What is Governance?

What is your understanding of governance?
Do you immediately think of the government officials? Or, the policies and rules flash in your mind? Some of us might be thinking about the word, ‘govern’, right? Then our concern would be, ‘who is being governed’… and in some cases, ‘what is being governed.’ The understanding of ‘governance’ varies among institutions, individuals, contexts and intentions. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (1997) defined it as:

Governance is the exercise of economic, political, and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions levels through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences.

Moreover, good governance complements the policies in place to achieve and promote sustainable development. It plays an important role in delivering public services. It is a continuous, gradual process that can go different directions considering the wide arrays of factors that need to be measured…

The World Bank (1992) went a step ahead and defined ‘good governance’ as –

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CARE Bangladesh, one of the largest international humanitarian organizations, prioritizes inclusive governance as an essential criterion for communities’ socio-economic development. It has defined inclusive governance as ‘the effective, participatory, transparent, equitable and accountable management of public affairs, guided by agreed-upon procedures and principles, to achieve goals of poverty reduction and increasing social justice.’ In achieving that, CARE’s Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities (SHOUHARDO), a gender-equitable food security program, now on its third phase of implementation included inclusive governance as one of its core objectives. This newsletter highlights on this purpose and the concrete results that the program acquired thus far by embarking on this area of work such as –

(1) Poor and Extremely Poor obtaining khas lands (government-owned fallow land),
(2) Participants demanding good governance after being oriented on their rights and entitlements, and
(3) Capacity building for the Union Parishad (UP) members so that they can better perform their roles.

Meeting is just the beginning. Village Development Committees (VDCs), are CARE SHOUHARDO III’s change agents in 947 villages where the program operates. They conduct bi-monthly and annual general meetings in an effective and meaningful manner where these serve as forums for solving problems in the community. They facilitate the Community Action Plans (CAPs) that aims to address issues in favor of the Poor and Extremely Poor (PEP) in accessing khas land, livelihood opportunities and safety net facilities.
The program was designed and has been implemented in an integrated manner that ensures all the five purposes – agriculture and livelihoods, health, hygiene and nutrition, resilience, women’s and girls’ empowerment and governance individually and collectively – result in desired goals for any purpose in question.

In the area of governance, SHOUHARDO III has focused on local government and nation building department service provision, and accountability to constituent communities which include program participants. In this issue, you will find evidence on how working closely with the government has led to achievement of results in increased incomes, health, resilience and women empowerment. Participant communities on the flip side have enhanced their skills and confidence in communicating and negotiating for their needs.

As we come to the end of the third year of implementation I am (and will forever) be indebted to dedication, efforts and commitment of program staff both in CARE and our dedicated partner organizations, and the ever supportive and engaged and supporting Government of Bangladesh officials, and our donor - the government and people of the United States of America.

Special tribute goes to the program participants for the successes they have achieved in their own lives and willingness to participate in the program. Our successes will always be measured by the change we catalyze of these rural households.

It is my sincere hope that you find this helpful and welcome any comments you may have to make future issues more relevant and useful to you.

GOVERNANCE: THE NATIONAL APPARATUS

Over the last decades, Bangladesh made significant progress in strengthening local governance and increasing citizens’ participation in the governance processes. One of them is the Union Parishad Act 2009 with salient features such as follows –

- Incorporates provisions to evolve the UP into an effective and responsive institution;
- Recognizes the importance of community participation, transparency and accountability, by including a specific section on formation of ward committees, participatory planning, access to information, and extended authority of the sectoral standing committees;
- Ensures women’s participation as 33% of committee members has to be women;
- Assures a mandatory citizen’s charter that states the rights of citizens and responsibilities of the UP toward its constituents; and
- Allows for space, such as - ward shabha and open budget meeting, to encourage citizens’ participation in local planning and budgeting.

SHOUHARDO III takes part in events and celebrations, such as Nutrition Week in the photo above, that aim to create awareness among community members and allow them to take part in local activities.

Community health volunteers work closely with participants by conducting household visits after Growth Monitoring and Promotion sessions.

GOVERNANCE IN SHOUHARDO III

CARE Bangladesh’s SHOUHARDO III aims to ensure the provision and utilization of public services from Local Elected Bodies (LEBs) and Nation Building Departments (NBDs) for communities, especially for the PEP women. More specifically, to confirm that -

1. Communities are better able to demand and negotiate increased public services (from UPs and NBDs); and
2. Accountability of LEBs and NBDs to the needs of communities, especially to PEP, increased.

Figure 1. CARE’s Governance Programming Framework
SHOUHARDO III’s governance efforts are designed in a way that contributes to the three main pillars of CARE’s Governance Framework. The following diagram illustrates the interconnections:

**EMPOWERED COMMUNITIES**
- Formation and capacity building of the Village Development Committees (VDCs) and youth groups

**RESPONSIVE AND ACCOUNTABLE SERVICE PROVIDERS**
- Organizing foundational meeting with the UPs,
- Providing training to UPs and NBDs, and
- Supported UPs in organizing standing and special committee meeting

**INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATORY SPACES**
- Formation of Program Advisory Coordination Committees (PACC)
- Organizing periodical meeting from upazila to the national levels

HOW GOVERNANCE CONTRIBUTES IN ACHIEVING OTHER SHOUHARDO III’S PURPOSE AREAS

**Government responses to citizens' demands**
The program formed national, division, district and upazila committees that brought together representatives from 14 ministries and NBDs who play a significant role with regard to advice on strategic directions and policy guidelines of the program.

**Citizens demand for public services**
The program uses community-based platforms such as EKATA and VDC to raise communities' awareness on their rights and entitlements.
WHAT ARE WE DOING DIFFERENTLY IN SHOUHARDO III FOR ITS GOVERNANCE INTERVENTIONS?

Women facilitate meetings in the communities to tackle issues concerning them, including children and adolescents.

SHOUHARDO III participants are 65% women and they have since been actively involved in all interventions, particularly livelihoods. Khodeja Begum, a Community Agriculture Volunteer, invested in her self-initiated poultry farm for a sustainable livelihood option.

Community groups organize vaccination campaigns in Itna, Kishoreganj.
COMMUNITY SCORE CARD
The community score card (CSC) is a tool utilized by CARE that facilitates the process used to create spaces for engagement between communities and the government. SHOUHARDO III facilitated the CSC interface dialogue with the local government in selected unions. In Chatirchar Union of Nikli upazila of Kishoreganj district, PEP raised their concern that the community clinic of this union remained closed most of the time. After the dialogue, the concerned community health care provider resumed operations of the facility as agreed with the health department so that rendering of services to those who needed them would continue. CSC was deemed a relevant process in the program that brings together participants and local government representatives to talk about issues upfront and face-to-face. This will be expanded in other unions of the program with the intention to get community feedback and improve services particularly of agriculture, livestock and community clinic services.

CONSTITUENT VOICE
SHOUHARDO III initiated the piloting of “Constituent Voice”, a feedback mechanism that aims to promote regular feedback, dialogue and course correction between different stakeholders in a project cycle. A non-profit innovator named ‘Keystone Accountability’ developed this methodology. Deployment of this methodology led the program to gather feedback from the implementing partners, community volunteers, and participants on program interventions.

COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTER
SHOUHARDO III has been building 300 community resource centers in the selected communities. These centers serve the purpose of a local-social-center where the community-based groups (e.g. EKATA and VDC) as well as the local government entities (e.g. Union Parishad and LEBs) can organize the meeting, conduct Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), and host communities’ cultural events. The community resource centers are built on high-raised platforms so that these can also be used as safe shelters during the flood.

VDC AND UP CROSS LEARNING
SHOUHARDO III believes in ‘learning by doing’. In line with this, the program organizes learning visits among VDCs. From January to March 2018, the program organized 28 learning visits to different VDCs. The community volunteers are now better equipped to perform their roles as they learn from their peers as an immediate result of these visits. The VDCs also share new ideas and innovative solutions for better decision-making among them.
CARE engages with the Government of Bangladesh at all levels. They meet regularly to find ways on how to improve the lives of Poor and Extremely Poor people in the Char and Haor regions.

The program organizes national, district and Upazila level coordination committees to review and support program progress and identify ways to improve government services for PEP. Representatives from 14 ministries at different levels participate in the PACC. Below are some of the key progress made:

- Support in strengthening collaboration with Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) in testing arsenic in tube wells
- Conduct regular and timely vaccination through coordination between district and Upazila levels livestock staff
- Assistant Commissioner (AC) of Land’s necessary support in providing khas land to landless participants of SHOUHARDO III
- Birth registration of the program ration recipients
- Priority to SHOUHARDO III female participants for government-organized trainings

Augmenting the efforts of the VDC, the program mobilizes youth groups to participate in periodic meetings, annual sports and cultural events. Through these, they are meaningfully engaged in community development by providing support in government-led activities, such as vaccination and search and rescue during disasters. The youth are also engaged to provide basic messages about public services, Gender-Based Violence (GBV), caring for the environment, and using modern agricultural technologies.

Responsibility to participants remain at the core of SHOUHARDO III. By opening a line of communication with participants and partners, we are empowering them by making their voices heard and at the same time for SHOUHARDO III to know how to better address their needs. In the immediate term, improved communication creates a better understanding and removes misconceptions – thereby creating an atmosphere of accountability, transparency, trust and support among all those who will benefit from the formation of a well-functioning communication line to establish the feedback mechanism for the program in place.
## GOVERNANCE MATRIX OF SHOUHARDO III

The illustration below shows how Governance contributes to the work of other program purposes in achieving better results.

### GOVERNANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PURPOSE 1: AGRICULTURE AND LIVELIHOOD</th>
<th>PURPOSE 2: HEALTH AND HYGIENE</th>
<th>PURPOSE 3: RESILIENCE</th>
<th>PURPOSE 4: WOMEN EMPOWERMENT</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Disseminate information on the public services available in agriculture and livelihood through FFBS;</td>
<td>- Lobbies with the National Nutrition Council (NCC) at the national level;</td>
<td>- SHOUHARDO III staff on Disaster &amp; Climate Risk Management (DCRM) build capacity of the Union Disaster Management Committees (UDMC) and Upazila Disaster Management Committees (UzDMC);</td>
<td>- EKATA representative in VDC ensures that the committee tackles women empowerment and gender equality agenda;</td>
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<td>- Collaborates with government’s Agricultural Extension Department, Department of Fisheries and Department of Livestock to provide support to the PEP;</td>
<td>- Strengthens the district and upazila level Nutrition Coordination Committee (NCC) and share communities’ challenges and needs;</td>
<td>- Community representatives participate in the process of developing the Union Disaster Management Plan (UDMP) and ensure sufficient resource allocation;</td>
<td>- Technical staff facilitate sessions on women empowerment for the local government representatives/LEBs</td>
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<td>- Lobbies and negotiates with the District and Upazila Health Department and Family Planning Department and they organize visits to the communities;</td>
<td>- Builds community people’s capacity to prepare contingency plan which are later included in the Community Action Plan (CAP) and UDMP;</td>
<td>- Builds capacity of the way men, women, girls and boys so that they are fully aware of their rights and capable to negotiate with the government service providers;</td>
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<td>- SHOUHARDO III engaged government’s health department to provide Iron and Folic Acid supplements in the community clinics in respond to communities’ need.</td>
<td>- Develops capacity of the Union Digital Center entrepreneurs so that they can gather and disseminate early warning information;</td>
<td>- Disseminates information on safety net programs in targeted communities so that the most vulnerable groups can access them;</td>
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<td>- The program provided Search and Rescue (SAR) kits to 37 UDMCs and the kits will be preserved to be used for early warning information dissemination and rescue activities by Union Disaster Volunteers (UDVs) during an emergency.</td>
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WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO CHANGE A VILLAGE: SHAHEBHATI VILLAGE

This story features the Village Development Committee (VDC) in Shahebhati, a southern village of Nikli Upazila in Kishoreganj district.

Shahebhati is surrounded by waterbodies except for the Northern side where, only in that part, there is a big pond. The only way of traveling in and out of this village was the earthen road beside the pond, in the local dialect, a ‘kacha rasta’. The earthen road was in a bad condition due to heavy rainfall and no repairing effort in a long time. The mobility of the villagers was difficult as the road was not always accessible. During the rainy season, the situation used to be worse as the road would go under water. The road used to get slippery if not under water which made it tough for the women, children and differently-abled people to commute. Local livelihood was affected significantly because the farmers could not take their produce to the market using the local vehicles. The school-going children were irregular in the school and the villagers could not go to the community clinic and visit the Union Parishad (UP) when required. The absence of an alternative road made Shahebhati an isolated village and disrupted the transportation with the Upazila.

SHOUHARDO III formed VDC in the targeted communities which is a community-driven platform that includes 11 Poor and Extremely Poor (PEP) members of which 50% are women. VDCs identify the common problems and challenges faced by the community, through the Community Action Plan (CAP) process, and then to work out ways to resolve these. It works as a primary link between the community and the Union Parishad, head of Bangladesh’s lowest tier of local government.

Rahima Begum, an inhabitant of Shahebhati, was nominated as the VDC Chairperson by the villagers. She had a vital role while conducting the well-being assessment at the beginning of this process. Rahima initiated dialogues with different households individually and mobilized them to repair the earthen road. In her lead, the VDC members made their CAP and identified the road transportation problem as a top priority. Then, around 10-12 VDC and Empowerment Knowledge and Transformative Action (EKATA) members visited the UP Chairman and raised the problems associated with the earthen road. After a successful negotiation with the UP Chairman, they made an agreement that the VDC and EKATA members will immediately begin to raise the earthen road; after that, the Chairman will provide the additional construction materials for a concrete road.

As per their agreement, a few days later, the VDC and EKATA members began to raise the earthen road. Only the women members from VDC and EKATA worked collectively to raise the earthen road. Their spirit of volunteerism did not only break the social norm of restricting women within the households but also inspired the villagers. They worked for 30 days approximately to repair the road and finally, completed the earth compaction process. After that, the UP provided brick and cement for road construction. Shahebhati now has a 100-meter-long road that lets the children attend school regularly, farmers to take/sell their crops in the market, villagers to avail of community clinic services, women and differently-abled people to commute, and vehicles (e.g. van rickshaw, battery rickshaw, bicycle, motorcycle) to travel to and from this village.

This achievement made the VDC members more confident about their ability and unity. They are now aspired to address other problems in their community. For example, recently the UP made a 100 feet U-drain in Shahebhati to reduce waterlogging. However, the village needs a 200 feet longer U-drain. The VDC members discussed this with the UP Chairman and came to a similar agreement. According to that, the VDC will do the earthwork on their own and then, the UP will complete the drain. While all these tremendous community-driven efforts came out to be successful, Rahima also grew as a leader. She earned respect from the villagers as she continued her effort to make Shahebhati a better village.