

The Hunger Project-Bangladesh

Executive Summary

Over the past six months, The Hunger Project (THP)-Bangladesh recognized and pursued the following objectives.



1. During the last six months, we reached over 50,000 at all levels of the society across the country through our mobilizing tools (Vision, Commitment and Action Workshops (VCAWs); animator trainings; women leaders trainings; youth leaders training; coordination and follow-up meetings), empowering them to take a stand for self-reliant action.
2. As a part of mobilization, an Animator Reunion/Conference (*see photo*) was held at Savar Dhaka after a one-year break, in which approximately 12,000 animators from across the country participated. All the animators paid their own transportation and other expenses. In addition, each participant contributed taka 20 (US\$0.26) as a registration fee. This is the first time the animators paid a registration fee for participating in a reunion. Former Chief Advisor of the Care Taker Government and Retired Chief Justice, Mohammad Habibur Rahman, was the Chief Guest.
3. A new partnership with BRAC, the largest NGO in the world, was developed for implementing a pilot project, “Social Mobilization and Accountable Local Governance towards Achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Four Unions.” Our intention is that this will be replicated around the country based on its impact.
4. A National Conference of SHUJAN, a platform of civil society, was held to mobilize members to promote good governance, human rights, etc.

This six-month period was distinguished by the following accomplishments:

- Increased Youth Ending Hunger (YEH) activities;
- Imparted animator training courses;
- Trained youth activists and launched a good number of “Social Action Projects;”
- Development of a strong web-based M&E system to easily monitor and supervise every activity at the field level as well as work of regional offices; and
- The Unleashed Women's Network Committees at the district level across the country were formed.

Details on Progress

Achievement	Measurement (see M&E report for numbers)
A. Mobilization for Self-reliant Action	
Trained new group of volunteer animators.	Animators are the driving force of THP-Bangladesh. The demand to create more animators is gradually increasing, especially at the grassroots level. During this period, we trained a good number of animators at the grassroots, who are taking different initiatives to meet the MDGs in their localities.
Mobilized community people through the Vision, Commitment and Action Workshop (VCAW).	The VCAW is one of the best THP tools for people's mobilization. We made some changes to our VCAW manual according to the changing lives of grassroots-level people. Animators are conducting VCAWs to mobilize the grassroots people to work to achieve the MDGs in their communities.
Trained new youth activists and mobilized social action projects to ensure child education and enrollment in institutions and on various social development issues.	Youth are vital volunteers of THP-Bangladesh. A good number of youth were trained under the Active Citizens Youth Leaders program, and they are already undertaking various types of social action projects, ranging from setting up literacy centers and libraries to campaigning on dowry-free marriage.
Practical skills development for self-employment.	Skills development trainings were provided to youth in 12 different trades for creating self-employment opportunities.
Involved underprivileged people in Participatory Action Research (PAR).	Trained a good number of animators as PAR facilitators through workshops and extended PAR activities to many unions. The PAR facilitators formed small organizations to provide loans among members for income-generating activities and generate savings.
Formed social units at THP-Bangladesh-mobilized unions to strengthen Union Parishad (UP)-led, women-focused interventions.	Social units – including Shujan, Volunteer Trainers (VTRs), Women Leaders, Youth Ending Hunger, National Girl Child Advocacy Forum, UPs, Resource People, and Core Groups – are being formed in a planned way at the union level.
Formed self-help organizations.	Self-help groups/organizations were formed and have already generated savings of more than one crore (10 million) taka (US\$134,867) and are providing loans among members for income-generating activities.
MDG-focused community initiatives.	Our trained volunteers have launched various

	initiatives to achieve the MDGs such as: primary education, poverty reduction, safe delivery, pregnant mother care, dowry-free marriage, stopping early marriage, tree plantation, sanitation and safe drinking water.
B. Intervention for Gender Equality	
Developed the leadership capacity of grassroots women.	THP-Bangladesh imparted Women Leadership Training to grassroots women through courses on gender issues, leadership and women's legal rights. During this period, monthly follow-up trainings were also conducted.
Expanded Unleashed Women Network.	The Unleashed Women Network was extended to additional districts, upazilas and unions. They are mobilizing the grassroots women.
Completed preparations to celebrate Girl Child Day effectively to raise public awareness.	Under the banner of NGCAF, as well as in partnership with the government, National Girl Child Day was celebrated all over the country through workshops, discussion meetings, rallies, etc. Thousands of women, men and girls participated in these programs.
C. Working Towards Good Governance	
Members of civil society, brought together under the banner of SHUJAN, worked to promote good governance, election and political reformation, human rights and citizen rights.	A National Conference of SHUJAN was held in Dhaka to mobilize members to promote good governance and human rights. Thousands of members attended the conference, spending their own money to do so. They made a plan to work on voter education during the upcoming municipality election.
Trained local elected representatives to strengthen local government bodies.	Special animator trainings were provided to elected representatives from four unions of the Mymensing District under the BRAC-THP-Bangladesh project.
Arranged Ward Sava and open budget meetings to ensure the local government body is accountable and transparent as well as to ensure people's participation	A good number of UPs arranged open budget meetings as part of the transparency and accountabilities of Union Parishad.
Increased awareness on improving hygiene practices, sanitation and safe drinking water (HYSAWA FUND Project)	A special project is being implemented in 11 unions on sanitation and safe drinking water (HYSAWA FUND Project) Every union has many community-based organizations (CBOs), who mobilize people to install sanitary latrines and ensure safe drinking water. During the period, CBOs conducted 594 courtyard meetings,

	campaigns, workshops and meetings with UP bodies. As a result, there is now sanitation coverage is 64 percent in the 11 unions, and safe drinking water ensured in four unions, with 30 percent coverage in the rest of the seven unions.
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Objective/Challenge	Reasons/Lessons Learned
Empower and inspire animators to form social units in all THP-Bangladesh- mobilized unions so that they can pressure UP bodies and government functionaries to provide facilities to grassroots people to achieve the MDGs.	<p>Social units have not yet been formed in all THP-Bangladesh-mobilized unions for the following reasons:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We did not fully decentralize our activities due to financial limitations. In addition, more staff presence/involvement is needed in the field which we do not yet have. 2. We have not yet created a critical mass of volunteers/animators who will act as self-generating leaders in all of the active unions. 3. Our program is totally volunteer based, whereas other NGOs employ a service-delivery model and financial incentives to mobilize people, which creates a challenge in the field.

Partnerships

A new partnership with BRAC, the largest NGO in the world, was developed to implement a pilot project, “Social Mobilization and Accountable Local Governance towards Achieving the MDGs in Four Unions.” A partnership was also developed with the Australian High Commission for strengthening Upazila Parishads.

Our partnership with the British Council also continued, and there is great potential to further expand this project in the future. Partnerships are also underway with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), HYASWA, SPANDAN-B and AGAMI.

In addition, we have active partnerships with civil society organizations and NGOs including ActionAid, Manusher Jonno, Nari Maitree, Caritas, USC-Canada, South Asia Partnership and Plan Bangladesh. They provide funds for women’s empowerment activities and girl child rights activities through the NGCAF. We have also developed partnerships with many individuals and businesses, which provide funds for Shujan activities.

Broader Awareness and Advocacy

Almost all of our programs and activities are widely covered by all national and local electronic and print media. THP-Bangladesh Country Director, Dr. Badiul Alam Majumdar, and Mrs. Nasima Akter also regularly take part in talk shows arranged by electronic media on different social, women's empowerment and political issues. National print media publish the writing of the Country Director on various issues regularly. We are also advocating under the banner of Shujan, Upzila Parishad Chairmen Forum, Self-Governing Union Parishad Advocacy Group, National Gild Child Advocacy Forum and the Unleashed Women Network for the promotion of good governance, human rights, political and election reform, accountable and transparent local governance, awareness towards girls' and women's rights and on various social issues.

Profile of a Leader in the Community

Rashida's husband had lost the battle against poverty and was ready to run off to the capital city Dhaka. Rashida had not agreed with his decision, instead she decided to stay and fight, a fight which she eventually won. In the process, she not only learned how to live with dignity but also showed other women how to do so. *(Rashida is pictured in the center of the photo, in red, to the right of the woman in blue)*



Rashida was born in a fairly well-off farming family from Bandobila village in Bagharpara Upazila of Jasore Jela. Her mother was a house maker and Rashida was the youngest of 11 children. Her father had 15-16 bigha (about 5 acres) of farming land so there was never any trouble feeding the many mouths. But, before she could understand the ins and outs of her life, she was married off early because of social superstitions. She was in tenth grade at the time, and that was the end of her education.

Rashida was married to Shahjahan Shaju who lived in the same union. Her in-laws had passed away and left some land to their son. Unfortunately, Shaju was not good at farming and was well known as a philanthropist. He never hesitated to sell his own land to help the people of the village. Some farm land was lost that way while the rest of it was sold when Shaju decided to try his luck abroad. There, he fell in the hands of a fraud and lost all his money. The family had lost everything and was destitute. Rashida's husband wanted to lock up the household, take their two sons and move to Dhaka City in hopes of finding work. But Rashida wanted to stay back. Through times of trouble she still dreamed of gaining back the family's self-respect.

The family was in despair. At that time, Gopikanto Sharkar, lecturer at Shahid Shirajuddin Degree College and volunteer trainer of THP-Bangladesh and Ayub Hossain, THP animator, encouraged Rashida to take an animator training. With their support, Rashida and her husband completed the 127th Animator Training at the Gaibadh Agricultural Technology Development Center.

This animator training changed Rashida's perspective. She discovered a new strength within herself. Being a girl, she had never thought of herself as being able to work and provide for her family. She discovered that she could achieve anything she wanted if only she tried. After the training, she was able to discuss this freely with her husband, and he responded with assistance and encouragement.

The training had left Rashida eager to start something, but she did not have any capital. With 350 taka (US\$4.72), which she had earned by selling poultry, she bought the supplies needed to make Nakshi kantha (traditional blankets with hand-crafted embroidery on them). She did not have any professional training in making the kanthas, only what she had learned in her childhood as a hobby. In just 15 days, she earned 1,150 taka (US\$15.50) by selling the kantha she had made. This amplified her self confidence and there was no turning back. Within two months, Rashida had included several other women from her village and started a new business.

The women had to fight through many odds to do their work. It was not socially honorable in the village for the women of the house to work outside to earn a living. Even poor parents weren't willing to let their daughters work sewing kanthas. They had to be persuaded. The situation is very different now; Rashida, 15 other women from her village and 35 others from the surrounding villages of Keshobpur and Chantipur are also involved in this sewing venture. They are earning 1,200-2,500 taka (US\$16-34) per month with just their labor and no capital. Rashida herself earns 4,000-5,000 taka (US\$54-67) per month from this and she also earns another 3,000-4,000 taka (US\$40-54) from a job as a life insurance policy agent.

Rashida had started her work as an animator in 2008. After that, she also completed the 24th Women Leaders' training which helped her further progress. In the beginning her efforts were concentrated on giving her family financial stability, but now her goals have expanded. Not only has she broken the barrier of a woman being the bread winner of the family, she has helped give other women a way to self sufficiency. Rashida has adopted a girl from the village and is living a fulfilled life with her husband, two sons and a daughter.

Rashida now continues to help better the quality of life of the women in the village. Many girls have to stop studying because their families cannot afford their education. Rashida has involved such students in the sewing work. Now the girls can earn their own tuition fees with work that they do in their free time. She is also working to create awareness and empower women. She is active in other social work such as stopping early marriages and dowry exchange, encouraging proper sanitation and encouraging parents to keep their children in school. All this good work has given her a positive reputation in her village and women come to her for advice on many subjects. Currently, Rashida is a member of the Chandipur Government Primary School managing committee. The business she had built with a meager capital of 350 taka (US\$4.72) has grown to become a 50,000 taka (US\$674) endeavor.

Had Rashida given up, paid heed to her husband's wishes and left for Dhaka, her life could have been different. But, the lives of so many other women that she had helped, would have remained the same; impoverished and incapable. In her area, Rashida is a beacon of possibility and inspiration. In the future, she wants to find employment opportunities for all the unemployed

women of her village. She also wants to give her children higher education. We are certain that Rashida will succeed in reaching all her future goals.

Impact Assessment

We have been facing challenges in collecting data from field, such as:

1. Event reports, planning format and impact assessment data does not reach the Dhaka office in a timely manner as the data is sent by local courier.
2. Most of the volunteers as well as field staff do not fill in the data collection forms properly. Sometimes they send incomplete data. Therefore we have to communicate repeatedly with volunteers as well as with field staff which is time consuming.
3. Sometimes data is uploaded incorrectly.

To address these problems, the following steps have been taken:

1. We introduced an online system to send data from the field level. Now, only a few staff members are using the online system.
2. Orientations are being given so that volunteers and field staff can fill and send data in the forms correctly.
3. Orientations also being arranged for data uploading so that it inserted properly.
4. We are providing computer and Internet facilities at all regional offices.

We analyze collected data and utilize the results for future program planning and management decisions. We also share the data analysis findings with field staff, consider their perspectives and give directions to them as and when needed. As a result, data is now reaching the Dhaka office more quickly and in better condition.

Future Plans

For the next six months, we have identified the following objectives:

1. Carry out a mass voter education campaign across the country in the upcoming local government elections in order to ensure the election of skilled and honest people.
2. Arrange a fair to showcase youth social action projects at the divisional level.
3. Form social units in the listed unions.
4. Expand Active Citizen Program under British Council project to new communities and provide leadership training to youth leaders.
5. Complete the formation of all social units in at least 30 more unions.
6. Carry out campaigns to raise awareness on MDGs.

7. Carry out campaigns to elect honest candidates during upcoming local-level elections.
8. Mobilize volunteers to initiate social action projects to halt early marriage, promote dowry-free marriage, ensure women's rights, eradicate illiteracy, and ensure primary health care, nutrition, sanitation and environmental sustainability.
9. Provide Women's Leadership training to 500 women.
10. Provide animator training to 5,000 new social activists.
11. Arrange open budget meetings and Ward Sabha at 100 unions to make Union Parishads more effective.
12. Provide a PAR foundation course to 35 men and women.
13. Create 360 PAR animators through 12 courses.