

Rural Organizations and Active Citizenship in Bangladesh: Evaluation of BRAC's *Polli Shomaj*

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ACRONYMS

CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
NGO	Non-Government Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
NPHM	Non Position Holding Members
PO	Programme Organizer
PRA	Participatory Research Appraisal
PS	<i>Polli Shomaj</i>
SD	Social Development
TUP	Targeting Ultra Poor
UP	Union <i>Parishad</i>
US	Union <i>Shomaj</i>
VO	Village Organization

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ABSTRACT

Can rural civil society organizations (CSOs) generate active citizenship in developing societies? This report studies *Polli Shomaj* (PS), a ward-based civil society initiative of BRAC's Community Empowerment and Strengthening Local Institutions (CESLI) programme. It examines PS achievements as a group, active citizenship among its members, and geographical diffusion of the organization's influence. The study drew on 671 semi-structured group interviews, 2,684 semi-structured one-to-one interviews and census of four wards. Findings suggested that civil society organizations may increase active citizenship among rural citizens in Bangladesh, but such activism may not necessarily increase the accountability of local institutions. Certain operational elements may, however, enhance programme effectiveness. For example, PS groups may organize meetings in the early morning or late evening for maximum participation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Can civil society organizations (CSOs) survive in rural developing societies? Can they create active citizens? Does their influence diffuse throughout rural society? This report explores answers to the above, drawing on *Polli Shomaj* (PS), a rural civil society organization in Bangladesh. BRAC's Community Empowerment and Strengthening Local Institutions (CESLI) programme, formerly known as the Social Development Programme (SDP), implemented this ward-based initiative. The report answers the above questions through its three study objectives – to document PS achievements as an organization, to evaluate the degree to which PS members were active members of the community, and to map PS coverage throughout the ward. We measured PS achievements along the programme's three activity areas: assisting rural women to access government and non-government resources, encouraging their participation in local government activities, and engaging them in local and social initiatives.

Research methods

Study tools included group interviews of 671 PS, semi-structured interviews of 1342 PS members, 1342 interviews of a comparable control group, census of four wards, and qualitative interviews of UP members and BRAC staff. The selected PS covered Bangladesh's 40 food insecure districts.

Findings

Structure and leadership. The average grew in size, from 43.3 during their formation to 60 members during the time of this study. Many successfully operated on their own, without BRAC support. However, others had weakened to the degree that they became inactive. Although PS members came from the bottom echelons of rural society, their leaders were of higher social standing. However, many PS incorporated their ultra-poor members in leadership positions.¹

Elections. Many PS could not hold timely elections as the Programme Officers (POs), BRAC staff they relied on, did not mention their need, or could not provide enough

¹ We tracked PS's inclusion of participants from BRAC's CFPR/TUP programme. The Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction: Targeting the Ultra Poor Programme is an asset transfer programme targeting the bottom segments of rural society. The programme selected participants through a rigorous appraisal process. The CFPR/TUP programme targets clusters of the rural poor and does not provide equal coverage of the entire country. Therefore, its membership may not uniformly reflect in PS across geographical areas or regions.

support.² However, the groups survived without elections. They felt no need to replace good leaders. Instead, PS committees often replaced committee members without elections, in order to weed out incapable leaders or place individuals in positions they were best suited for.

Dropout. Many PS dissipated over time due to loss of membership. Impoverished rural women often relocated, for marriage, or new employment. Others joined PS hoping to receive material benefits and lost interest when they realized that PS did not give out free goods. Some members stopped attending meetings due to time constraints, tied down by labour work, family obligations, or home-grown businesses. Finally, societal factors such as resistance from the religious community, husbands' non-cooperation and criticism from the larger society created a psychological barrier to participation.

What kinds of rural women belonged to PS? What determined a household's likelihood of engaging with PS? Proximity to PS, household vulnerability and NGO activity within the household were all likely to increase the possibility of at least one household members' engagement with PS. Households located in immediate PS neighbourhoods were 4 times likelier to have at least one household member also be a PS member, than households in non-PS areas within the same ward. In terms of wealth ranking, well-off and poor households were less likely to be engaged with PS than very poor households indicating successful membership targeting.

Ultra-poor (CFPR/TUP) members in PS. Approximately 213.6% of all surveyed PS included at least one ultra-poor member. This number is comparable to the percentage of actual ultra-poor residents of targeted areas, the bottom 25% of society. Within these PS an average of 8.2% of the PS members were also enrolled in the BRAC TUP programme.

Activity area 1: Assisting to access services. PS lobbied for numerous government social safety net services, mostly VGD, VGF, old age allowance, widow allowance and the hundred days employment generation programme.³ PS in the eastern zone lobbied for and received the largest number of government services among all zones, from 2008-2009. At the individual level, a larger percentage of PS member households received social safety nets, the most coveted services, compared to the control group. PS members also lobbied through various sources to reach service providers. For example, PS members visited female UP members and chairmen for social safety net services whereas control group limited their reach to the male UP members. However, neither group received services free of cost; both paid with labour, votes, or money.

Activity area 2: Engaging in local government activities. PS encouraged its members to participate in local government. Therefore, we tracked PS involvement in the 2003

² Programme Organizers (PO) are BRAC field-level staff. The Social Development (SD) programme PO oversaw operations and functioning of the PS.

³ See Appendix Table 4 for details on these programmes

Union *Parishad* (UP) elections. Approximately 7% of the PS formed on or before 2003 participated in the local elections, mostly when their respective PO encouraged them to do so. Approximately 11 % had at least one PS member contest; over half of those running for a position were elected into office. PS active campaigned when one of their own ran for office. However, financial limitations, opposition from the rural elite, and community restrictions on women's participation challenged their efforts. As a group, PS attended and sometimes presided in *shalish* or village court. More PS members attended *shalish* than the control group. However, they hesitated to speak out during proceedings. Members mostly felt that they had little to contribute, as village elders constantly interrupted them while talking, or ignored their opinions.

Activity area 3: local and social initiatives. As a group, PS successfully motivated parents of non-school going children to enrol their children in primary educational institutions. Groups in all four geographical zones intervened in over 7 cases of schooling on average, with highest performance in the eastern zone. They were less successful in preventing dowry and child marriage. Parents have tendency to give marriage of their female child at an early age, mostly to relieve the household economic burden but also, for the possible social and economic security that they thought a husband could provide. PS engaged in community activities such as helping disaster victims rebuild their life, organizing fundraising activities, and maintain rural infrastructure. However, they were excluded from local committees, typically dominated by men, or women from wealthy and influential families. The study also tracked PS members' response to human rights violations in their households or the community. Very few reported violations in their households due to the fear of social stigma and further violence.

Relationship with the local government. PS leaders' personal relationships with UP members influenced whether the community supported their efforts. Some local officials were completely unaware of PS existence. Some recognized PS leaders by name, but had little knowledge of PS as a group.

Role of the PO. BRAC POs each oversaw a number of PS. Their job required extensive travel; thus many rushed from meeting to meeting, and then back to the BRAC office in order to report to the headquarters. Many POs could not maintain regular contact with their PS. Therefore, PS members complained that their POs did not provide enough support. Many POs did not maintain registers for record keeping.

Conclusion

The experience of PS shows that civil society organizations can flourish in resource constrained settings. However, structural factors such as distance, relocation, poverty and societal barriers challenged their ability to hold local governing institutions accountable. PS members' inferior social status limited their influence as a pressure group. Lack support from the family and community created a psychological barrier to participation. Religious groups condemned PS activities as they involved women's mobility and need to work alongside men. In addition, the elite often dominated PS activities, for example, by influencing process related to

resource allocation, local justice, and community activities. As a result, the organization was more successful in undertaking community activities, than increasing the accountability of elite-dominated governing institutions.

Can civil society generate active citizenship among its members? PS members fared far better than the control group on most programme outcomes. They actively lobbied for services for themselves and others, and in fact received more of the most coveted resources than the control group.

Finally, can PS influence diffuse throughout the ward? Although PS was expected to include women throughout the ward, its members mostly came from the near vicinity. To overcome the challenge of distance, local organizations may be more effective at the community or village level.

Recommendations

- POs may organize PS meetings in the early morning or late evening to ensure maximum participation.
- The three-year election may be too short; allowing the three leaders of the EC to stay in office for 5 years will provide a longer learning-period, and allow room for leaders to implement their learning.
- Members must be informed that PS is not a service distribution programme but rather, a poor people's organization. Efforts must be taken to ensure that PS is not used as an inlet for service provision.
- Leaders need to play a more proactive role in dispersing knowledge about PS within the community.
- PS leaders should receive training on leadership and organizational management.
- Rural institutions in developing contexts must be both flexible and adequately nursed. POs must be able to adequately nurse their PS to ensure sustainability.
- POs need to employ a more effective system for providing adequate oversight and support.
- The programme could appoint more female POs.
- Geographical barriers prevented PS from reaching out to all members of the ward. The programme could either bring PS down to the village level, or introduce more than one PS for each ward.

I. INTRODUCTION

Civil society organizations (CSO) typically generate responsible citizens who take interest in governance (Almond and Verba 1963, Almond and Verba 1980). Ideally, such citizens participate in political processes and hold governing institutions accountable. However, most civil society theories emerged from the experience of developed countries; thus, work better in certain societies than in others. As developing countries foster complex political systems, for example, based on parochial, patron-client, or kinship-based relations, civil society's has a diverse impact on citizenship and participation in such settings (Bratton 1989, Bratton 1994, Diamond 1994, Hinnebusch 1994, Foley and Edwards 1996, Harbeson *et al.* 1996, Booth and Richard 2001). Regardless, many development agencies implement group-based initiatives in developing countries, hoping to increase institutional accountability and political participation.

This study explores how a poor people's civil society organization operates in a resource constrained society. It draws on the experience of *Polli Shomaj* (PS), a ward-level, rural civil society initiative in Bangladesh. PS's primary objective was to transform Bangladesh's marginalized women from passive poor into vibrant, proactive citizens through its three programmatic objectives: assisting rural citizens to access government services, participate in local government activities and engage in local social initiatives.

PS provides a space for rural women to collectivize on urgent and pertinent matters in various dimensions of economic, social, familial and political life. Since 1998 PS has helped village members receive services under the government's social safety net mechanism. It played an active role in local human rights abuse cases – for example, child marriage, domestic violence, rape, and murder. PS engagement in human rights incidents varied from arranging medical help for survivors, to ensuring legal support. PS educated rural citizens in matters of children's education, health, and human rights norms and practices, among others. They assisted the Bangladesh government with the beneficiary selection process for 100-days employment generation programme, engaging locals in income generating activity. *Polli Shomaj* members are also directly involved in policymaking processes. In the past PS members have been elected to local government positions. Selected participants are also members of Union *Shomaj*, an organization that seeks to influence policy implementation at the union level.

This evaluation studies PS through three study objectives.

- Study objective 1 explores the nature of civil society in a developing country. It tracks PS achievements as a rural institution. We ask for example, who are PS

members? What are the organizations' achievements? Is PS indeed successful as an organization? What explains its successes and failures?

- Study objective 2 asks whether civil society can generate active citizenship in a resource-constrained setting. For example, do PS members exercise citizenship individually, without group support? Do they participate for the welfare of their own households as well as the community? Which particular activities do they participate in, and which do they refrain from engaging with?
- Study objective 3 explores the geographical diffusion effect of civil society's influence throughout the ward. For example, does PS assistance extend beyond the *para* and the village to encompass the entire ward? Is PS most effective at the ward-level or will it perform better if confined to a smaller setting?

Civil society and active citizenship

Citizenship refers to the relationship between an individual and the state of which he or she is a member. This relationship has two dimensions - all legal rights he or she is entitled to by legal membership of the state or group, and his or her responsibility to play an active participatory role in the community. Active citizenship is thus best described as citizens' and communities' ability to work together by themselves, or through elected representatives, to exercise their own economic, social and political power in the pursuit of shared goals (STAC 2007). For this purpose, this report conceptualizes active citizenship as participatory citizenship. In other words, active citizens are those, who participate in political life, and attempt to influence matters of governance.

Citizens of many developing countries are less inclined to participate in politics compared to their counterparts in established democracies.⁴ Even in developed countries, low income groups refrain from participation as they feel that their voices matter little in matters of governance (Nie *et al.* 1969, Jamal 2007, Lijphart 1997, Verba and Nie 1987, Milbrath and Goel 1977, Verba *et al.* 1979). Additional structural barriers keep poor citizens of developing countries, out of the political process. For example, the governing elite manipulate weak and unresponsive institutions, and keep the masses out of politics. Also, multiple, and open avenues for political

⁴ Participation essentially entails multiple activities, ranging from protest to voting. However, this report only addresses activities aimed towards specific outcomes or those reflecting actual intentions to influence governing institutions, policy processes, civil society, political choices at various levels of the political system or systematic patterns of social behaviour Barnes S & Kaase M. 1979. Political action: Mass participation in five Western democracies, Sage Publications, Norris P. 2001. Count Every Voice: Democratic Participation Worldwide. <http://www.pippanorris.com>. Specific actions involve electoral engagement in selecting their candidate of choice, for example, through voting and campaigning; but it should also include participation that influences the behaviour of their chosen candidates while in office, for example, through lobbying, communicating and engaging in civic associations that serve as pressure groups Schonfeld W. 1975. The Meaning of Democratic Participation. *World Politics: A Quarterly Journal of International Relations*, 28, 134-158, Bourdieu P. 1986. The forms of social capital. *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, 241-258, Ferejohn J & Fiorina M. 1974. The paradox of not voting: A decision theoretic analysis. *The American Political Science Review*, 68, 525-536, Aldrich J. 1976. Some problems in testing two rational models of participation. *American Journal of Political Science*, 713-33, Verba S. 1967. Democratic participation. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 373, 53.

participation already exist in developing societies; such avenues are missing in developing democracies. Due to insufficient education and information, marginalized citizens fail to develop qualities essential to citizenship – for example, knowledge of rights, politics and available resources that are essential for critical and responsible decision-making. In developing countries such as Bangladesh, therefore, marginalized citizens rarely participate in politics.

Can civil society organizations such as PS enhance their participatory tendencies? First, let us examine to what degree PS qualifies as a civil society organization. Civil society refers to the independent space existing between the family and the state. It typically consists of voluntary organizations that provide citizens with an independent space for interaction, and an identity separate from the state (Varshney 2001). In Bangladesh, however, scholars and policymakers often use the term Civil Society Organization (CSO) interchangeably with non-government organizations (NGOs), organizations that implemented donor funded projects. This is problematic for several reasons. Civil society extends beyond the operations of NGOs to include voluntary associations, professional associations, business guilds, etc. Secondly, NGOs could not fully represent the operational space between the public and the private. Many operated primarily as executors for donor programmes (Uphoff 1996, Sobhan 1997). Although independent from the state, their objectives and activities were overseen by foreign donors. Donor-influenced programme designs did not consider local realities. Many NGOs operated through local partners, most controlling programme resources through alliances with landlords, moneylenders, religious leaders and village elites (Parnini 2006). NGO programmes thus threatened, and often replaced independent local associations. However, this study classifies *Polli Shomaj* as a civil society organization due to its substantive independence from BRAC, its implementing organization. Although BRAC staff provided operational oversight to PS groups, members themselves led, managed and made and implemented major decisions. During meetings members identified activities, made decisions and devised implementation strategies. PS provides an independent avenue for citizens' aggregation and therefore, it classifies as a civil society organization.

How can CSOs such as PS enhance participation in rural Bangladesh? CSOs create a more informed citizenry and facilitate greater awareness of citizens' rights. Active citizens tend to take a greater interest in political affairs which, too, increases access to information and inspires greater action (Almond and Verba, 1980, Almond and Verba, 1963). Thus, participants in a civil society are capable of making more informed choices than they would in a traditional, hierarchical society. Informed citizenship develops through socialization process that not only transmits through formal education in school but also via complex processes occurring in social institutions such as family, peers, school, work and the political system.⁵ Rural civil society organizations may initiate or enhance an existing socialization process. In Bangladesh where NGOs are rampant and geographically dispersed, such

⁵ Almond and Verba 1963 pp. 8, 79, 498.

programmes may extend from NGO-run schools for children, to community health initiatives, and civil society groups.

Civil society also enhances citizens' activism through social capital, or 'features of social organizational such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit' (Putnam 1995). Governments and NGOs have adopted policy practices and interventions aimed at increasing such capital for long term societal development (Knack and Keefer 1997). The benefits of participation are considerably low in developing societies where elusive rule of law and low accountability reduces levels of social trust. CSOs may help establish norms of reciprocity that help generate greater peer accountability and societal trust in such settings. Higher societal trust can increase personal networks and greater cooperation among individuals, all of which may help increase family income and well-being. A BRAC study has found positive association between social capital in the form of informal interactions, and expenditure, an indicator for household well-being in Bangladesh (Ameen and Sulaiman, 2006). Civil society organizations such as PS can help establish such networks of trust, both providing group support as well as social insurance that ensures reciprocity in group behaviour. In rural Bangladesh access to services is largely unequal. Many NGOs have helped built an alternative institutional framework for service delivery that bypasses the public bureaucracy to reach the poor. This framework has both raised grassroots political awareness, and has had much success empowering the disenfranchised (David, 1996, Quddus *et al.* 2009). Social capital is most effective, not only when it creates solidarity among the poor and the ability to collectively voice demands, but also creates access for the poor, to individuals with the power to bring about change (Huda *et al.* 2005). This study examines how PS reaches out to local governing institutions to fulfil its objectives.

As a rural civil society organization, PS mobilizes its members to engage in various forms of activism, along three activity areas.⁶ PS first assists its members to access government and NGO resources such as government handouts, education, immunization and NGO services. PS members lobby with Union *Parishad* (UP), local government officials, and bargaining to receive services from other NGOs, including latrines, medication, birth control, and education support. PS secondly encourages its members' involvement in local government activities, for example through voting, campaigning and contesting in local elections, lobbying for *khas* land and government water bodies. PS finally increases marginalized women's participation in local and social initiatives such as local committees and traditional judicial processes, responding to incidents of human rights abuse, helping develop local infrastructure, and participating in community initiatives.

⁶ Objectives are as they existed at the time the study was undertaken, in September 2009. By September 2010 a fourth objective was added, that of identifying and responding to human rights violations which was previously included in the third programmatic objective.

Structure and operations

PS is a ward-level civil society organization for rural impoverished women. The average PS included sixty mostly female members organized around two committees. PS leadership consisted of 11 executive committee members, which includes a president, secretary, cashier and 8 sub-committee members. The remaining members formed a larger group, the General Committee. The executive committee was replaced by democratic elections once every three years. Existing PS members elected the executive committee and approved the admission of new members into the General Committee.

PS bodies held two types of meetings in alternate months. The larger general committee meeting gathered all PS members, whereas the smaller Executive committee meeting included the 11 PS leaders. The trio - president, secretary, and cashier - played the highest leadership role in terms of identifying issues, overseeing decision-making processes and ensuring implementation of accepted decisions. The eight sub-committee members oversaw five subcommittees handling specific issues - accessing resources, preventing human rights violations, family development (welfare in the family, use of safe water, sending children to school, medical check-ups for expecting mothers, etc.), participation in the local power structure, and social welfare⁷.

Since 1998 PS has grown to encompass almost 30% of all wards in rural Bangladesh. While some became inactive over time, many new ones also sprung up in their place. In order to launch new PS SDP first identified a target ward. Programme staff organized meetings with ward residents to discuss the vision, objectives and possible activities of PS in meetings. Once a PS was established, the PO facilitated elections for the post of President, Secretary and Cashier who then appointed various sub committees. This process was followed by a meeting at the BRAC office orienting the executive body to its new role (SDP).

⁷ At the time of the evaluation these committees had only been functioning for six months and therefore, they are not an area of focus for this report.

II. METHODS

Study area

This study divided Bangladesh into four geographical zones based on initial field observations and consultations with programme staff. The zones, namely the northeast, east, north-central and south, varied in geography, livelihood patterns and PS institutional strength, factors likely to influence participation. Religious and social practices, too, differed between regions due to variation in institutions and participatory norms. Women in the east, for example, tended to be religious, using *parda* and maintaining low mobility. Thus POs had difficulty gathering members in this region (Table 1).

Sampling

We selected 671 *Polli Shomaj* from Bangladesh's 40 poorest districts, from a total of 9,152 PS operating within this area at the time (Figure 1).⁸ Sample selection reflected PS density within each identified geographic zone (Table 1).⁹

Data collection tools and techniques

A research team of three core researchers, one field manager, and up to 45 Research Assistants (RAs) designed and tested the questionnaires, and collected data. Study tools involved semi-structured questionnaires, a census of four wards, and numerous interviews of PS staff, local government officials and key local figures. The research team also held several informal discussions and interviews with programme staff. Data collection spanned a period of 4.5 months – from mid-November 2009 to end of March 2010.

Study Objective 1. PS achievements as rural organization. Researchers conducted 671 semi-structured interviews of *Polli Shomaj* as a group, including leaders and active general members knowledgeable of PS activities and capable of providing reliable information. Two sections of this questionnaire were completed through brief interviews with the SDP PO overseeing the particular PS, and Union *Parishad* officials of the respective ward.

Study Objective 2. PS members as active citizens. RAs interviewed 1,342 randomly selected PS members, one from each studied PS, and a comparable control group.

⁸ The 40 districts were selected based on the poverty map draw by the World Food Programme. The districts were also identified by Brac for its CFPR/TUP programme.

⁹ Most wards had 1 PS, although a handful of larger wards had 2; only PS representing entire wards came up in the random selection process. Inactive PS that had come up in the sample were replaced by the closest neighbouring PS in an adjoining ward.

RAs identified comparable control group respondents from wards adjoining the PS-ward being studied. To ensure maximum difference, RAs selected neighbouring wards based on the absence of PS, limited NGO activity and least presence of BRAC. Within the control ward there was purposive selection of individuals to match socioeconomic characteristics of the above interviewed PS members (age, education level, household income, number of members in household).

Study objective 3. PS coverage of the ward. This report examined PS geographical diffusion within the ward, in four wards, one from each geographical zone.

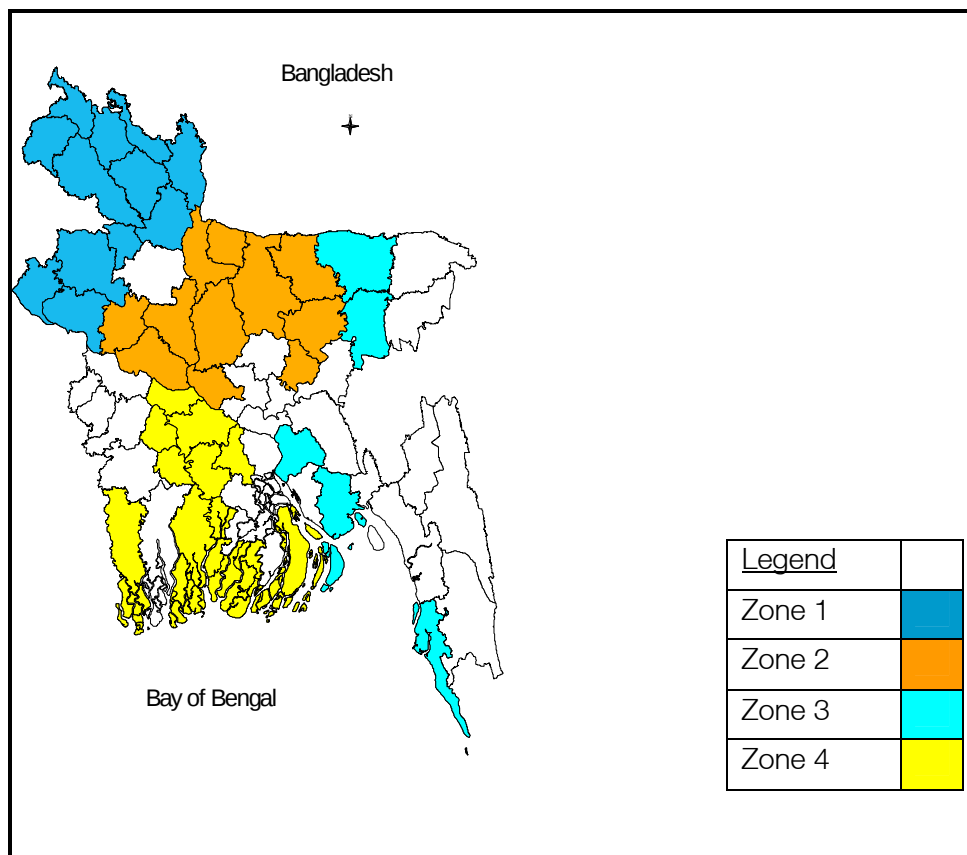
- Researchers selected one ward from each of the four geographical zones, using both random and purposive techniques. Purposive selection ensured the presence of PS activity
- The participatory rural appraisal (PRA) technique was used to list all households in the ward and rank them according to wealth status – namely rich, well-off, poor and very poor.

Table 1. Sampling and methods

Research question	Objective ¹⁰	Methods	Data
What is the nature of civil society in a developing country?	Examine PS as an institution and track its achievements at the organizational level	671 semi-structured group interviews of PS leaders	Quantitative and qualitative
Can CSOs generate active citizenship in a resource constrained setting?	Measure the degree to which PS members are active citizens	1342 semi structured interviews of PS members, and 1342 semi structured interviews of a control group	Quantitative and qualitative
Can the effect of civil society diffuse through space?	Measure the degree to which PS influence spreads throughout the ward	Census of 4 wards, a total of 2844 structured interviews	Quantitative
Zone	Geography	Total PS	Sample
North-eastern	Drought-prone	2935	205
Eastern	Hilly areas	857	60
North-central	Flood-prone	3315	232
Southern	River erosion	2045	143
Zone	District	Upazila	Union
North-Western	Dinajpur	Parbotipur	Hamidpur
Eastern	Hobiganj	Chunarughat	Pikepara
North-Central	Manikganj	Sadar	Ghorpara
Southern	Faridpur	Boalmari	Shekhor

¹⁰Each *study objective* addresses a different level of analysis: organizational, individual, and geographical diffusion. The different *programme objectives* (access to services, governing processes and local and social institutions) inform major sections of the report and therefore, most chapters address these themes along all three levels. Firstly we look at how the organization achieves these goals, secondly whether citizens internalize their pursuit within their behaviour and finally, whether there is a dispersive affect in society. Each *study objective* therefore, appears in more than one chapter.

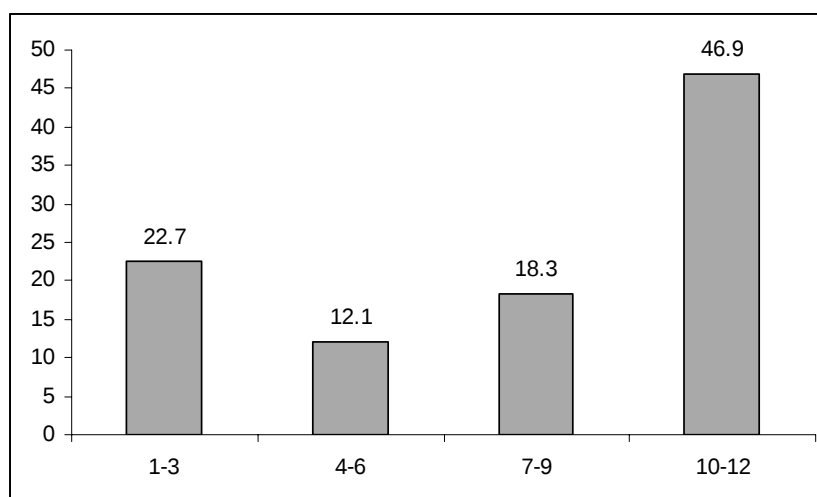
Figure 1. Geographical zones



III. OVERVIEW OF POLLI SHOMAJ

This section provides a general overview of PS in the 40 studied districts. A total of 9,152 PS operated in this area at this time.¹¹ The average PS was eight years old, though 11 and 12 years old PS were the most prevalent (22% and 20% respectively). Around 47% were 10-12 years old followed by 12% at 4-6 years (Fig. 2). (Table 2). The average PS had 60 members, much higher than the average size of 43.3 when the programme began in 1998 (Table 3). Size varied by geographical zone and PS age; the eastern zone had the smallest PS. Older PS – particularly those between 7 and 9 years old – were both the largest and grew the most (21.8 members). PS in the South grew the most over time – on average, by 21.4 members.

Figure 2. Number of PS by age group (n=671) (%)



¹¹ This information is based on programme records.

Table 2. PS by age, independence and geographical zone (%)

Age in years	n	Independent	Geographical Zone (N=671)				Total
			North Eastern (n=205)	Eastern (n=67)	North Central (n=239)	Southern (n=160)	
1	14	.0	1.5	3.0	2.9	1.2	2.1
2	46	8.7	8.7	9.1	6.3	4.3	6.9
3	92	12.0	12.1	19.7	15.1	11.2	13.7
4	23	17.4	3.4	1.5	4.6	2.5	3.4
5	34	17.6	5.3	10.6	5.0	2.5	5.1
6	24	16.7	2.4	3.0	2.9	6.2	3.6
7	34	29.4	5.8	1.5	6.7	3.1	5.1
8	36	19.4	5.8	.0	8.0	3.1	5.4
9	53	17.0	5.3	12.1	6.3	11.8	7.9
10	32	12.5	3.4	9.1	5.0	4.3	4.8
11	148	23.0	26.7	15.2	18.5	23.6	21.9
12	135	23.7	19.4	15.2	18.5	26.1	20.3
Total	671	18.6	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
P-value		0.119			.015		

Table 3. Average PS membership by geographical zone and PS age

Geographical Zone	Inception	Present	Mean	Age Range in years	Inception	Present	Mean
	n = 506	n = 670	difference		n = 506	n = 670	difference
North-eastern	47.3	57.1	-9.8	1-3	44.5	57.1	-12.6
Eastern	31.9	46.8	-14.9	4-6	41.0	60.4	-19.4
North-central	44.1	64.1	-20	7-9	41.4	63.2	-21.8
Southern	41.8	63.2	-21.4	10-12	44.2	60.1	-15.9
Total	43.3	60.0	-16.7	Total	43.3	60.0	-16.7
P-value	0.004	0.000		P-value	ns	0.06	

Approximately 18.6% of PS (125) operated independently. These PS conducted meetings, implemented decisions and actively participated in the community without any BRAC support. The remaining 81.4% were dependent on the Programme Officer (PO) to various degrees. Older PS tended to be more independent. Almost 30% of 7 year old PSs were independent, followed by 23.7% of 12 year old PS, and 23.0% of 11 year old PS. Ten year old PS were the most dependent; only 12.5% were independent. The eastern and north-central zones were least successful in their ability to create sustainable and independent PS (4.8% and 14.4% independent respectively).

Polli Shomaj leadership: the executive committee

Capable leadership enhances organizational performance. This section examines the quality of PS leadership, and inclusiveness of the leadership committees Table 13 compares the socioeconomic characteristics of executive committee members, who include presidents, secretaries, cashiers, sub-committee members, non-position

holding members of the executive body and members engaged with the CFPR/TUP programme¹².

Leadership composition mirrored Bangladesh's religious and ethnic homogeneity. Most executive committee members were Bengali Muslims. Leadership did, however, include ethnic and religious minorities in small numbers. Presidents held higher social standing than non-position holding general members (NPHGM), possibly as women of higher social and economic standing were in a better position to bargain for resources. A greater percentage of presidents were also service holders or self-employed compared to the lesser earning, labour work of other executive body members. PS presidents were also older, and more educated than the other groups (Table 5).

Ultra poor PS members were extremely vulnerable; a higher percentage were divorced or widowed compared to executive committee members. A higher percentage of TUP members were also employed by others, for example for household or labour work. TUP members were the least educated, with 1.1 years of education on average compared to the president at 4.1 years. However, TUP members showed the longest duration of membership in the PS. In fact, most leaders including the president showed less than 5 years of PS membership signalling that more members with more experience in PS were not favoured for leadership positions.

Who participates in PS?

General body membership – Gender variation and NGO memberships

As PS primarily targeted rural women, but 3.9% PS drew some male membership (Table 6). Older PS drew more male members, as did PS located in the north-central and southern zones. Other PS allowed male meeting participants (96%), although their presence could be inconvenient. Male attendees tried to influence PS decisions, particularly on using funds and issues of social injustices, where men were mostly perpetrators and women victims. Female members also felt self-sufficient and found male engagement only complicated things. PS, however, tried to involve men in their activities, as men, having better access to institutions, could help PS create an entryway into local governing procedures. Also, men held better relationship with the ruling elite than women. Therefore, involving men in PS activities ensured greater visibility for the organization.

¹² The CFPR/TUP programme is Brac's ultra-poverty initiative. Including this group within our analysis will illustrate the degree to which *Polli Shomaj* leadership is inclusive of extreme poor women.

Table 4. Socio-demographic profile of PS leaders (%)

Ethnicity	President n=661	Secretary n=662	Cashier n=665	Sub-committee n=3965	NPHGM* n=1322	TUP n= 972
Bengali	99.7	99.5	99.5	99.6	99.7	99.3
Others	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
p = 0.702						
Religion	President	Secretary	Cashier	Sub-committee	NPHGM	TUP
Muslim	86.7	88.1	86.6	86.8	86.5	88.6
Others	13.3	11.9	13.4	13.2	13.5	11.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
p = 0.629						
Marital status	President	Secretary	Cashier	Sub-committee	NPHGM	TUP
Unmarried	1.8	1.5	2.0	2.8	20.9	.2
Married	85.6	87.9	89.9	87.8	71.4	72.2
Divorced/Widow	12.6	10.6	8.1	9.4	7.7	27.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
p = 0.000						
Occupation	President	Secretary	Cashier	Sub-committee	NPHGM	TUP
Student	.3	.3	.6	1.2	16.8	.0
Housewife	82.5	90.7	91.8	91.9	76.1	79.2
Self-employed	6.3	3.5	2.9	2.8	3.8	5.8
Employed by other	2.6	2.6	3.2	2.8	2.2	15.0
Service	8.4	2.9	1.5	1.4	1.1	.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
p = 0.000						
NGO membership	President	Secretary	Cashier	Sub-committee	NPHGM	TUP
BRAC	58.1	53.0	49.2	41.8	32.1	n/a
Other national NGO	11.5	11.9	17.7	17.8	13.1	
Former NGO member	17.5	13.1	13.1	13.0	10.1	
Non-NGO member	7.4	12.2	12.2	16.8	36.1	
Local NGO member	5.4	9.7	7.8	10.6	8.7	
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
p = 0.000						
Position in BRAC	President	Secretary	Cashier	Sub-committee	NPHGM	TUP
<i>Shebika</i>	13.0	2.7	2.0	1.2	0.4	n/a
VO leader	16.8	2.6	1.8	0.5	0.2	
VO member	33.0	47.8	44.9	39.0	30.1	
PS member	37.2	46.9	51.3	59.2	69.4	
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
p = .000						
Social Position	President	Secretary	Cashier	Sub-committee	NPHGM	TUP
General villager	89.4	98.2	99.4	99.6	99.8	n/a
Influential family	7.6	1.2	0.3	0.2	.0	
Position holder	3.0	0.6	0.3	0.2	.2	
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
p = .000						

* NPHGM= none position holding general member.

Table 5. Age, education, family size and duration in PS

	President	Secretary	Cashier	Sub-committee	NPHGM*	TUP
Age	40	37.4	36.8	35.6	31.3	39.4
Years of Education	4.1	3.5	3.1	3.2	2.8	1.1
Family member	4.9	4.7	4.8	4.6	4.7	4.0
Duration in PS	4.6	3.8	3.7	3.5	3.2	4.8

* NPHGM= non position holding general member.

Table 6. Gender variation and NGO membership among PS members

Composition of General Body (% members)					
Zone	Male	Female	BRAC VO	Other NGO	No NGO
	%	%	%	%	%
North-eastern	2.9	97.1	39.4	32.1	28.5
Eastern	2.2	97.8	40.9	32.9	26.1
North-central	4.5	95.5	41.0	30.3	28.7
Southern	4.9	95.1	37.4	32.3	30.3
Total	3.9	96.1	39.1	31.7	29.1
Age in years	Male	Female	BRAC VO	Other NGO	No NGO
	%	%	%	%	%
1-3	3.8	96.2	39.2	32.0	28.9
4-6	2.8	97.2	39.3	31.7	29.0
7-9	3.9	96.1	37.8	33.1	29.1
10-12	4.3	95.7	39.7	31.0	29.3
Total	3.9	96.1	39.1	31.7	29.1
Maximum presence in meetings (% PS)					
Zone	% PS with only females	% PS with majority Muslim	% PS with majority BRAC members	% PS with majority other NGO member	% PS with majority no NGO member
North-eastern	87.3	84.8	72.6	17.3	10.1
Eastern	100.0	74.2	63.6	28.8	7.6
North-central	95.4	88.6	73.5	19.3	7.2
Southern	95.0	80.7	81.1	17.1	1.8
Total	93.3 (623)	84.1 (562)	73.6(426)	19.3(112)	7.1(41)

Many PS members were involved with BRAC programmes. Approximately 39.1% of the PS members were BRAC microfinance clients. Only 31.7% were members of other NGOs, and 29.1 % did not belong to any NGOs at all (Table 6). PS leaders in particular, were extensively involved with BRAC. For example, over half of all PS presidents and secretaries, and a little less than half of the cashiers were members of BRAC Village Organizations (VOs), village-level groups of female microfinance clients. A higher percentage of presidents were also associated with other BRAC programmes (for example, VO member, VO leader or *shebika*). General members, too, belonged to the BRAC VO (32.1%). High BRAC representation in PS is not surprising, as the organization was initially formed as a federation of BRAC VOs. However, VO members also joined PS, hoping to access services provided by other

BRAC programmes. Some held the misconception that PS was controlled by BRAC and failing to engage with PS could hamper their loan eligibility in the VO. PS members, however, were happy to involve VO members. The latter's experience with group activity was usually an asset to PS.

PS also incorporated members of other national NGOs. Of PS leaders, 11.5% of Presidents, 17.7% of Cashiers, and 13.1% of non-position holding members of PS belonged to other NGOs beyond BRAC (Table 4). Typically, geographical proximity determined which NGOs PS members belonged to. In some cases, all PS members were formerly BRAC members, but they had deflected from BRAC to join other NGOs. Thus the preferred microfinance organization was also a contributing factor – in one PS, conflict with the local microfinance PO has uninspired BRAC members from attending PS meetings. Many preferring other NGOs for microfinance loans joined PS in the hope of receiving BRAC benefits. Using PS as an inlet for BRAC services thus led members to deflect from the main purpose of the organization, which was to enhance women's own capacity to strive for these services along with other rights.

Most PS meetings were dominated by Muslims; approximately 84.1% of all surveyed PS claimed a Muslim majority presence at the last held general body meeting. Meeting attendance of particular religious groups depended on their presence in the area. In some areas minority members were financially solvent and did not require PS help in acquiring services; in other areas members had more time to commit. Non-Muslim members were active participants when the PS president hailed from the same religious group. Minority-led PS also took maximum advantage of the group as a participatory channel, showing tremendous responsibility and integrity towards PS and its activities.

Ultra poor members

Over a quarter of Bangladeshis live below the national poverty line. Poverty and ill health prevents them from participating in the work force, or effectively using microfinance loans. BRAC provided targeted support to the poorest households in specific areas under a programme titled *Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction: Targeting the Ultra Poor (CFPR:TUP)*. The TUP programme strengthened the livelihoods of ultra-poor households through asset transfer, training, special health services, social capital development, subsistence allowance and microfinance loans. The programme provided families with assets such as domestic animals or leased land, a flexible savings scheme, training and basic literacy as well as preventive and curative health care.¹³ However, the extreme poor could best benefit from economic support when it was accompanied by access to information and channels for participation. The CESLI programme thus tried to integrate TUP participants into PS.

¹³ BRAC annual report, 2009.

Approximately 28.6% of all surveyed PS had at least one TUP member, a number comparable to the actual percentage of ultra-poor residents in society, the bottom 25% (Table 7).¹⁴ Within these 28.6% an average of 8.2% of the PS members were TUP programme members. The largest number of TUP members (18) existed in PS 5 of Belabo in Narshingdi.

Table 7. Positions held by TUP members by zone and age (%)

Zone	executive body	sub-committee	general body
North-eastern	5.7	9.0	85.3
Eastern	9.1	36.4	54.5
North-central	18.3	8.7	73.1
Southern	14.5	13.2	72.3
<i>P value .000</i>			
Age	executive body	sub-committee	general body
1-3	22.0	13.1	65.0
4-6	5.6	7.4	87.0
7-9	10.2	11.4	78.4
10-12	8.0	9.9	82.1
<i>P value .000</i>			

A higher number of TUP members in the north-central zone (18.3%) were members of executive body, whereas a higher number in the eastern zone were sub-committee members (36.4%) compared to other zones (Table 7). By age those between 1-3 years included more TUP members in the executive and sub-committees than others, possibly because the youngest PS included TUP members from their very onset.

Socio-Demographic Profiles of PS general body members

Objective 2 of this study explored PS members' levels of active citizenship, comparing their activities with that of a control group. To ensure comparability in the absence of baseline data we compared socioeconomic characteristics of experimental and control groups using independent sample T-tests. Similar baseline characteristics ensured that the experimental and control groups were indeed comparable (Table 8). Respondents in both groups showed similar results on indicators related to vulnerability, which may impact participation - for example, education, female headship, and social position. To some degree, PS members were slightly more vulnerable than the control group. For example, a slightly higher percentage of PS members worked as contractual labour or *grihosthali*, and the number was statistically significant. However, more PS members were also BRAC clients (loan recipients from the microfinance programme) and hence, more affluent, most likely engaged in small businesses using microfinance loans.

¹⁴Since the TUP programme operated in clusters identified at local levels, it was not possible to design this study focused particularly on TUP-clustered areas. This would have required extensive time, just for sample selection. However, the study focuses on PS located in 40 districts identified by the TUP programme as Bangladesh's ultra poor districts. This identification was based on a number of criteria identified in earlier sections of this report, including indicators of food and income vulnerability.

Table 8. Demographics – PS and control group

Demographics (Respondent)	PS	Control	Difference
	<i>n=1342</i>	<i>n=1342</i>	
Average years of education	2.9	2.9	-0.0
% of respondents who were NGO members	42.4	39.6	2.8***
% of respondents from STUP households	77.3	64.0	13.3
% of respondents who were BRAC members	0.5	0.1	0.4***
% of respondents married & in cohabitation with spouse	35.3	17.1	18.2
% respondents serving as <i>grihosthali</i>	97.2	97.2	0.2***
% of households with highest social status being of ordinary villager	90.5	93.9	-3.4
% Female headed HH	86.7	86.3	0.4
Number of earning members in HH	1.5	1.5	0.0
Average yearly income for HH (in Tk)	57459.0	55673.3	1785.6

* Numbers in bold font show statistically significant variables. One, two and three stars denote P-value < 0.1, 0.05 and 0.01 respectively, which denote statistical significance at the 10%, 5% and 1% levels.

Socio-demographic characteristics in four wards

The study also used census data map PS influence throughout the geographical scope of each ward. In the absence of baseline data, again we have compared some socio-demographic characteristics of households closer to PS (that is, located in the same *para* as the PS meeting spot or leader's house) to households located in other *paras* of the ward using independent sample T-tests.¹⁵

Households near *Polli Shomaj* were more vulnerable than other households in other wards. The percentages of female-headed households and poor and ultra-poor households were higher for PS *paras* and statistically significant, while mean years of education for household members above 13 lower for PS *paras* and statistically significant (Table 9). As PS was likely to be formed by the most vulnerable women, its tendency to be established in areas with the most vulnerable households was not entirely surprising. However, this democratic difference may affect findings in one of two ways. Firstly, households in PS *paras*, by virtue of their lower socioeconomic status, may have substantially lower capacity for income generation, bargaining for resources, and due to constraints placed by their vulnerable status, less time to engage with civil society organizations. They may, therefore, practice active citizenship in lesser degrees than their better-off neighbours. However, on the other hand, their vulnerable status may also make them targeted recipients for services, and therefore, they may benefit more from PS engagement.

¹⁵For detailed discussion of indicators refer to section 4c above; indicators were similarly selected for this section.

Table 9. Demographics and PS achievements – census of four wards (PS vs. non PS *para*, n=2844)¹⁶

Demographic Indicator	PS <i>Para</i> n=916	Non-PS <i>Para</i> n=1928	Difference
% of Female-headed HH	9.8	7.0	2.8**
Mean yrs of education for HH members above 13	4.1	4.5	-0.5***
Number of HH members	4.4	4.6	-0.1
% of poor and ultra-poor households	73.0	65.3	7.7***
NGO household	52.6	56.4	-3.8*
Outcome Indicator			
% of PS households	15.7	4.5	11.2***
Objective 1: Access to Services			
% HH receiving any Service	62.9	61.5	1.4
% HH receiving Government Service	88.2	88.0	0.2
% HH reporting PS help in receiving services	6.2	3.5	2.7***
Objective 2: Engaging in Local Governance			
MP voter to Voting Age pop Ratio	93.2	92.7	0.5
UP voter to Voting Age pop Ratio	92.2	88.4	-3.8**
% HH reporting PS role in national elections (2008)	2.0	1.3	0.6
% HH reporting PS role in local elections (2003)	2.5	1.2	-1.2
Objective 3: Engagement in Local and Social Initiatives			
% HH reporting HR violation	18.8	21.5	-2.7*
% HH taking action against HR violation	8.1	10.4	-2.2

* One, two and three stars denote P-value<0.1, 0.05 and 0.01, and statistical significance at the 10%, 5% and 1% levels respectively.

Determinants of PS membership in four wards

In order to test the robustness of the above findings we conducted logistic regression on the census data from four wards, to test for determinants of PS membership (Table 10). This section has a particular programmatic relevance. Although each PS was ideally expected to cover an entire ward, in practice its influence might not be evenly distributed within this area. Typically, the president's residence was the primary centre and meeting location. Therefore, residents of segregated localities at a distance from the centre point were at risk of exclusion. The inconvenience posed by distance may lead PS members to refrain from reaching out to such households for membership, and incorporation into lists of candidates for service distribution. Similarly, eligible women from non-PS localities may not be aware of the organization's existence or all possible benefits of membership.

The dependent variable of PS membership reflected whether at least one member of the household was involved with PS (PS member household = 1; non PS member household =0). Independent Variables included location (households in the *para* or locality where PS was located were more likely to have a PS member), and other elements that previous sections of the paper found relevant, namely geographical

¹⁶Results are discussed by programmatic outcome in the following sections.

zone; age of PS in months (older PS were more likely to have more members); sex of household head (female headed have higher vulnerability to poverty and thus, more likely to be a PS household); average number of household members (higher-member households also more vulnerable to poverty); mean years of education (less educated households more vulnerable); mean age (younger member households more likely to engage in activity); NGO membership (as NGO members were expected to be more likely to bargain for resources); and wealth status.

Location, demographic factors and household wealth status influenced the likelihood of membership. PS was not successful in representing its entire ward; location positively correlated with PS membership. Households from PS *paras* were 4 times likelier to have at least one household member also engage with PS, than households in non-PS *paras* within the same PS ward. Female headed households were 0.63 times more likely to engage with PS, whereas households involved with NGOs were almost 3 times more likely to also get involved with PS. Well-off and poor households were less likely to be engaged with PS than very poor households.

Table 10. Logistic regression on household PS involvement

Independent	B	Exp (B)	p-value
Location (PS <i>para</i> =1; non PS <i>para</i> =0)	1.4	4.1	0.0
Eastern zone (zone 2=1)	-0.2	0.8	0.9
North central zone (zone3=1)	0.1	1.1	0.9
Southern zone (zone4=1)	-0.3	0.8	0.8
Age of PS (years)	0.0	1.0	0.9
Sex of HH head(female headed household=1; male headed household=0)	0.5	1.6	0.1
Household size (mean)	0.1	1.1	0.0
Household education (mean no. of years)	-0.1	0.9	0.1
Household age (mean no. of years)	0.0	1.0	0.3
NGO household (at least one NGO member in household=1; no NGO member in household=0)	1.3	3.8	0.0
Rich (rich=1; others=0)	-0.6	0.6	0.2
Well off (well off=1; others=0)	-0.7	0.5	0.0
Poor (Poor=1, others=0)	-0.3	0.7	0.1
Constant	-4.1	0.0	0.0
Model Statistics			
Pseudo R Square		0.16	
Model Chi-square (Significance)		0.00	

* P-value<0.1, 0.05 and 0.01 denote statistical significance at the 10%, 5% and 1% levels respectively.

In order to explore PS's targeting effectiveness we compared membership and service distribution among different wealth-groups in PS and non-PS *paras* (Table 6 in Appendix). PRA ranked households as rich, well-off, poor and very poor. PS was fairly effective in targeting poor members. Approximately 3.77% of all rich households in the ward were PS member households, compared to 8.32% of poor households and 11.66% of very poor households. Although PS included its target group of poor and very poor households, it also involved a fair amount of wealthier families.

Meetings

Executive committee meetings

Each PS was expected to hold an executive committee meeting every two months, with general committee meetings taking place in-between. Approximately 87.3% of PS held regular executive meetings, while 12.7% held irregular meetings; the others could either not mention the meeting time accurately, or did not hold meetings at all¹⁷. Comparing across regions, PS in the Southern zone met most regularly (93.6%), while those in the north-east were most irregular (81.5%); the difference was statistically significant. Meeting regularity varied little by age, and the variation was not statistically significant (Table 11).

PS meeting agenda varied locally (Table 12). The executive body generally discussed operational matters first - issues to be raised in the next general body meetings, followed-up on issues discussed in the previous general meeting, set targets and deadlines on tasks to be performed, delegated roles and responsibilities to achieve those targets, and discussed lobbying strategies. Most identified issues to be discussed at the following general body meeting (from 43.8% of all PS in the north east to 55.1% of all PS in the south, with other zones falling in between), and set the date, time and place of the next executive body meeting (except for PS located in the north-central zone who most often discussed acquisition of GO/NGO services). A literate PS leader or *kishori netri* from BRAC Adolescent Development Programme (ADP) documented discussions and decisions in the PS register.

Table 11. Executive committee meeting by geographical zone and age of PS (%)

Zones	Every 2 months	After 3 or more months (3-12)	Total	Age range	Every 2 months	After 3 more months (3-12)	Total
North-eastern	81.5	18.5	100	1-3	86.3	13.7	100
Eastern	85	15	100	4-6	87	13	100
North-central	88.5	11.5	100	7-9	90.4	9.6	100
Southern	93.6	6.4	100.0	10-12	86.7	13.3	100
<i>Total</i>	87.3	12.7	100	<i>Total</i>	87.3	12.7	100
<i>P-value</i>	.008			<i>p-value</i>	.738		

¹⁷Often PS registers did not document this information correctly, in which case it was verbally corroborated by interviews with PS leaders and members. In all instances, verbally received information that was mutually agreed upon by a large group of PS members, took precedence over written data given the state of registers in the field (evaluated later in the report).

Table 12. Decisions taken during executive committee meetings by geographical zone and age of PS (%)

Issues	Geographical zone				Age of PS			
	North Eastern	Eastern	North Central	Southern	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12
Setting date, time and place of next/upcoming meeting	17.9	26.1	21.5	21.6	20.8	20.5	20.5	21.1
Issues to be discussed in next general meeting	43.8	53.2	45.1	55.1	48.5	48.5	50.7	46.7
Issues regarding participating in election and committee activities	.1	.9	1.2	.5	1.2	1.0	.7	.3
Fund raising	4.2	3.2	3.3	5.9	5.2	3.1	4.0	4.1
Education	2.9	5.9	6.9	5.9	6.2	6.5	5.2	4.8
GO/NGO services	20.4	5.0	14.2	8.0	10.8	10.6	13.8	15.6
Health	6.3	1.4	4.0	2.1	3.8	4.1	2.9	4.4
Legal aid/dispute resolution	.4	.0	.4	.0	.6	.7	.0	.1
Dowry/Child marriage/Human rights	1.7	4.1	1.5	.7	1.5	2.0	1.7	1.5
Maintenance of local infrastructure	.3	.0	.0	.0	.0	.3	.0	.1
Survey of tenant farmer	.4	.0	.0	.2	.4	.0	.0	.2
others	1.7	.5	2.0	.0	1.2	2.7	.5	1.2
P value	0.000				.184			

There was some geographical variation on issues discussed (p -value = 0), but little variation by age. A larger percentage of PS in north-central zone discussed service acquisition and health issues but a lower percentage of PS in the same zone discussed meeting-related issues. Issues discussed less frequently included maintenance of local infrastructure and survey of tenant farmers, a survey conducted by BRAC microfinance programme using PS members to reach out to all ward members.

General committee meetings

Each PS was also expected to hold a general committee meeting with all PS members in the ward. Meetings occurred every two months, in months alternate to the executive body meeting. An overwhelming 88.6% of PS held timely general body meetings, within the two-month period, with some variation by geographical zone but little variation by age of PS (Table 13). Variation along geographical zones was statistically significant, with the highest percentage of meetings held on time in the south (94.9%) and lowest in the northeast zones.

Table 13. General committee meeting by zone and age of PS (%)

Zones	Every 2 months	After 3 or more months (3-12)	Total	Age range	Every 2 months	After 3 or more months (3-12)	Total
North-eastern	84	16	100	1-3	86.7	13.3	100
Eastern	86.7	13.3	100	4-6	87.2	12.8	100
North-central	88.6	11.4	100	7-9	91.3	8.7	100
Southern	94.9	5.1	100	10-12	88.7	11.3	100
Total	88.6 (557)	11.4 (72)	100 (629)	Total	88.6 (557)	11.4 (72)	100 (629)
P-value	.016						

Table 14. Decision taken during general committee meetings by zone and age of PS (%)

Issues	Geographical Zone				Age of PS in years			
	North eastern	Eastern	North- Central	South	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12
Setting date, time and place of next/upcoming meeting	1.7	2.5	4.0	2.4	3.0	3.3	2.6	2.6
Issue regarding next general meeting	14.5	7.0	18.3	24.5	19.4	14.6	22.0	15.9
Issues regarding participating in election and committee activities	2.8	4.5	1.9	2.3	2.8	1.7	1.6	2.9
Fund raising	11.2	9.0	10.1	14.9	11.0	16.3	10.1	11.3
Education	7.1	15.6	11.3	16.2	11.	12.6	13.7	11.0
GO/NGO services	39.5	29.1	33.0	26.6	30.8	33.1	33.3	33.8
Health	12.8	20.1	12.0	7.9	11.9	10.5	9.0	13.5
Legal aid/dispute resolution	.6	4.5	1.5	.4	1.9	2.1	.3	1.1
Dowry/Child marriage/Human rights	4.9	7.0	4.5	2.3	4.7	2.5	4.7	4.4
Maintenance of local infrastructure	.8	.0	.0	.0	.6	.4	.3	.0
Survey of tenant farmer	1.7	.0	.3	1.1	.9	.8	.0	1.3
others	2.2	.5	3.1	1.5	1.7	2.1	2.6	2.3
P value	0.000				.072			

PS members used the general meeting as a forum to discuss issues concerning their own lives as well as the community. While most executive bodies spent their time on planning meetings, general bodies tended to discuss access to services and health issues, followed by a slightly smaller number of cases focused on planning the next meeting. A small percentage of PS in north eastern, north-central and southern zone

discussed the tenant farmer survey. Variation by geographical zone and age were both statistically significant (Table 14).

PS election, replacement and dropout

Executive committee election

The CESLI programme required PS to replace its executive committee through competitive elections, once every three years. Elections also replaced members lost through death, relocation or inactivity. PS's success in holding timely elections varied by geographical zone and age; the variation was statistically significant. PS in the north-central zone were most regular in holding elections (35.4%), and the southern zone was the least (18.6%). The oldest PS were the most successful in this area, with 35.5% of 7-9 year old PS holding regular elections, compared to 3.1% of 4-6 year old PS.¹⁸ Many factors accounted for this difference (Table 15). Firstly, many PS members were not even aware of the need for elections.

Table 15. Election of PS leadership by geographical zone (%) and PS age

	Geographical zone	
	Election held on time	Irregular election
North-eastern	22.7	77.3
Eastern	26.1	73.9
North-central	35.4	64.6
Southern	18.6	81.4
P-value	.045	
	Age range	
	Election held on time	Irregular election
1-3	0.0	100.0
4-6	3.1	96.9
7-9	35.5	64.5
10-12	29.6	70.4
P-value	.001	

Table 16. Leadership rotation within the PS (%)

Position	President	Secretary	Cashier	Subcommittee	General member
President	0	50	45	37.5	13.4
Secretary	48.1	0	30	40	19.3
Cashier	29.6	35	0	22.5	23.8
Subcommittee	18.5	10	5	0	43.6
General member	3.7	5	20	0	0
Total	100 (27)	100 (20)	100 (20)	100 (40)	100 (202)

Irregular elections did not, however, hamper operations. By mandate, no executive committee member could serve more than two terms in office, over a period of six

¹⁸This question was not relevant for 1-3 year old PS as their leadership had not yet reached their 3 year term limits.

years. However, in many cases strong leaders stayed in office for years. PS members found no need to change a good, working committee with dependable leaders. In fact, leaders who had been in office for a longer period had already established relationships with power holders, were good at resolving conflicts, and felt confident making decisions (Box 1).

Leadership replacement in between elections

Ideally, PS leadership was meant to be replaced through elections. However, the PO and PS members also changed leadership in between election periods. PS committees periodically replaced ineffective leaders. They also replaced committee members who could not participate due to labour work or household chores. In other cases, selected leaders replaced those who relocated for work, marriage, migration, river erosion and other obligations.

Box 1. Leadership replacement

"We had to replace our earlier president Yesmeen because she was less educated and incapable of running of the group activities effectively such as being vocal, lobbying with member/chairmen and having capability to influence others in attending the meeting."

PS leaders also shifted positions within the committee, as well as in and out of the committee without elections. This internal flux demonstrated the organization's remarkable ability to adapt to changing circumstances. For example, when a president has proven incapable of extensive lobbying with the power elite, she may be shifted to a less demanding office such as cashier, or member of a particular sub-committee. For each person having shifted out of a certain position, Table 16 shows the variety of positions they shifted into. A total of 27 Presidents shifted out of their position without elections and moved into another position, as did 20 secretaries, 20 cashiers and 40 subcommittee members; 202 general members were also placed in various positions within the executive committee without elections. Many general members assumed the role of sub-committee members (43.6%) or cashier (23.8%) followed by secretary (19.3%) and president (13.4%). The SD PO played a pivotal role in the process of shifting roles within, and in and out of the committees.

Membership dropout

Membership dropout was the biggest challenge to PS survival. Although the average PS grew in size during the past decade, many also became inactive. The highest percentage of dropouts occurred among the sub-committee members (40.2%), and the lowest were general body members (6.4%) (Table 17). PS executive leaders were typically too invested in the organization to drop out, but sub-committee members frequently withdrew as they could not devote sufficient time for PS activities. As general membership was less demanding, members stayed involved in the hope of getting material benefits.

Regardless, many members dropped out as they relocated for work or marriage, or were occupied by labour work or household chores. Meeting participation also took away precious time that impoverished women that could otherwise devote to additional income generating activities (Box 2). Many, for example, took microfinance loans for home-grown businesses such as animal rearing or corner stores. Disapproval from family members, neighbours or the larger community created an additional psychological barrier to participation. Furthermore, many women joined PS hoping to get some material and therefore, lost interest and became inactive upon not receiving any services. Several PS members cited the desire to engage with TUP, but expressed to their dismay, that while others in neighbouring areas received assets from the TUP programme, they were being discriminated against despite being engaged with *Polli Shomaj*.

Table 17 shows the percentage of PS that experienced dropout, no change, or growth. Highest dropout (22.8%) occurred among the PS formed in 1998, the formative year. The percentage of PS experiencing dropout declined in the mid 2000s, only to rise from 2007 onwards. Similarly, the percentage of PS having undergone growth were mostly established in the early and mid-2000s; those established later had not existed for long enough to experience substantial growth.

Box 2. Dropout

"Most of the members of our PS are poor day labourers; hence they are rarely able to attend PS meetings because to them attending PS meetings mean sacrificing a day's wage. As a result most of them left PS."

Table 17. Membership retention by formation year (%)

Year	Dropout	No change	Growth	Total
1998	22.8	1.1	76.1	100
1999	22.3	2.1	75.5	100
2000	10	0	90	100
2001	17.1	0	83	100
2002	17.9	0	82.2	100
2003	16.7	4.2	79.2	100
2004	16.7	5.6	77.8	100
2005	16	8	76	100
2006	11.8	11.8	76.4	100
2007	17.6	9.5	72.9	100
2008	17.4	32.6	50	100
2009	0	100	0	100
Total	18.3	9.1	72.6	100

Capacity building

SDP organized day-long training workshops for PS committee members to effectively attain PS objectives. Training also encouraged PS members to access various skill development opportunities provided by the government and NGOs, skills

including sewing, livestock, agriculture, and handicrafts. Presidents attended the highest number of training sessions (1414 sessions or 59.8% of all sessions attended) followed by secretaries, cashiers and general members at 24.7%, 3.6% and 11.8% respectively. Presidents mostly attended training workshop on PS activities; secretaries, cashier and general members attended training on poultry and livestock rearing.

Table 18. PS members receiving training by type of training (% of all held sessions)

Training	President	Secretary	Cashier	General Member
Poultry and livestock	26.8	57.2	42.4	41.1
Health issues	12.2	6.7	10.6	8.9
Workshop on <i>Polli Shomaj</i> activity	40.9	15.8	30.6	34.3
Prevention of human rights violation	3.5	1.5	4.7	1.8
Small enterprise	2.3	6.7	5.9	3.6
Agriculture	4.9	5.7	5.9	3.6
BRAC health worker	8.3	5.1	0	6.1
Local security (Ansar/community police)	1.0	1.4	0	.7
Total	100 (1414)	100 (584)	100 (85)	100 (280)
Statistical Significance	0.000			

Access to services

PS assistance in accessing services

How did PS pursue services? What kinds of PS were more successful in this area? PS helped eligible villagers pursue various government social protection schemes such as food aid cards, and allowances for the elderly, widows, freedom fighters and disadvantaged people. The organization also assisted rural Bangladeshis access various non-government services such as health support, tube wells and latrines.

PS executive members were asked to document the process through which services were received – what characteristics were used to select beneficiaries? Once they had drawn up a beneficiary list, what steps were taken to move forward? What constraints did they face while lobbying for these services for community members? Table 20 shows the responses of PS leaders according to the type of service disbursed.

PS remained informed of service availability through regular contact with local government officials, BRAC POs and other knowledgeable individuals (Table 20). Upon discovering the availability of a particular service, PS leaders used the selection criteria to identify recipients in the community. They prepared a list of possible beneficiaries after prolonged discussion with PS members, and negotiated to obtain services for as many people as possible. The specific role of PS ranged from helping select appropriate beneficiaries and maintaining liaison with government

representatives to remaining informed of services, and maintaining accountability until the services were received, ensuring proper distribution of resources and finally, increasing access for disadvantaged individuals who were incapable of lobbying. PS members were able to identify appropriate target recipients. For example, the target list for VGD and VGF cards include ultra poor households, education stipends were proposed for children of poor or single mothers, tube wells for those in need of safe drinking water, warm clothing for villagers living in mud huts that provide inadequate heat, latrines for villagers lacking sanitation facilities, and widows allowance, disability and old age allowance for the relevant population groups.

PS leaders, however, could not always ensure services for their selected beneficiaries. The resource allocation process at the Union *Parishad* (UP) level was not participatory, democratic or demand-driven. Even if UP members were willing to distribute services to appropriate persons their opinions were overridden by the chairman or UP members at the union level. Services were handed down from the Union; thus many wards do not receive enough services to meet demands. PS members maintained good relations with the local chairman, UP members and local elites experienced most success in ensuring receipt for their selected beneficiaries.

As an organization, PS most frequently lobbied for social safety net programmes such as the Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF), Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), old age allowance, widow allowance and the hundred days employment generation programmes. The organization did, however, lobby for more resources on behalf of their own members as opposed to the larger community (Appendix Table 1).¹⁹ Table 19 shows the average number of government (VGD, VGF, stipend and food for work etc.) and other (tube well, latrine, warm clothes, etc.) services that PS obtained, by geographical zone and PS age. PS located in eastern zone obtained the highest number of services whereas those in the north-eastern zone acquired least number. PS aged between 7-9 years acquired the majority of GO services and PS aged between 10-12 years acquired the majority of NGO services.

Table 19. Average number of services PS received in last one year by zone and PS age

	Geographical zone			
	north-eastern	eastern	north-central	southern
Government	5.7	8.1	7.2	7.1
Others	2.7	5.3	3.7	4.5
	Age of PS in years			
	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12
	1	2	3	4
Government	6.4	6.5	8.1	6.3
Others	2.9	4.1	3.0	4.2

¹⁹The Table also demonstrates the mean difference between number of service PS member applied for and the number of services they actually received.

Table 20. PS role in assisting rural citizens to access services

Service	Targeted beneficiaries	Process followed by PS	Role of PS	Constraints
VGD	Ultra poor household			
VGF	Ultra poor household	a. PS generally gains knowledge about availability of resources through SDP PO/ Local leaders/villagers	a. Helped selecting appropriate beneficiary	a. Sometimes member/chairman demand money
Stipend	Children from poor/single parents/day labourer household			
Food for work	Landless day/ day labourer/ women headed household	b. PS working committee informs both PS members and villagers about the selection criteria of beneficiaries through general	b. Maintaining liaison with local government representatives	b. Some member/chairman considers PS members as an outsider and do not like their interference
Old age allowance	Old, poor, sick and physically in capable person			
Widow allowance	Widowed separated or abandoned female			
Tube-well	Ultra poor household who are badly in need of safe drinking water	c. Then the PS committee member held a meeting where they discuss among themselves about who can be beneficiary before preparing the final list	c. Ensuring proper distribution of the resources	c. PS members had to spend a lot of money and time in order to pursue member/chairman. Such as: Phone bill, transportation cost etc
Warm Clothing	Poor families living in mud huts, families with small children or/and elderly people	d. PS members prepare the final beneficiary list	d. Helping people to get access to resources who were unable to lobby	d. Due to bad communication facilities of some <i>upazilas</i> it is troublesome and time-consuming for PS member of respective <i>upazilas</i> to visit UP office frequently.
Latrine	households who are unable to access adequate sanitation facilities	e. Submit the list to respective member/chairmen	e. Proposing and bargaining	
Disable Allowance	Unable to work due to physical and mental condition	f. Negotiate with relevant persons		
100 days	Ultra poor men and women who work as day labourer			

Services received by TUP members

Did TUP members benefit from PS membership? Table 21 shows the extent to which they received services for themselves and others. By resource type, TUP members mostly acquired VGD card through PS both for themselves and others, followed by VGF, latrine and financial assistance. TUP members also received support and motivation from PS on various issues like sending their children to school, resolving conflict etc.

Table 21. Services received by TUP members

Service	Geographical zone (n=671)-				Geographical zone (n=671)			
	NE	E	NC	S	NE	E	NC	S
	For self				For others			
VGD	5.4	.0	.0	2.1	5.0	.0	.0	.0
VGF	12.5	.0	17.4	25.8	35.0	.0	23.5	13.0
Elderly allowance	42.9	60.0	77.3	51.5	25.0	.0	29.4	65.2
Widow allowance	1.6	.0	.0	10.3	5.0	.0	5.9	17.4
100 days	11.4	.0	20.5	10.3	10.0	.0	17.6	8.7
Winter clothes	7.6	.0	6.1	5.2	5.0	.0	17.6	4.3
Disable allowance	.6	.0	.8	1.0	5.0	.0	5.9	.0
Latrine	22.3	40.0	4.5	4.1	5.0	.0	.0	.0
Financial assistance	2.7	.0	3.0	1.0	10.0	.0	.0	.0
Other government Services	4.9	.0	5.3	5.2				
Total	100	100	100	100	100	.0	100	100

In the eastern zone support for TUP members was limited to elderly allowance and latrines, whereas other types of services were also distributed in other areas. TUP members mostly received elderly allowance for their households followed by 100-day employment, and VGF cards. When looking at services received for others – that is, TUP members' ability to act as responsible citizens in enhancing the community's access to resources – most helped receive elderly allowances and VGF cards, followed by latrines and winter clothes. TUP members in the eastern zone did not help anyone receive services.

Access to service: PS members VS. Control group

Were PS members more active in lobbying for resources on their own than the control group? How did they receive these services? We categorized indicators along two dimensions: the extent to which citizens' were able to pursue their own citizenship rights (lobby for services for their own households) and secondly, whether they fulfilled their civic responsibilities as citizens (lobbied for fellow villagers).

Services for own household

Table 22 compared the two groups on services received during the past year. The data contains multiple response answers, as each household could receive more

²⁰ NE= North Eastern, NC = North Central, E=Eastern, S=Southern.

than one type of services. A larger percentage of PS members received coveted social safety net services for their own households (Table 22). Although the difference was not statistically significant for all social safety net services combined, when broken down by specific service the difference was statistically significant for two extremely coveted resources, VGD cards and Widow's allowance. More PS members also received non-government health services, and the difference was statistically significant. Within this service type, PS most received latrines, possibly as the BRAC WASH programme often used PS as a platform for service delivery.

Table 22. Access to Resources for own household: PS members vs. Control group (%)

Service	PS	Non PS	Difference*
	<i>n=1075</i>	<i>n=1045</i>	
Social Safety Net (govt.)	53.5	50.0	3.44
Health & Environment (govt.)	74.5	76.7	-2.14
Education (govt.)	18.0	17.4	0.54
Other (govt.)	12.7	12.9	-0.27
Health and Environment (Non-govt.)	21.9	18.6	3.30*
Education (Non-govt.)	3.0	2.8	0.20
Other (Non-govt.)	1.2	0.9	0.35

* One, two and three stars denote P-value<0.1, 0.05 and 0.01, and statistical significance at the 10%, 5% and 1% levels respectively.

On the one hand, PS members did receive more of some coveted services than the control group. However, they rarely receive these services through the right channels and by due procedure. As rural citizens possess limited knowledge regarding service providers and procedures, we explored which PS members went for services and how they received this service²¹. Table 23 shows the first level of contact for both experimental and control groups (PS and control), for each received service.²² A smaller percentage of PS members received social safety net services through the male UP member, typically, the primary provider of social safety net services. More PS members lobbied through different sources such as female UP members and chairmen, whereas the control group respondents limited contact to the male UP

²¹For simplicity, services are divided into seven groups- Social safety net services: VGD, VGF, widow allowance, disability allowance, freedom fighter's allowance, food for work and all other government safety net cards; Government disbursed health and environment services include birth control pills, immunization, latrines and tube-wells; Government education services include free school attendance, free books and education stipends; Other government services include access to *khas* land, use of water bodies and relief for natural disaster victims; Non-Government health and environment support: tube-wells, latrines, birth control and other health aid disbursed by Non-Government sources; Non-Government educational support includes education stipends; Other NGO support includes animals for rearing, tin, vans and other miscellaneous help.

²²In order to adequately capture the lobbying process, percentages reflect the distribution based on total number of services handed out, as opposed to the number of households having received services. This is because one household may receive more than one service in each service category, and they may be completely different services. For example, one household may have received a tube-well, and latrine (both health) from non government organizations, lobbying with different persons for each. However, if they received more than one tube-well, we count it as one if they have had to lobby for the service just once.

member. Table 2 in the Appendix shows that a higher percentage of PS members received government services from UP members, family, friends and health workers, compared to the control group, more of whom received them directly from teachers. More PS members also approached female UP members, empowering the role of women in local government in PS areas. PS members received more non-government health services through the organization, or directly from the PO, as BRAC programmes often used PS as a platform for resource delivery.

Table 23. Service provider by PS membership type (% of services)

For own household			
Service provider	PS	Control	p-value
	(n=2427)	(n=2296)	
Service Group 1: Social safety net			
Male UP member	67.9	81.3	0.00
Female UP member	11.7	6.3	0.00
UP chairman	7.6	5.5	0.16
Service Group 2:Health (Government)			
Health worker	79.3	79.9	0.72
BRAC PO	1.1	0.4	0.06
<i>Polli Shomaj</i>	0.8	0.2	0.03
Service Group 3: Education (Government)			
Teacher	85.8	90.3	0.18
Female UP member	0.5	0.0	0.33
BRAC PO	5.1	3.8	0.54
<i>Polli Shomaj</i>	2.0	0.0	0.05
Service Group 4: Other (Government)			
Teacher	84.8	88.1	0.42
Service Group 5: Health (Non-government)			
Health worker	23.4	14.7	0.02
BRAC PO	21.9	14.3	0.03
Service Group 6: Education (Non-government)			
Teacher	84.4	82.8	0.87
BRAC PO	9.4	3.4	0.35
Service Group 7: Other (Non-government)			
Family or friend	72.2	40.0	0.12
BRAC PO	16.7	30.0	0.46
For others in the community*			
Service provider	PS	Control	Significance
	(n=102)	(N=52)	
<i>Polli Shomaj</i>	7.8	0.0	0.0
BRAC PO	4.9	5.8	0.8
Family or friend	9.8	30.8	0.0
Male UP member	22.5	26.9	0.6
Female UP member	11.8	3.8	0.1
UP chairman	4.9	1.9	0.4
Teacher	1.0	1.9	0.7
Health worker	28.4	19.2	0.2

*Sample size too small to conduct analysis separately by type of service. Hence, analysis incorporates all instances where respondent reached out to help another member of the community

**P > 0.1 for statistical significance at 10% level

Services received for others

A very small number of respondents lobbied for services on behalf of others, though PS members did so more than the control group (102 PS members, 52 control group).²³ A higher percentage of PS members helped others receive services through the PS, and this finding was statistically significant²⁴. More PS members also lobbied through the female UP member, and fewer lobbied through personal connections than the control group. Both differences were statistically significant.

Respondents in both groups helped fellow village member access resources in similar ways – namely, by advising them on lobbying with the appropriate persons (UP members, health workers, teachers, NGO officials). However, PS members reported approaching UP members or UP chairmen for different types of social safety net resources, beyond VGD and VGF cards, including old age allowance and education help. They also lobbied with other individuals, including PS members and BRAC POs. Control respondents primarily helped community members by offering advice to approach their UP members for VGD/VGF cards, or accompany the relevant person to a government health clinic for birth control pills.

The cost of receiving services

In weak institutional settings, resource providers rarely distribute services by due procedure. Often, they are exchanged for votes, money, or other forms of payment. Despite PS lobbying efforts, service recipients in both the experimental and control groups had to provide some favour for the received services. Services were mostly provided based on family relations, and in exchange for vote, money or work.²⁵ PS members were no more successful than the control group in acquiring services via due process (See Figure 3). Only 70.5% of services received by PS members for their own households were by due procedure, compared to 70.3% of the control group. Most service recipients acquired their service without any form of payment, followed by exchange for vote (13.0% PS, 14.2% control), money (12.3% PS, 12.2% control), family relations (3.8% PS, 3.0% control), and labour (0.5% PS, 0.5% control). Exchanging social protection services for money was standard and accepted practice both in PS wards and non-PS wards. Cards were also distributed due to party or candidate allegiance during elections (Box 3). Thus both PS members and the control group advised the recipient to pay money directly to the UP member for VGD or VGF cards.

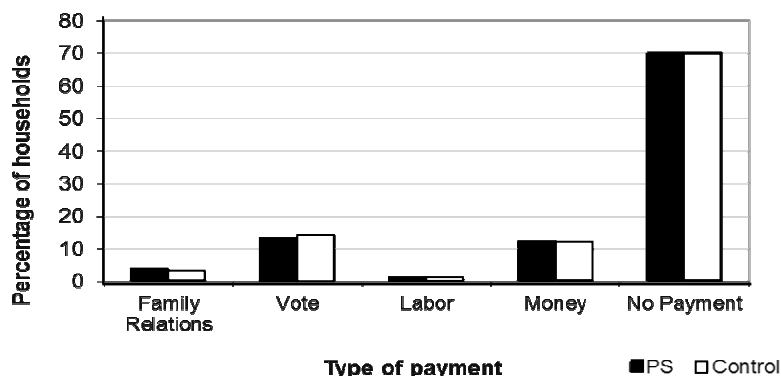
²³We asked the respondents to trace incidents when they as individuals reached out to help fellow villagers or family members within their ward obtain some service. In order to adequately capture PS members own active citizenship, as opposed to activities where they relied on PS for help, we only incorporate instances where PS members acted independently of PS as an organization. However, this may include instances where the PS member, on her own accord brought a fellow community member to PS, where PS eventually helped the individual pursue their objective.

²⁴In the previous cases of services received for the self, this analysis is conducted along each service type. However, in this case the sample size is too small to conduct t-test by service type.

²⁵Given that elections take place infrequently, exchange for vote seldom means selling a vote for a resource; rather it refers to handing out resources to individuals who helped vote into office the official handling resource distribution.

Respondents also lobbied for resources on behalf of others. However, fewer were given by due procedure compared to services received for self (approximately 70% self, 60% others). A higher percentage of services given by the control group were exchanged for money (12.4% PS, 21.3% control). Differences between the two groups were not statistically significant.

Figure 3. The cost of Service (%)



Box 3. Distribution of VGD card

PS lobbying efforts as a group

"Mojafor, a member of our village is very poor, helpless and sick and people call him hijra. He is unable to work. When the female UP member came to our ward I asked her if it is possible to give Mojafor a card, she said she will give him one. Later, I took the help of *Polli Shomaj* members to pressurize the member, as a result he was given a VGD card. Mojafor died a few days ago."

PS members' individual lobbying

"VGD cards for our union came to the UP Member. I got to know. Joleka in our village, her financial situation is very bad. Her income is very low, her family is frequently suffering from economic hardship. I took her to the member (m) and I told the member about her situation. Member told me, Joleka voted for me, you have my word that I will give her a VGD card. Later the member arranged a VGD card for Joleka."

Service distribution in the ward

To study the diffusion of services throughout the ward we compared service distribution in the PS *paras* with other *paras* in the ward. Three indicators measured access to services: percentage of households receiving at least one service of any kind in the last two years; percentage of households receiving at least one government service in the last two years; percentage of households reporting PS assistance in receiving services.²⁶

²⁶The services variable initially included two services widely distributed by the government, and received by most rural citizens, namely immunization, and free government education, are likely to skew results. There is also an additional service of *krimir bori* handed out in overwhelming numbers in one out of the four wards. Therefore, we created a new variable accommodating for this factor and thus removing these three services from the list.

A higher percentage of households in PS *paras* received at least one service, both government or non-government (62.9%) compared to non-PS *para* households (61.5%) although the difference was marginal, and statistically insignificant. The fact that services are evenly distributed throughout the ward was slightly disconcerting, as PS *paras*, being more vulnerable, should have received a larger share. In addition, PS was playing a stronger lobbying role in its neighbourhood than in other areas of the ward. A higher percentage of households in the PS *para* claimed that PS helped receive the mentioned service (6.2% compared to 3.5% in non-PS *paras*) and the finding was statistically significant (See maps in Appendix 2)

Wealth ranking and service distribution

About 85.53% of all rich households accessed at least one government or non-government service of any kind, with other groups falling between 92.5% and 95% (Appendix Table 2). We removed widely distributed services such as immunization and stipend for primary education, creating a variable Service 2. The new variable Service 2 indicated that 39% of all rich households received at least one service, compared to 65.37% of poor households and 70.35% of very poor households. Many of these services were social safety net goods and therefore, no rich household should have received them. Rich households also received many NGO-distributed resources. Of rich households, 2.52% indicated PS support in receiving services compared to 5.83% of very poor households.

Local government activities

PS activity in the 2003 union Parishad election

Few PS participated in the local Union *Parishad* (UP) elections, but those involved campaigned with tremendous intensity. As the organization was fairly young in 2003, many could not independently engage in matters of governance. Therefore, most PS who participated in the 2003 elections, did so because they were mobilized by their respective POs.

In 31 out of the 438 surveyed PS formed on or before 2003 (7%) BRAC encouraged PS members to play an active role in the elections. Of these 31 cases, 38.71% were in the north-eastern zone, compared to 25.8% in the south, 22.58% in the north-central zone, and 12.9% in the eastern zone (Table 24). In these PS, the respective POs mobilized SP members during meetings, motivated them to participate in local elections, and advised them on ways to get involved. The POs stressed that having one of their own in the government would increase the rural poor's access to resources. One problem with involving PS in local elections is that the organization no longer remains apolitical. Often the PO suggested that qualified PS members run for office. In at least one instance the PO lobbied on behalf of the PS member,

PS members mobilized villagers to participate in elections, in 10.7% of the surveyed PS. Groups from the north central zone (40.43%) were most involved, followed by the north-east (34.04%), and a much lower 17.02% and 8.51% in the south and east

respectively. Mobilized PS members campaigned intensively – where active in the local elections, an average of 15 members, or 30% of the PS based on the average PS size of 52.49 at the time. The north-central zone campaigned most intensively (21 average number of members engaged) followed by the south (14), east (10.7) and northeast (9.31). T-tests confirmed this variation, finding a statistically significant difference between the regions with most and least intense electoral engagement (north-central and northeast).

**Table 24. PS Electoral activity in the 2003 Union *Parishad* elections (% of PS)
N=438**

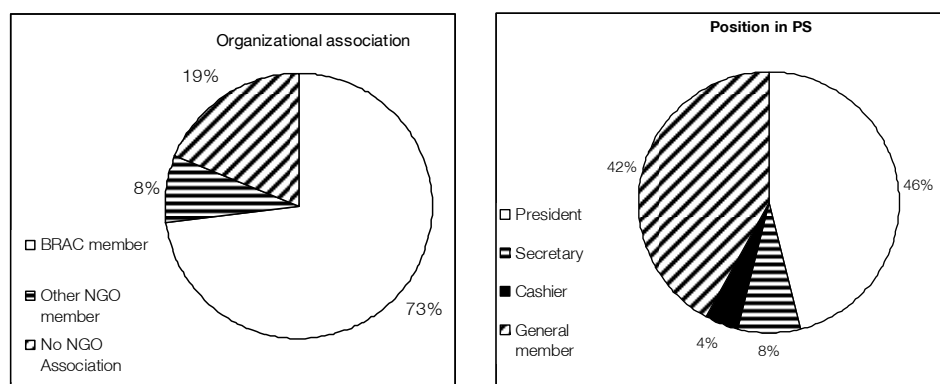
Geographical zone	BRAC influencing PS <i>n</i> =31	PS influencing villagers <i>n</i> =47	PS with members contesting <i>n</i> =48	PS with members elected (as % of seats contested) <i>n</i> =24
Northeastern	38.7	34.0	31.3	33.3
Eastern	12.9	8.5	8.3	8.33
North-central	22.6	40.4	41.7	50.0
Southern	25.8	17.0	18.8	8.3
Total	100	100	100	100

PS members contesting in local elections

Only 11% of PS existing before 2003 had members contest as candidates in the local elections, of which a little over 50% were elected. About half of those elected are from the north-central zone. Fifty two PS members contested the 2002-2003 Union *Parishad* elections from a total of 48 PS. More PS leaders pursued office, with 46% of this group being PS presidents, followed by 42% of members (Figure 4). No PS member contested for the position of Chairman; 23% contested for the UP member position, and 77% contested for the secured seat. Also, 73% of PS members contesting were BRAC members followed by 19% of no NGO association (Figure 4). PS engaged in active door to door when one of their own contested. Members motivated voters by promising to meet villagers' demands and ensure adequate distribution of government resources if one of their own was elected. They engaged other villagers in the campaigning process through meetings, and by providing entertainment.

Insufficient financing prevented many PS members from standing for office, and other contesting candidates from campaigning with vigour (Box 4). Others had problems engaging fellow PS members in the campaign as people were busy with work, or their husbands did not allow it. Generally, men did not value women's electoral engagement. A handful of PS candidates were offered money or threatened to back out by powerful persons in the society. Opponents made false allegations against the candidate. Some did not face any problems.

Figure 4. Position and organizational association of PS members contesting in the 2003 Union *Parishad* elections



Box 4. Contesting in local elections

"For very long I have been close to all kinds of people, rich and poor, and listened to their problems. As much as possible I have tried to resolve their problems. PS (PO) told many ordinary villagers to contest in the UP elections. It was decided during discussions between PS members and the BRAC PO bhai that I will stand in the elections. PS Members and BRAC PO bhai went door to door to voters' households to encourage voting. BRAC PO bhai advised us on strategies to succeed in the elections"

"First, we were discouraged to contest in elections by a powerful segment of society. We explained to them that we will not harm anyone. We are poor people, we will contest in elections in order to pursue our demands, for having a better live in society. If people find our candidate to be good, they will vote for them and perhaps they will not. This is how, by explaining the situation to our traditional leaders we removed all barriers and engaged in election campaigning"

Electoral activity – PS members vs. Control group

National elections

During the 2009 national election PS encouraged members to register for voter ID cards, and showed up to vote. The two groups fared similarly on receiving voter IDs, voting, and on having a particular political preference (Table 25). Approximately 97.2% of PS members claimed to vote in 2009, compared to 97.3% of the control group. However, a higher percentage of PS members identified with a specific party as its member (3.6%) or worker compared to the control group (1.0%). A higher percentage of PS respondents also claimed to have actively campaigned for a candidate (2.8% PS, 1.7% control). Since a small percentage of PS members contested for office, many of the above respondents must have campaigned for a candidate outside of PS. PS members, therefore, appear to be a more political than the control group.

Table 25. Electoral activity of PS members vs. control group

	2009 National election		
	PS n=1342	Control n=1342	Difference
Voting activity			
Voter ID received	98.4	98.3	0.2
Voted	97.2	97.3	-0.1
Have particular political preference	28.7	28.5	0.1
Have particular party affiliation	3.6	1.0	2.6**
Engaged in electoral campaigning	2.8	1.7	1.1**
Campaigning activity	n=38	n=23	
Mobilized for voting (HH members)	65.8	47.8	18.0
Mobilized for voting (relative)	76.3	60.9	15.4
Mobilized for voting (fellow villager)	86.8	95.7	-8.8
2003 Union <i>Parishad</i> elections			
Voting activity	n=1342	n=1342	
Voting	81.26	84.57	-0.03*
Electoral campaigning for candidate	5.70	3.65	0.02*

Local government election (2003 UP election)²⁷

Even though only 10% of PS campaigned as a group in 2003, individual PS members were generally more active than the control group across all cases. A higher percentage of individual PS members campaigned, or ran for office compared to the control group. Both differences were statistically significant. However, a lower percentage of PS members voted during these elections, possibly due to their inferior socio-economic status. As of 2003, PS was fairly young and its influence had possibly not permeated all of rural society.

Electoral activity across the ward

Respondents from households in *paras* where PS was located voted more intensively than those from non-PS *paras* in the same ward (Table 18). The average number of households reporting PS involvement during elections was also higher in PS *paras*, although the difference was not statistically significant.

Wealth ranking and electoral activity

Wealth ranking did not affect PS influence of households – PS influenced wealthy and non-wealth households alike (Appendix Table 2). This was because elections were one sphere of activity where the poor participated with just as much vigour as other groups.

²⁷For PS member behavior in the 2003 Union *Parishad* elections, we only consider data from wards where PS was active on or before 2003.

Reasons for voting

Respondents' rationale and motivations for voting in the national elections were captured as multiple response answers (Appendix Table 3). In both groups, and across both elections the majority of respondents claimed that they voted to exercise their citizenship, and in the hope that the candidate will serve the common good, grant personal favours and to a lesser degree, because most household members and villagers voted. Their needs, which they expect the candidate to fulfil, extends from the policy domain, such as policies that will increase trade, reduce prices and grant employment, to activities that meets the need of the community, and their individual families. Bangladeshi rural citizens vote, and encourage fellow citizens to vote in the hope that the newly elected candidate will strengthen their rural infrastructure through building schools, *masjids*, *madrasas*, roads and highways, bridges and bring electricity to their locality. They also hoped to have greater access to government services, including relief in the event of natural disasters. Respondents expected candidate of choice to stand by them in difficult times, particularly due in light of their status as the extreme poor. Finally, although to a lesser degree, respondents claimed to have voted because those in their surroundings – family, friends, neighbours and fellow villagers – vote with enthusiasm and vigour.

Reasons for voting differed slightly between the two elections we compared. In the 2009 parliamentary elections, a much larger percentage of respondents in both groups (about 15% higher) voted to exercise their citizenship than the 2003 local elections. The hope that candidate may help village or grant personal favour, was comparatively lower in 2009 national elections (See Table 3, Appendix).

Influence behind voting

Although rural Bangladeshi women voted in high numbers, they still relied on their husbands to choose their candidate. However, PS members were more likely to independently choose their candidate than the control group 83.7% PS members consulted their husbands, compared to 87% of the control group. A higher percentage of PS members also reported taking decision independently (12.48% compared to 9.04%). Others consulted parents, in-laws, other relatives, PS and political party workers.

PS group involvement in *shalish*

Shalish or mediation in a village court was at traditional justice mechanism practiced in rural Bangladesh. Typically, village elites such as the *Shomaj Prodhan*, Chairman, and *Matabbor* organized *shalish*. Although the purpose of *shalish* was to provide the socially disadvantaged with access to justice, socially disadvantaged groups such as women, minorities and the extreme poor rarely participated in such proceedings. CESLI encouraged PS to take a leadership role in such events, and voice their opinions on cases ranging from elopement and adultery, to rape, physical punishment, unlawful punishment, etc.

Table 26 shows the incidence of *Shalish* PS members reported attending in the past year. Please note that the cases reflect roles as percentage of *shalish* PS attended. It was not possible to show what percentage of *shalish* PS participated in, since we do not know how many *shalish* occurred in PS wards in the designated period. When PS did attend, they mostly appeared as observers. They played the more active role of *shalishkar* for incidents of domestic (26%) and dowry, polygamy and divorce (23%).

Table 26. Percentage of *shalish* took place in wards and types of involvement of PS member (n=671)

Incidence*	Observer (Silent)	Observer (Vocal)	Claimant	Victim	Witness	<i>Shalishkar</i>
Land-related dispute	60.3	24.1	2.3	.6	1.1	13.8
Domestic dispute	36.4	31.3	6.3	.0	1.1	26.1
Dowry, polygamy and divorce	38.8	33.9	4.2	1.2	1.8	23.0
Financial dispute	50.0	21.4	14.3	.0	7.1	14.3
Theft	72.0	16.0	4.0	.0	4.0	4.0

*Multiple responses

***Shalish* participation: PS members vs. Control group**

We traced PS members' *shalish* participation in two ways – firstly by their knowledge of *shalish* activities by type, and their role in the proceedings. Several interviewees mentioned more than one *shalish* to have occurred in their ward over the past year, thus the answers reflect multiple responses. The data includes responses from two individuals in each ward. It was thus likely that in several instances, more than one respondent reported knowledge of the same *shalish*. Table 28 shows the percentage of respondents reporting knowledge of *shalish* by type of dispute. The analysis holds the underlying assumption that an equal and relatively comparable number of *shalish* were held across all wards.

We classified *shalish* along types of issue, including (i) all forms of domestic dispute that did not turn violent, (ii) any form of violence against women including beating, rape and murder, (iii) business-related disputes, (iv) land-related disputes, (v) incidents of animals destroying another person's crops, (vi) eloping, which involves running away with a girl that may or may not lead to marriage, (vii) theft, (viii) unsocial behaviour, referring to sexually explicit behaviour and extramarital affairs, and (ix) other issues, involving inhuman punishment, torture while in police custody, and violence in the hands of the elite or their cadres. We note that along almost every type, PS members reported a larger number than the control group; many PS respondents claimed to have heard about it from PS itself. PS members, therefore, appear to have wider networks providing them with access to information regarding local issues, with PS being a key information focal point (Box 5).

Box-5. Individual PS members in *Shalish*

Case 1

Some time back, a cow belonging to Abdul Khalek destroyed the crops of Aftar Uddin, both hailing from our *para*. Upon discovering his crops destroyed, Aftar locked the cow in his own shed, an act witnessed by my brother in law. Soon, Khalek's son Anis discovered that his cow had been taken away. Along with a few village hooligans, he stormed into Aftar's house but was unable to recover his cow. Anis and his father then informed the entire village that Aftar had stolen the cow; soon villagers were divided between the two families. My brother in law then informed me that he had witnessed the cow destroying crops; I urged him to tell the truth. The next day the ward's member and village *matobbor* organized a *shalish*. Aftar had arranged for a few witnesses, who failed to show up. Upon my insistence, my brother in-law defended Aftar, claiming that the cow was not stolen but it had been confiscated because of destroying crops. Anis and Khalek claimed his statement to be untrue. I then demanded that Anis place his hand on his father's head and claim Aftar Uddin to be a thief, which Anis was unable to do. The cow was returned, and Aftar paid Tk. 1,000 for defamation, and for destroyed crops.

Case 2

Four years ago, Raja from our *Dorga Para* married Sharmin from *Kakoli Haat* under a dowry contract of Tk. 20,000. During the wedding the girl's father paid Tk. 15,000 in cash with Tk. 5,000 remaining. Later the groom's family demanded this money, where the girl's parents delayed due to financial insolvency. Raja's parents did not let him see his wife; if they were together his mother got upset and called her family beggars. His mother used to make up lies and complain to him about his wife. At one point the son stopped spending time with his wife, and stopped speaking to her. The girl's father arranged a *shalish* where the two were divorced. At that point, Raja's guy's family had to pay Sharmin Tk. 20,000. Even if I played no direct role in the proceedings, when I discovered that the girl does not want to divorce the husband, I explained to her that a man, who loves his wife for money, will only bring her suffering. They will never be happy. It is better that she leaves. The girl finally agreed, and divorced her husband.

Case 3

A year ago my daughter Rupali was married to Alam, son of Abjal from a neighboring village. During the wedding, we agreed to pay them Tk. 25,000 cash. However, as we were unable to make the payment on time my daughter's in laws pressurized her to bring the money, often beating her, asking her to leave the household and not return unless she had the money. I consoled her, and asked her to return to her in laws; however they sent her back. My husband and I went to Alam's residence and explained that we are poor, we do not have access to such money. Alam was upset, and said, take your daughter home. I will divorce her. We then asked for seven days time. We returned home, and informed the village head Abu Bakkar of the incident. He then organized a *Shalish*. Alam and his father Abjal were asked to attend the *Shalish*, as were many knowledgeable men of the community. Upon hearing both sides of the story it was decided that we will pay Tk. 15,000 instead of Tk. 25,000; and we were allotted until next *poush* month to make the payment. We accepted this verdict.

What role do impoverished women play in during the *shalish*? Table 27 details respondents' role in each *shalish* they report. Findings are based on the number of *shalish* reported as there was no way to know the actual number of *shalish* held.

Shalish attendance was higher among PS members the difference was statistically significant (64.56% PS, 51.72% control). Of those attending, a higher percentage of the control group attended as the plaintiff or defendant, whereas a higher percentage of PS members attend as non-vocal attendees (*porjobekkhok nirbak*). A higher percentage of PS members therefore attend *shalish* as observers, whereas a higher percentage of the control group of regular villagers attended when directly involved in the case.

Table 27. Participation in *Shalish*: PS members vs. control Group

Role played by respondent in <i>Shalish</i> as % of <i>shalish</i> that respondents reported knowledge of			
Respondent's role	PS	Non PS	Significance
Observer (silent)	35.44	26.21	0.02*
Observer (vocal)	5.36	4.85	0.78
Plaintiff/Victim	59.20	68.93	0.01*
Witness	0.57	0.49	0.88
<i>Shalishkar</i>	2.11	0.00	0.04*
Did not attend	51.72	64.56	0.00*

*P value above 0.1 denotes significance at a 10% level

**Findings are reported based on number of responses; columns indicate the % of instances where individuals played the mentioned role out of all *shalish* they mentioned knowledge of

Rural women were reluctant to play a confrontational role in *shalish* without group presence. PS members played a more active role in *shalish* than the control group. However, societal opposition to women's vocal engagement prevented PS members from active participation. Many PS members felt that they had nothing constructive to add as their efforts to speak during proceedings were either interrupted by the village elders, or their opinions ignored. They claimed that rural Bangladesh's social structure does not permit women from being vocal in local decision-making processes; their acceptance of this subordination was itself a major challenge for organizations such as PS. Their attendance of judicial events itself posed a risk to their reputation and well-being, even social rejection to the point of being called a "spoilt woman", being barred from speaking out; this was sufficient to discourage them from habitual engagement. PS members, however, were often motivated by the presence of fellow PS members at such events. In other more constraining circumstances respondents acted behind-the scenes to counsel to relevant parties. Both groups were reluctant to protest high profile cases such as business disputes, violence, dowry, unlawful divorces, and even child marriage unless accompanied by additional community members.

Lobbying for *khas* land

As an organization PS lobbied for local resources such as *khas* land and water bodies. *Khas* land refers to government owned cultivatable lands which were not being used by government. The government allocated these lands to landless farmers and labourers. PS members were encouraged to collectively claim this land for groups of beneficiaries, by lobbying with the UP members and chairmen - the primary decision makers. However, out of 671 cases we found three instances were

PS lobbied for *Khas land* (Box 6). In most of rural Bangladesh *khas* land was occupied by power holders affiliated with political parties. As a result, such land rarely remained in the hands of the poor beneficiaries it was allocated to.

Box 6. Lobbying for *Khas* land

Members of the Dumutari PS in Gaibandha union have successfully lobbied for *khas* land allotment among the landless extreme poor who lost everything due to river erosion. They identified potential beneficiaries and submitted a prepared list to the UP member as part of lobbying.

IV. LOCAL AND SOCIAL INITIATIVES

PS group involvement in local and social initiatives

PS members were expected to undertake various social activities such as prevention of dowry, early marriage, providing assistance after disaster, rural infrastructure maintenance, providing support for children's education, and helping families in severe economic distress. Table 30 details role PS played in various local and social issues. PS members drew on their personal networks to keep track of possible child marriage or dowry-related threats. However, local elites and villages often discouraged from intervening. Consequently, PS with vocal and well-connected leadership was most successful in resolving local and social issues.

Among other initiatives, PS was most active in motivating parents of school-aged children to send their kids to school, followed by financial assistance and intervening in cases of child marriage. To a lesser degree, they undertook dowry prevention, rural infrastructure maintenance and providing assistance after disaster (Table 28). Table 29 shows the average number cases where PS members undertook social endeavours, by zone and age. PS located in eastern zone took higher number of initiative on average in case of dowry, schooling, early marriage, providing assistance after disaster, financial assistance, and rural infrastructure maintenance. On average, PS in the eastern zone took up 7 cases of dowry prevention, and the difference between the east and all other geographic zones were statistically significant. PS aged 4-6 and 7-9 years resolved more local social cases – the most difficult to resolve - than PS from other age groups.

As the Tables illustrate, PS was more successful in some areas than in others. Members identified dowry and child marriage as most difficult to challenge. Parents married their daughters before adulthood, firstly to relieve themselves of financial burden and secondly, for social and economic security. The bride's parents provide this money for their daughter's welfare, in order to increase her worth with her in-laws. PS typically came to know of dowry or child marriage through their intensive personal networks - members, neighbours, fellow villagers or family members of the victim. They intervened as a group, trying to stop the legal guardians from going forward with the event. In some cases PS members threatened to inform the police and have the parents arrested.

PS members also pursued various community initiatives. For example, PS helped disaster victims rebuild their homes, and get relief aid. In addition to lobbying with government sources for funding, leaders raised funds from villagers, and provided money from their own funds. PS Presidents and education committee members tracked school age children who were not attending school or forced to leave school by their parents. In several instances PS members had assisted the relevant parents

through the enrolment process. In several instances PS members maintained and repaired their local infrastructure. They reconstructed damaged roads, temples and donated mosquito nets, prayer mats and other goods to local mosques. One PS helped reconstruct a road connecting their village to the closest highway. The damaged road had delayed crop transportation, severely affecting farmers' incomes for many years. Finally, PS generated funds to meet personal financial crises of PS members and other villagers for situations including wedding, funeral and medical expenses (Box 7).

Table 28. Local social initiative undertaken by PS in the last one year (2008-2009)²⁸

Issue	Lobbied (for PS)		Received (for PS)		Mean diff	Lobbied (for others)		Received (for others)		Mean diff
	% of PS	mean	% of PS	mean		% of PS	mean	% of PS	mean	
Dowry prevention	2.8	.44	2.6	.21	0.23	6.5	.69	3.8	.1	0.6
Early marriage prevention	18.3	1.44	8.9	.36	1.08	24.2	1.30	10.5	.2	1.1
Assistance after disaster	.7	.61	.8	.33	0.28	1.4	.83	1.5	.3	0.6
School enrolment	44.3	3.45	47.0	1.88	1.57	33.4	1.78	35.1	.6	1.2
Financial assistance	33.1	2.14	39.3	1.30	0.84	34.4	1.53	48.5	.7	0.8
Rural infrastructure maintenance	0.7	.37	1.4	.37	0	.2	.07	.6	.1	0
Total	100	1.97	100	1.02	0.95	100	1.36	100	.4	0.9

Table 29. Average number of cases PS intervened since formation period by zone

Issue	By Geographical Zone				By PS age (in years)			
	North-east	East	North-central	South	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12
Dowry	2.35	7.67	1.68	1.90	1.06	3.00	3.89	1.77
early marriage	2.30	1.85	2.41	1.53	1.80	2.46	2.03	2.27
Schooling	9.21	9.54	7.01	7.36	7.00	11.21	6.79	7.85
Others	3.11	3.39	2.72	1.88	2.37	2.45	2.55	2.78

Box 7. Supporting the community

Saleha was suffering from gall bladder stone and in need of immediate treatment. However, her family didn't have enough money to finance her operation cost. When PS members learned about Saleha's problem they decided to help her by raising funds for her treatment.

²⁸Time period includes a year from the interview date. Data collection took place between November 2009 and March 2010.

Local and social activities – PS members vs. Control group

Human rights violations in the household

How well were PS members able to pursue their own individual human rights? There was no statistically significant difference between PS and control groups on reporting, reacting to, and resolving situations related to human rights abuse in their own households. Sixty-eight PS members and 65 control group respondents reported HR violations occurred in their households during the past year. The number did not necessarily reflect low occurrence but rather, the fear of social stigma may have discouraged survivors from reporting incidents. A small number reached out for help, mostly to a family member. Very often PS members were themselves victims of domestic abuse and reluctant to seek help for fear of abandonment, divorce, further abuse and even death. Many PS members paid dowry for their daughters' weddings. In particular regions, citizens could not even imagine a wedding without a dowry. The groom's side refused to give up dowry as it provided a material benefit. The bride's side believed a high dowry would ensure their daughter's well-being. Others claimed that dowry was standard practice in poverty-ridden communities, and the bride's in-laws could not care for her without it.

Control group respondents appeared less successful than PS members in actually resolving dowry-related problems within their household. Many experienced having their married daughters sent back from their in-laws due to their inability to pay a promised dowry. PS members had called *shalish* or approached village elders in several instances to seek a permanent solution. In spite of PS members' vulnerability due to their gender roles, they were quite proactive in resolving non-gender related conflicts, for example those related to money, property or business, particularly those involving their husbands

Human rights violations in the community

PS members appear much more proactive in resolving human rights abuse situations in their community. A higher percentage of PS respondents reported helping a community member respond to human rights abuse at least once in the past year, and the difference was statistically significant (31.25% PS, 25.34% control). A higher percentage of PS members also reported reaching out to a resource person to help the victim (9.09% PS, 5.69% control), and being able to resolve the crisis (22.39% PS, 13.83% control); the differences for both were statistically significant. Among PS members, 3.17% of those reporting knowledge of an incident claim to have heard it from the PS (Table 31).

Most interventions occurred in dowry cases; 15.94% of PS respondents and 12.67% of non-PS respondents claimed intervention on the bride's family, whereas 20.73% of PS respondents and 18.48% of non-PS respondents intervened on the groom's family at least once during the past year. This is followed by underage marriage of girls and domestic abuse of women by in-laws, with 5.44% of PS members and 3.35% of the control group taking action in the former and 4.55% of PS and 1.94% of non-PS respondents reacting to the latter.

Table 30. PS role played in local and social issues

Issue	Beneficiary selection	Process	Role of PS	Challenges
Dowry	Mostly neighbour Family member Villagers	a. Members gain knowledge about the matter by neighbours/PS members/ family member of victim etc. Visits the victim's house. b. Members try to stop the transaction/occurrence of dowry/marriage	a. Mobilizing the community to reject dowry. b. Making people aware of consequences of dowry practice.	PS members faced difficulty in convincing the brides' parents
Child Marriage	Under-aged boy or girl.		a. Protested against the violation. b. Convinced the guardian to stop the wedding.	PS members faced difficulty in convincing the bride parents and others.
Providing support during disaster	Ultra poor Disaster victim	a. Members gain knowledge about the matter by neighbors/PS members/ villagers etc. b. Address issue in meeting arrange fund c. Lobby with local government representative	a. Helped to rebuild houses b. Helped to gain relief support	They didn't face any constraint.
Motivating people to send their school aged children to school	School going aged children who are not attending or forced to leave school	a. PS tracks school age children who do not attend School/ stop attending school. b. PS member discuss on this issue in PS meetings. c. Consult and Convince legal guardians	a. Convinced parents to send their children to school. b. Help with the enrollment process.	They didn't face any constraint.
Financial Assistance	Villagers PS members Family member of PS member	a. Members come to know through neighbors/PS members/ family member of victim etc. b. Address issue in PS meeting c. Arrange funds and provide financial assistance to the victim	a. Provided financial assistance to meet wedding, funeral and medical expenses	Member had undergone hard time in arranging/raising fund.
Managing Rural Infrastructure	Community Local people	a. Members gain knowledge of matter. b. Address issue in PS meeting c. Raise fund from villagers d. Provided money from its own fund. e. Lobbied with local government representative. f. PS members physically engaged in construction process	a. Physically helped to reconstruct roads, religious places etc. b. Raised money to donate mosquito net, prayer mat etc to local mosque	Gathering every one at one place.

Table 31. Reporting and reacting to HR violations (N=2684)

HR Violations in the household	PS	Non PS	Significance
% HH reporting at least one incident	5.1 n=68	4.1 n=65	0.2
% HH reacting to at least one incident, of all houses where incident occurred	44.1 n=66	49.1 n=65	0.6
% HH able to resolve at least one incident, of all households where incident did not occur	40.9	38.2	0.8
HR violations in the community	PS	Non PS	Significance
% respondents helping community member in ward in case of HR abuse	31.3	25.3	0.0
% heard from PS	3.2	0.0	0.0
% respondents reaching out to resource person	9.1	5.7	0.1
% respondents able to resolve issue	22.4	13.8	0.0

PS members were reluctant to protest dowry and underage marriage without PS support. They feared social stigma and risk of social exclusion for challenging traditional practices. Often unable to resolve issues on their own, PS members involved local elders in the cases they pursued. However, even the political elite were not always able to resolve these issues, as challenging tradition could cost elected officials precious votes. Activists were most helpless in the case of torture by police.

Reacting to human rights violations throughout the ward

A higher percentage of households in non-PS *paras* reported HR violation incidents (18.5% in PS *paras*, and 21.5% in non-PS *paras*), indicating either that violations occurred less frequently in the near vicinity of PS, or households in PS areas, given their lower socioeconomic status, were less inclined to report incidents for lack of confidence in justice mechanisms (Table 18). The difference between areas on percentage of households taking action against incidents where they did occur was not significant.

Reacting to human rights violations across wealth status

There was little evidence that poor and ultra-poor groups reported and reacted to human rights violations any differently from wealthier groups (Appendix Table 2). A somewhat smaller percentage of rich households acknowledged the incidence human rights violations in their home, when compared to well-off and poorer classes. Very few households took action against such incidents, but when looking across groups, approximately 12% of rich and poor households reporting incidents also reported taking action, followed by 9% of very poor households and 7.10% of well-off households.

Membership in Local Committees

Neither PS members nor the control group was active in committees. Only 0.76% of our experimental group and 0.2% of our control group were members of any

committee. PS members, being the poorest female village residents were excluded from local committees, typically dominated by wealthy and influential families. PS members fared better in school committees than other types of committees. One PS member who was part of the PS education committee worked with her local school committee to track and enrol non-school going village children. She physically accompanied parents of such children through the enrolment process. Another PS member headed her ward committee, and met with the group every Saturday to bring together disabled village residents and educate them on various social issues. The committee also educated meeting participants on ways to integrate disabled citizens into society by encouraging vocal public roles, helping them get jobs and gain financial independence. The control group showed almost no engagement in local and social committees.

V. PS AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT

At the Union *Parishad* level UP members and chairmen were responsible for distributing government handouts. PS leaders' relationships with Union *Parishad* members significantly influenced their ability to get resources. Several PS members claimed to have good working relations with the local government. However, weak communication skills and inferior social position hampered their ability to bargain with local authorities. Several PS members mentioned that they had no idea how to bargain for resources, as they had received no capacity building training.

Government officials generally ignored PS requests. When leaders submitted their list of recommended recipients, local officials asked them to leave, often promising to take care of the issue but later ignoring their request. Others claimed that villagers only received government services by paying for it, through personal relationships with power holders, or party membership. PS members bargained well when they themselves held local government positions. Being an elected official increased their social status, and formed social connections.

One of PS's secondary goals was to increase visibility within the community and local leadership. In order to explore UP members' knowledge and perceptions regarding PS, its leaders and its activities we interviewed eight UP members and chairmen from four wards in four different geographical zones.²⁹ Six out of eight interviewed officials were unable to identify PS as an organization, though most recognized PS presidents by name. A few were familiar with various BRAC programmes and attended BRAC programmatic events.

PS leaders were often known as active community leaders. However, they did not promote PS as an organization. One UP member from Manikganj spoke very highly of the PS leader as an individual, also her aunt, not knowing anything about the organization (Box 8). PS leaders serving as BRAC health workers (*Shasthya Shebika*) were very popular with villagers. However, interviewed UP leaders knew little about PS as an organization.

Box 8. Local government perceptions

"My aunt Kayturi who works as BRAC health worker is quite popular with the villagers had helped me during my election campaign. She not only campaigned for me visiting door to door but also provided financial support to me by raising fund for my campaign. And after I got elected she came to me several times with request to give VGD, VGF card to certain people however she never mentioned her affiliation with any such organization name *Polli Shomaj*."

²⁹The selected wards are the same as those identified in Objective 3; please refer accordingly for details on sample selection.

Interviewed UP members were typically impressed after learning about PS and its activities. One member mentioned, it was a shame that she was not previously aware of this organization. They recommended that PS should involve the local government in their activities, and welcomed PS support in helping with the beneficiary selection process. However, at the time only two of the four surveyed PS were found to have actually submitted a list of suggested beneficiaries to the UP members, and only one had invited the UP member as resource person at their general body meeting.

VI. PROGRAMME ELEMENTS

Ranking criteria

For evaluation purposes the CESLI programme ranked PS performance on a scale of 100, based on 13 weighted criteria. The programme scored PS along dimensions such as the ability to independently conduct meetings, writing resolutions on their own, solving urgent matters collectively, participating in *shalish*, a village-level social justice mechanism, or independently resolving disputes. POs used diverse criteria for grading their PS, not all associated with the programme guideline. Table 32 lists the official BRAC evaluation criteria, alongside the list of criteria that POs actually used in the field. The Table lists criteria that POs themselves claimed to use while conducting their evaluations, for each grade of PS – namely, A, B and C.

In the field, POs prioritized certain criteria over others. Table 32 lists criteria by the order of importance. The POs, for example, prioritized engagement in local social initiatives, and acquisition of government handouts – that is, programme achievements along outcomes - over operational issues such as meeting attendance. In some areas, POs even added their own criteria that did not appear in the programme guidelines, such as low literacy rate of members, capability of raising funds and coordination among various sub-groups.

Role of the PO

Each PO supervised approximately 25-30 PS, typically across a wide area. The programme required that POs arrange approximately 1 PS meeting per day, which required excessive travel. Severely pressed for time, POs could often not fulfil all their responsibilities. Many could not maintain periodical contact with all their PS. Thus many PS members felt that their PO did not provide enough support to the organization.

The PO's absence led many PS members to feel that their PO did not fulfil his or her responsibilities. PS members depended completely on the PO for many activities. For example, the PO's leadership skills and personal connections were instrumental in their lobbying efforts. In a handful of PS, many general members did not know the PO by name. Others complained that the PO dictated and dominated their meeting, often writing down conceived meeting records before to the meeting was held. This violated PS procedures, as every PS was required to have an adolescent member whose sole responsibility was to inscribe meeting decisions into the PS register during meetings.

Table 32. Criteria set by programme and criteria used by PO for evaluating PS

Criteria set by programme	Grading criteria actually used by PO's in order of importance		
	A	B	C
Capable of conducting meeting independently	Capable of conducting meeting independently	Capable of conducting meeting independently	Unable to conduct meeting independently
Capable of writing resolutions on their own	Capable of engaging in local social initiative	Capable of acquiring government handouts on their own	Unable to acquire government handouts
Have 3-5 capable leaders	Capable of acquiring government handouts on their own	Incapable of conducting meeting independently	Incapable of writing resolution on their own
Able to protest against human rights violation	Capable of writing resolutions on their own	Incapable of acquiring government handouts	Low meeting attendance rate
Capable of Engaging in local social initiative	Capable of communicating with local government representative	Dependent on PO	Low literacy rate among members
Capable of acquiring government handouts (VGD,VGF etc)	Participating in various community forum	Incapable of writing resolution on their own	Unable to raise emergency funds
Presence of at least 5 STUP member in the group	Leadership skill of PS leader	Capable of writing resolution on their own	Lack of coordination among various committees
Conscious about their rights	Conscious about their rights	Capable of Engaging in local social initiative	Unable to invite resource persons
Capable of inviting resource person on their own	Capable of inviting resource person on their own	Able to protest against human rights violation	Incapable of participating in local social initiative
Other tasks	Coordination among various sub groups	Low literacy rate among members	Incapable of taking action against various social problem
	Capable of raising funds	Low meeting attendance	Unable to communicate with local government representative and local elites
	Capable of finding PS members	Capable of raising funds	Dependent on PO
	Capable of providing training in various local social issues	Dependent on PO	

*Highlights reasons are for falling below category A; un-highlighted cite reasons for staying in higher categories A and B.

Interviewers had much trouble locating POs and getting their support for this study. When POs were asked about older data on PS, or older events they claim that they were new to the location and not able to say anything about previous work of PS. In some instances interviewers claimed that all information provided by the PO was false as it did not match up with the actual data recorded by interviews with PS members. To fully explore reasons behind POs lack of performance, qualitative interviews were conducted of four POs and four RSS in four different zones of the country³⁰. The views of POs and RSS are reflected below.

Views of BRAC Staff: Regional Sector Specialists (RSS) and Programme Officers (PO)

Performance: BRAC staff felt that PS members were successful in securing safety net programmes, but less successful in other areas such as holding meetings, reacting to human rights violations and participation in local committees. They claimed that many PS members were completely dependent on POs, and reluctant to fulfil duties on their own. POs, however, were overloaded with targets which prevented regular PS visits. This hampered timely and efficient conducting of meetings. Interviewed staff did, however, agree that the quality of leadership mattered significantly for shaping PS outcomes – for example, attracting the right membership, accessing services and managing discipline and procedures. Some of the PS leaders were competent enough to hold local government positions. However, most PS leaders were poor and unskilled women with little or no education. As a result, they depended on the PO for:

Meeting spot: PS did not have its own office space to store documents and hold meetings. Meetings were held in open air and therefore, it was extremely difficult to carry out meetings during the rainy season. Designating a permanent indoor meeting spot or office space can increase programme efficiency and guarantee secure storage of documents.

Training: PS leaders required extensive capacity building training.

Appointment of female POs: PS members responded to female POs over male POs. Women were more comfortable discussing sensitive issues like pregnancy, family planning etc. with other women.

Resource persons: Leaders should invite a resource person to every general meeting.

Inclusion of local elites: Including local elites, government officials and power holders in PS activities can help raise resources, and increase networks for lobbying. This would run counter to PS objectives, as it was primarily a peoples' organization. Incorporating the elite would take away from its ability to function independently of the power structure. As civil society organizations were independent from the state by definition, this would violate the sole principle of PS.

³⁰ The selected wards are reflected in Objective 3, please refer accordingly for sample selection process.

Workload: Deployment of additional POs can help reduce work load and encourage POs to nurse their PS with more attention.

Record keeping

The programme required each PS to maintain a register for documenting events and other data to ensure accountability and efficient functioning. Ideally, a literate PS member, *kishori netri*, or the PO recorded the following during meetings:

- Executive committee meeting records including decisions
- Attendance in general and executive meetings
- Resolutions, a term referring to decisions taken during meetings
- A list of ultra-poor members in the community
- A list of disabled persons in the community
- A list of service recipients
- Names of sub committees, committee members and their respective assignments
- List of resource persons and their contact information
- Joint funds
- Implementation of decisions and resolutions

Source: Programme document (Grameen Shongothon Toiri o Khomotayon, Polli Shomaj and Union Shomaj, Kormoshuchi Bastobayon Nirdeshika, Shamajik Unnoyon Kormoshuchi, BRAC)

Many field registers appeared to be brand new, documenting no event beyond the last held meeting. In many surveyed registers, no details were available regarding PS establishment date, the number of members, change in membership status or replacement of members. Several also lacked details on resource distribution, for example, the numbers of government and non-government resources PS helped distribute, and the names of recipients. An equally large number of registers did not document the NGO affiliation of its members, including BRAC membership.

Also noteworthy was the lack of available data on the executive body– for example, how the committee was established, who holds leadership positions, and committee changes and elections. An approximately equal volume of registers were reportedly brand new, with no information available beyond the previous year and often, the previous handful of meetings. In addition, registers did not provide details on training received, PS activities or older meetings, and lists of TUP members.

Where data did exist it was unclear, disorganized, could not be deciphered, or the notebook was torn and neglected. Registers dating back more than a year were impossible to locate. Many POs were unable to provide older registers, claiming to have been newly assigned to the relevant area. Some PS were unable to provide any

register upon request. Information in the vast majority of existing registers did not correspond to actual events, and facts as verbally detailed by PS members. Many members reported that data in registers were made up. Executive and general body meeting decisions were either not mentioned, or incorrectly mentioned and did not correspond to reality as reflected in oral interviews.³¹

³¹ Given the state of registers in the field, we changed our interview strategy during the very inception of fieldwork, and instructed RAs to record data as derived from group interviews. No data was taken from the registers without being corroborated verbally. In case of mismatch, recorded data reflected information as derived orally from PS through group interviews of its executive members who were often accompanied by general members.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

What do study findings tell us about CSOs in rural Bangladesh? The experience of *Polli Shomaj* informs that CSOs can flourish in a resource-scarce setting, although their effects may be constrained by societal barriers and weak governing institutions. CSOs provide a physical space for women to organize, discuss issues pertaining to their daily lives and come together on matters of community interest. Although PS meetings only took place in alternate months, the PS meeting point or president's home was a central location for women to get together, invite resource persons and engage in a myriad of activities. This provided an alternative to main interactive spaces or power centres in non-PS wards, typically party offices, the local Union *Parishad* office, or the *thana* (police station).

Rural women also exhibited adaptability to sustain their organization. Not all PS maintained procedures with rigor; however, in many cases experienced leaders made relevant decisions independently. The local nature of PS also increased efficiency, entrenching the organization within the social sphere. For example, PS members developed wide networks to lobby for services and react to human rights abuses. The control group respondents mostly approach the male UP member or chairman, key power holders. Leaders, however, have been unable to increase PS visibility. The local elite were often familiar with active PS leaders, but not the organization.

PS had much trouble retaining its members. Women from poor households often relocated in pursuit of income generating activities; as a result PS membership constantly shifted in the previous years. In fact, rural-urban migration was a prevalent trend in contemporary Bangladesh. Secondly most rural women worked as day labourers, or ran small business with the help of microfinance loans. They were unable to invest time in meetings, or pursuing PS objectives.

Despite the various successes of PS, Bangladeshi society's patriarchal and elitist nature restricts its full potential. Lack of family support and disapproval of the larger community deter women from participating in civil society initiatives. Religious groups condemn PS activities due to members' need to work outside the home and alongside men. Rich and power-wielding persons dominate PS actions, for example, by influencing process related to resource allocation, local justice, and community activities to their own benefit. However, the collective power of PS as a group often propelled its members to overcome these barriers.

Despite such challenges, PS has survived as an organization. In evaluating PS success one must acknowledge that any civil society organization needs sufficient

time to institutionalize its procedures, develop experience in attaining its objectives, and learn from its mistakes to grow and prosper as an organization. PS has only been in existence for a little over a decade; it will take much longer to consolidate its practices. Increased experience allows leaders develop confidence and experience, both of which are crucial to organizational management and performance. A larger percentage of older *Polli Shomaj* may have had dropouts (which may be explained by the relative immaturity of a young programme), but a larger percentage also had a faster growth rate.

Can civil society generate active citizenship in a resource constrained setting?

While civil society encourages rural women to practice active citizenship, their progress was severely constrained by institutional and societal barriers. PS members had limited education, most coming from female-headed households and serving as *grihosthali* as occupation, working as contractual labourers for others. A demanding work schedule severely restricted mobility and status as labourer prevented contact with influential people. In fact, PS members had only limited success over the control group in getting services. They did, however, pursue diverse networks to receive these services – male and female UP members, chairmen, and often PS itself. A higher percentage of PS members lobby with female UP members and chairmen for social safety net resources, whereas a higher percentage of the control group directly lobby with the male UP member. To get services for others, a larger percentage of PS members went to PS or female UP members whereas the control group lobbied with family or friends. However, PS members could not get services without kickbacks. As with the control group, they typically exchange the service for votes, labour, or money.

PS members were undoubtedly more politically active than the control group. However, given Bangladesh's high voter turnout, the groups differed little when it came to voting. PS members were, however, more political - a higher percentage of PS members were affiliated with political parties. In the local elections, a higher percentage of PS members have campaigned for their candidates or themselves contested in elections when compared to the control group. More PS members attended *shalish* as vocal, or silent attendees; a few even played the role of *shalishkar*.

Can civil society activity diffuse throughout the community? We studied the extent to which PS activities diffused throughout the wider community. Households in PS *paras* of the ward were more vulnerable to poverty; a larger percentage of households in PS *paras* were female-headed and ultra-poor, and less educated.³² However, they only received a marginally higher percentage of the services and the differences were not statistically significant. PS needs to be more active in ensuring effective targeting of resources

³²Some rich households do fall into the PS domain (approximately 3.8% of all rich households are PS households compared to 11.66% of very poor households). This is most likely because PS often targets well-connected and vocal members to increase their social position and bargaining capacity, and such women are likely to come from slightly wealthier or influential families.

Although PS has achieved much, it faced many social and political challenges to survival. Its biggest challenge lied in showing rural citizens the power of self-reliance in a society that was increasingly dependent on aid. Where the impoverished knew of services they could get for free, they were unlikely to invest the time and effort for self-development, and realizing their own active citizenship.

Recommendations

PS was not able to reach all members of the ward. Women from far ends of the ward were unwilling to walk long to attend meetings. The programme could either bring PS down to the *para* level, or introduce more than one PS for each ward depending on the number of *paras*. A third option would be to divide each PS into two sub-groups, both governed by the same core group of leaders – one president, secretary and cashier. For this structure to work the trio would have to undergo intense capacity building so that they can conduct activities without the PO's support. If the trio could directly communicate with the PO, it would also limit the PO's engagement with PS, and thereby reduce dependency on BRAC and at the same time ensure adequate nursing.

POs need to employ a more effective oversight and support mechanism. They could either provide closer assistance, or as suggested above, guide the core leadership in various ways. POs were currently pressed for time due to work overload, which discourages PS members from attending meetings as they felt abandoned. Deployment of additional POs could also help provide closer oversight, as each PO's target would be reduced.

PS needs to work more actively to recruit non-BRAC members, and those who were not engaged with any NGOs. Those engaged with one NGO were more likely to engage in other participatory mechanisms as well, and about half of all rural women get let out of any community participation. It is important to reach those who were not engaged in any community activity at all and therefore, have minimal access to resources.

Many PS members dropped out as they did not receive any services. Rural women confused PS with the BRAC VO, or TUP initiatives. They typically joined PS, hoping for material benefits. All efforts must be undertaken to ensure that PS is not merely an outlet for service provision. Rather, POs must effectively communicate the real purpose of PS to the rural community – to empower rural women so that they are equipped to seek upward mobility.

To ensure maximum participation, meetings may be organized in the early morning or late evening. PS members' contractual work as labourers prevented them from attending meetings. During field work we found the largest most effective meetings to be the ones held before 10:00am, or after sunset. Therefore, PS may try to arrange meetings during these hours to accommodate members' work schedules.

The three-year election cycle may be too short; allowing the three leaders of the EC to stay in office for 5 years will provide a longer learning-period, and allow room for

these people to implement their learning. Knowing that they may be voted out in 3 years can reduce motivation. At the same time, the sub-committee can be rotated more frequently, allowing more PS members to develop leadership skills. It also requires less lobbying capacity and expertise than the main three positions, and therefore, voting people out of office more quickly is not likely to hamper progress. Rather, those voted out can now use their experience towards other activities they have the free time to engage in.

Although, we see that in terms of overall members PS is targeting members of various NGOs, looking at the 'majority groups' we see that most PS still have a majority of BRAC VO members. This suggests that most PS were located near the VOs since PS was initially a federation of VO members. Future, programme expansion strategies must take this into consideration, and plan to establish PS where VOs do not exist.

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APPENDIX:1 TABLES

Table 1. PS Applied and received UP services on behalf of PS members and others (PS as an Organization)

No.	Service	Applied on PS members' behalf	Mean	Received the service	Mean	Mean dif	Applied on Non PS members' behalf	Mean	Received the service	Mean	Mean dif
		1		2		1-2	3		4		3-4
1.	VGD	20.6%	11.26	14.7%	3.86	7.4	21.5%	6.84	14.5%	1.81	5.03
2.	VGF	58.3%	19.24	69.2%	10.89	8.35	52.5%	10.07	62.6%	4.72	5.35
3.	Stipend	1.3%	5.57	1.7%	3.22	2.35	3.4%	8.79	5.1%	4.72	4.07
4.	Food for work	.1%	9.00	.0%	1.50	7.5	.4%	13.00	.1%	2.00	11
5.	Old age allowance	5.7%	6.62	2.7%	1.55	5.07	7.3%	4.94	4.4%	1.19	3.75
6.	Freedom fighter allowance	.0%	1.00	.0%	.00	1	.1%	10.00	.1%	5.00	5
7.	Widow allowance	3.8%	8.43	1.7%	1.75	6.68	4.4%	5.57	.9%	.42	5.15
8.	Tube-well	.3%	4.71	.2%	1.20	3.51	1.0%	10.14	1.0%	3.30	6.84
9.	Warm clothes	1.5%	16.45	.4%	1.67	14.78	2.2%	14.18	3.5%	6.50	7.68
10.	Latrine	3.7%	9.64	4.3%	4.60	5.04	3.3%	4.98	2.7%	1.40	3.58
11.	Disability allowance	.2%	3.75	.2%	1.20	2.55	.3%	2.63	.2%	.80	1.83
12.	100 Day employment programme	4.4%	14.76	4.8%	7.30	7.46	3.6%	6.97	4.8%	3.48	3.49
13.	Agricultural equipment			.0%	.00				.1%	5.00	
14.	Educational supplies	.0%	3.00	.0%	3.00		.1%	4.00	.1%	4.00	0
Total		100.0%	13.64	100.0%	6.40	7.24	100.0%	7.93	100.0%	3.07	4.86

Table 2. Access to services by wealth ranking (Geographical distribution)

Rank	PS Membership	Access to Services						
		Service	Serv 2	Gov Serv	PS Help (Serv)			
Rich (n=159)	3.77(6)	85.53(136)	38.99(62)	78.62(125)	2.52(4)			
Well off (n=757)	4.23(32)	92.47(700)	51.52(390)	85.73(649)	4.10(31)			
Poor (n=950)	8.32(79)	94.95(902)	65.37(621)	89.68(852)	3.47(33)			
Very poor (n=978)	11.66(114)	93.05(910)	70.35(688)	89.78(878)	5.83(57)			
Significance (Chi Sq)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.04			
Rank	PS Activity in voter to voting age population in household ratio elections							
	MP		UP*	N	MP	N	UP*	N
Rich	0.63(1)	159	2.22(1)	45	0.85	45	0.94	159
Well-off	0.92(7)	757	0.84(3)	359	0.87	359	0.95	757
Poor	1.16(11)	950	0.69(3)	437	0.89	437	0.92	950
Very poor	2.56(25)	978	3.08(14)	454	0.92	454	0.90	978
Total					0.89	1295	0.93	2844
Rank	Local and Social Initiatives							
	Reporting incident	Responding to incident						
Rich	10.69(17)	11.76(2)						
Well-off	20.48(155)	7.10(11)						
Poor	23.79(226)	11.95(27)						
Very Poor	19.33(189)	8.99(17)						
Significance	0.00	0.44						

*Only for two wards; n in adjacent column

Table 3. Motivation for voting

2009 National elections g (multiple response)**	Respondent Type	
	PS	Non PS
	N=1306	N=1305
Exercising citizenship rights	63.86 (834)	65.06 (849)
Candidate may help the village or community	23.51 (307)	21.15 (276)
Candidate may grant personal favour	19.07 (249)	17.47 (228)
Everyone in the village or community votes	13.63 (178)	14.71 (192)
Everyone in the household votes	10.87 (142)	13.10 (171)
Personally liked the candidate	6.89 (90)	7.05 (92)
Personally know candidate	2.30 (30)	1.99 (26)
Voted for candidate due to political pressure	0.54 (7)	0.54 (7)
Total	140.66 (1837)	141.07 (1841)
Reason for voting (local elections)	Respondent Type	
	PS	Control
	n=713	N=740
Exercising right as citizen	43.76 (312)	45.00(333)
Candidate may help village or community	33.94(242)	32.70(242)
Candidate may grant personal favour upon victory	31.98 (228)	28.92(214)
Everyone in the HH votes	11.36 (81)	9.05(67)
Everyone in the village votes	10.66 (76)	8.92(66)
Liked the candidate	7.43 (53)	8.11(60)
Personally know and liked the candidate	6.73(48)	8.92(66)
Total	145.86(1040)	141.62(1048)

*Percentages are based on the total number of respondents

** Multiple response answers

Table 4. Services

Programme Name	Purpose	GoB/Donor agencies	Targeted population	Benefits
VGD (Vulnerable group development)	Developing life styles for women through training, motivating savings and providing scope for availing credit Building social awareness on disaster management and nutrition through training in groups.	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Directorate of Relief and Rehabilitation. Financed by GoB, WFP, EC, Canada and Australia	Households with not more than 15 acres of land Households with income less than Tk. 300 and dependent upon seasonal wage employment Women of reproductive (18-49) age Day labour or temporary worker Households with little or no productive assets	30 kg wheat/rice food per month, in total for 18 th month. Training (150 hour)
Vulnerable group feeding (VGF)	Provide food and other emergency assistance to disaster victims	Directorate of Relief and Rehabilitation	Disaster calamity victim Households with income less than Tk. 300 Women headed household	10-25 kg wheat/rice for 3 times in a year.

(Appendix Table 4 continued...)

(...continued Appendix Table 4)

Primary education stipend project (PEPS)	Increasing the number of primary school enrolments from poor family Increasing school attendance and reducing dropouts Increasing primary school completion rate Reducing child labour and poverty	Ministry of Education	Children from female headed households where head of the household is widowed, deserted, and destitute Children from day labour headed households Family of low income professionals (e.g. fishing, pottery, blacksmith, weaving, and cobbling) Landless or households that own not more than 0.5 acres of land	Family with one child enrolled in primary school receives monthly Tk.100 Family with two children enrolled receives Tk.125
Food for work (<i>Kajer binimoie Khaddo</i>)	Employment generation for the poor in season developing and maintaining rural infrastructure	LGED, Department of Social Services, Other Dept. Financed by GoB, ADB, WFP.	People who are functionally landless People who lack productive resources Women headed households where women are widowed, deserted, and destitute Day labour or temporary workers whose income is less than tk. 300.00 per month	Receives wheat/rice in exchange of work
Old age allowances	Livelihood support to the elderly poor	Ministry of Social Affairs, GoB	At least 65 year of age Income equal to Tk. 2000 or less Must have worked in formal sector Number of beneficiaries is determined on the basis of category of union Fifty (50) percent of the beneficiaries are women and the other fifty (50) percent are men	Receive monthly Tk. 300 allowance till death.
Honorarium Programme for the Insolvent Freedom Fighters	Livelihood support to the poor Freedom Fighters through cash transfers	Ministry of Freedom Fighters Affairs, GoB	Freedom Fighter's identity verifiable in cross section of references Freedom Fighters with income less than Tk. 6000 per year Disabled or partially disabled or landless or unemployed or none in the family to depend upon	Receives monthly 300 Tk allowance till death.

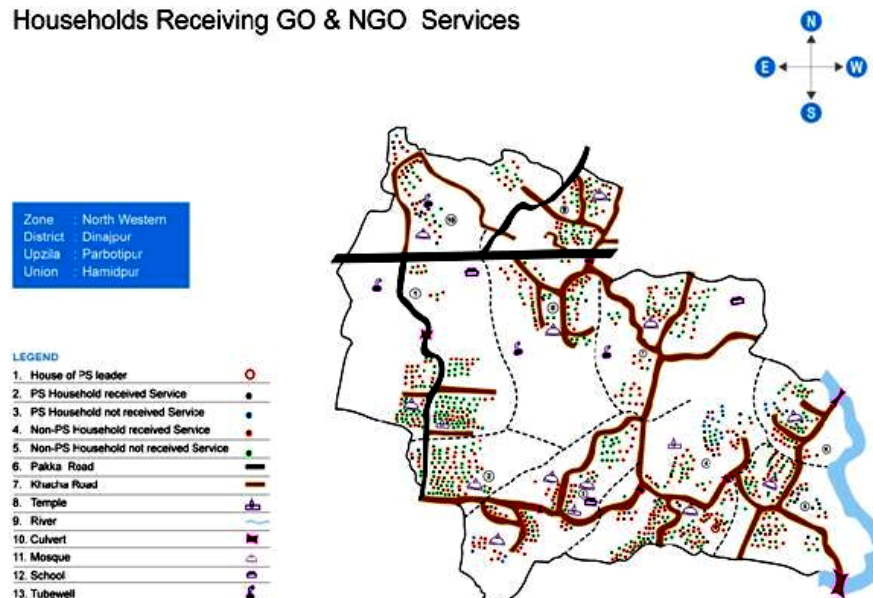
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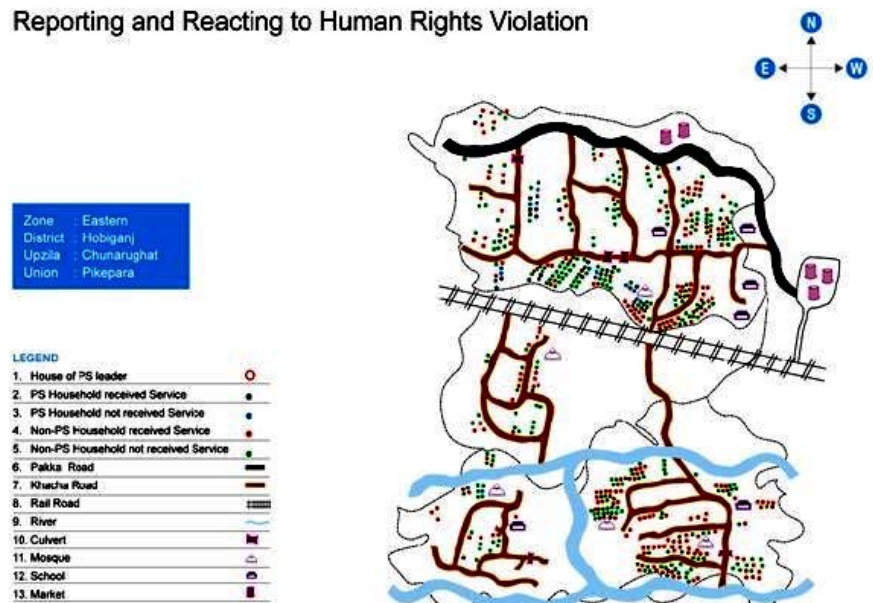
Allowances to the Widowed, Deserted, and Destitute women	Minimizing the problems faced by distressed women	MWAC, Financed by GoB	Women either widowed, deserted, or destitute The number of beneficiaries is identified on the basis of the category of Union.	Receives monthly 300 Tk allowance till death.
TR (Test Relief)	Employment generation for the people in poverty stricken areas in rainy season Developing and maintaining rural infrastructure	Directorate of Relief and Rehabilitation	Generally a location is targeted where poverty is relatively severe	Receives wheat/rice/ money in exchange of work
Allowance for Retarded Disabled Persons	Providing subsistence allowance to fully retarded persons	Ministry of Social Affairs, GoB	People who are mentally or physically challenged/handicapped	Receives monthly 300 Tk allowance till death.
100 Days Employment Generation Programme (EGP)	Employment generation for the poor in slack season Developing and maintaining rural infrastructure	LGED	People who are functionally landless People who lack productive resources Women headed households where women are widowed, deserted, and destitute Day labour or temporary workers whose income is less than Tk. 300.00 per month	100 Tk. per day
Agricultural Instrument	Strengthening ultra poor household abilities for responding to development opportunities	CARE-Bangladesh	Ultra poor farmers Agricultural labourer	Agricultural instrument, Boat, Cattle Training

APPENDIX:2 MAPS

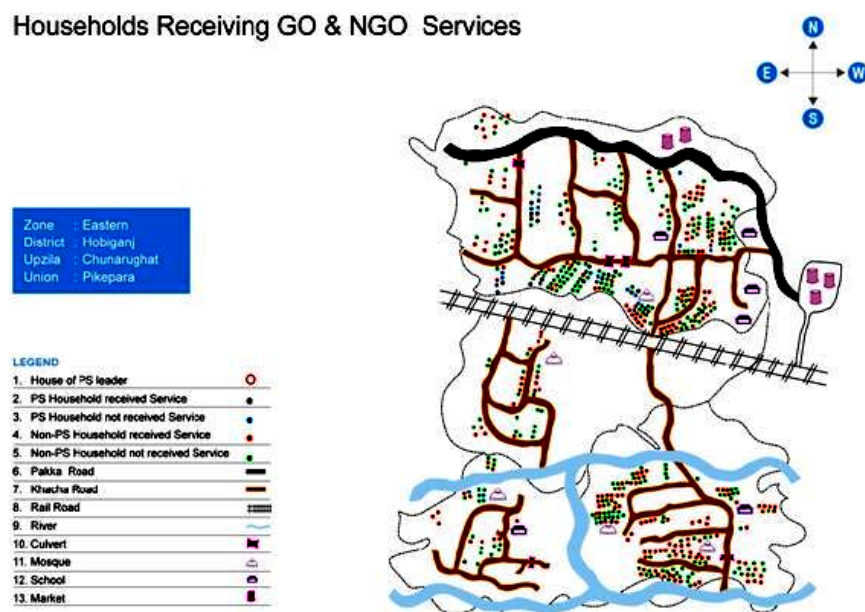
Households Receiving GO & NGO Services



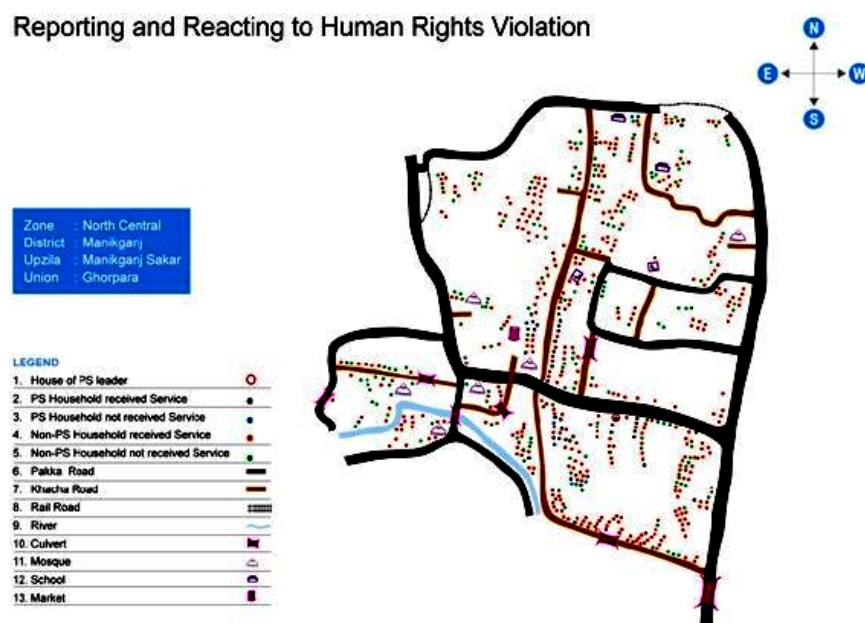
Reporting and Reacting to Human Rights Violation



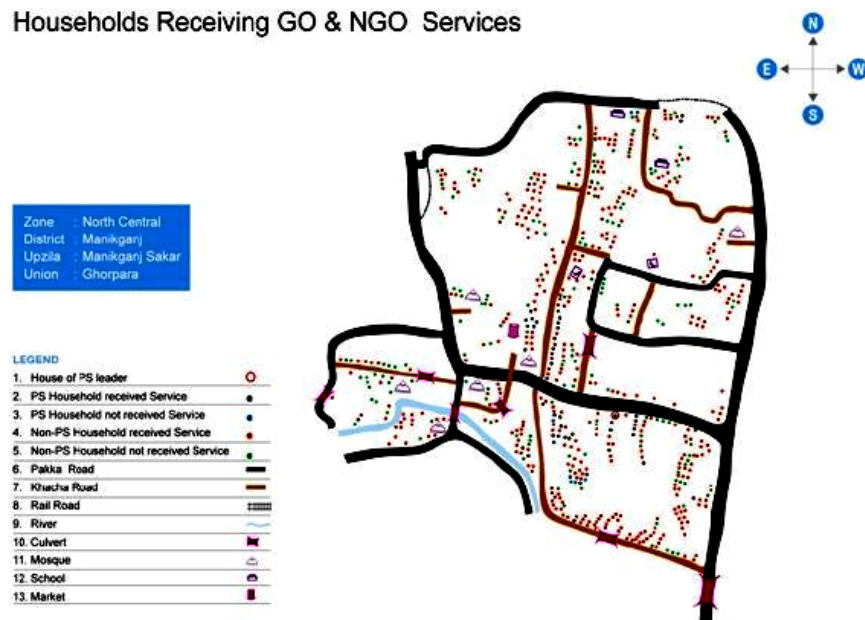
Households Receiving GO & NGO Services



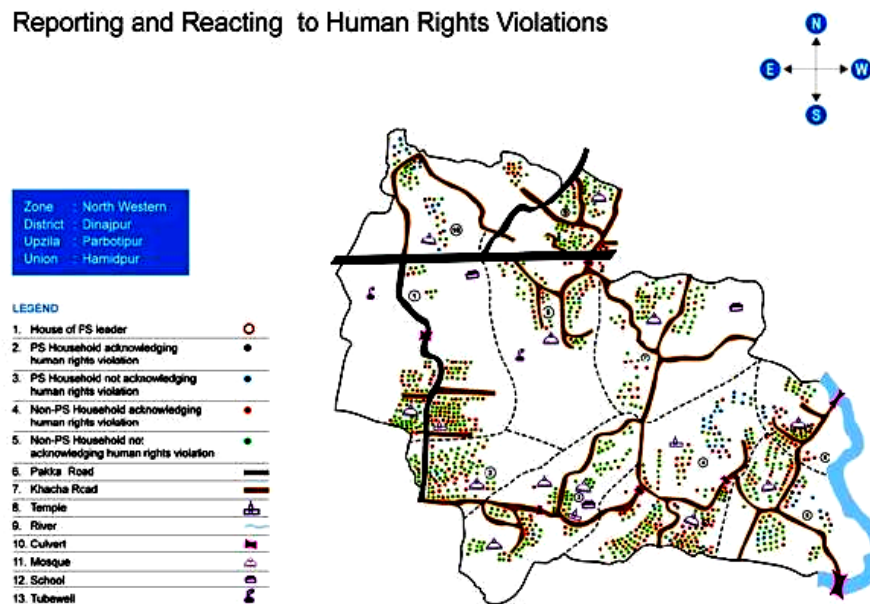
Reporting and Reacting to Human Rights Violation



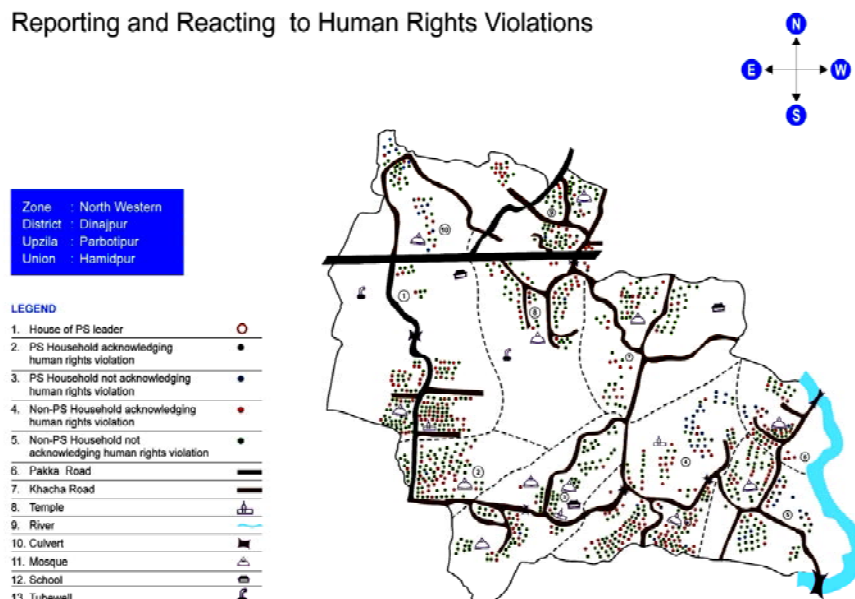
Households Receiving GO & NGO Services



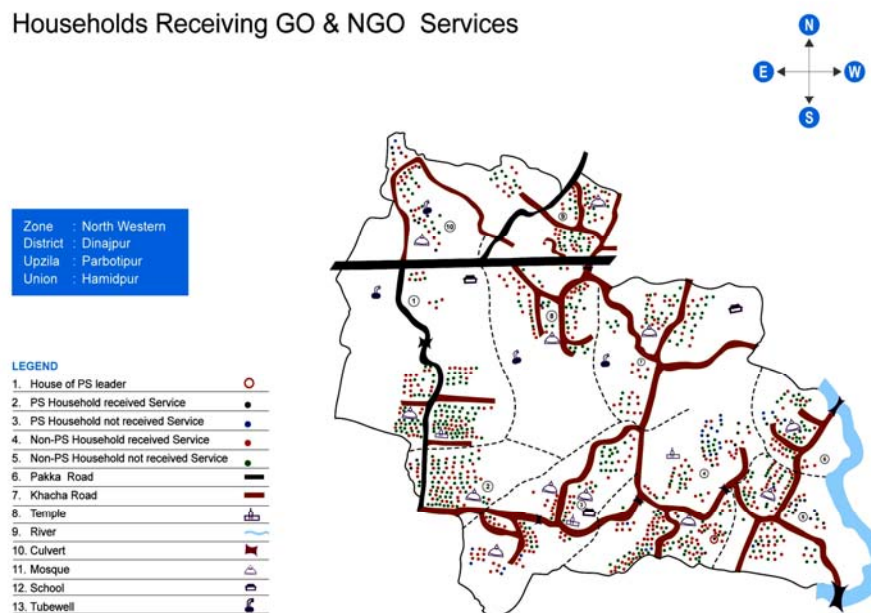
Reporting and Reacting to Human Rights Violations



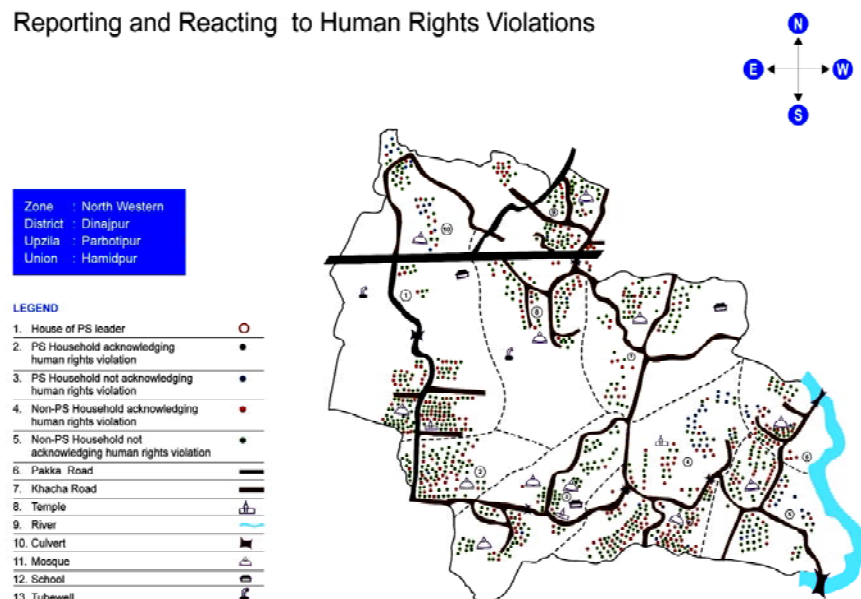
Reporting and Reacting to Human Rights Violations



Households Receiving GO & NGO Services



Reporting and Reacting to Human Rights Violations



Households Receiving GO & NGO Services

