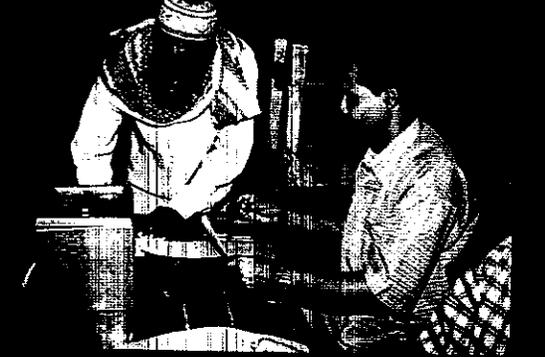


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# TOWARDS A STRONGER DEMOCRACY: A COMPREHENSIVE 2001 ELECTIONS PROGRAM





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# **Towards a Stronger Democracy: A Comprehensive 2001 Elections Program**

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## INTRODUCTION

After more than 30 years as an independent nation, Bangladesh has made tremendous strides toward establishing itself as a democracy. In the past, the major political parties have cooperated in order to reclaim democracy from two decades of autocratic rule, both have assumed power following closely contested elections, and both have served as the opposition party. The October 2001 elections were a significant and critical test of Bangladesh democracy. Beginning a year prior to the elections, The Asia Foundation (TAF) with its partners sought to support Bangladesh to assert its democratic commitments and work to strengthen its institutions and processes.

There was great concern that significant pre-election violence and voter intimidation would ultimately disrupt polling and prevent free and fair elections. To meet the challenges of Bangladesh's third national election and ensure the best enabling environment for open, transparent, and peaceful elections that would contribute to Bangladesh's democratic evolution, The Asia Foundation worked with the international donor community and civil society to develop a comprehensive election program. The three overall objectives were to: 1) to deter violence; 2) to increase public confidence in the electoral process and election monitoring organizations; and 3) to expand voter awareness to focus on each voter's responsibility to ensure a free, fair, peaceful, and fully participatory election.

A strong democracy is founded on knowledgeable and engaged citizens, and thus increasing the participation of civil society in the democratic process was the primary focus of the Foundation's election programs. To stimulate the engagement of ordinary citizens, TAF supported programs that encouraged participation and broad ownership of the process. To improve governance and strengthen democratic culture, TAF supported civil society efforts to enhance the accountability of parties and candidates, and inculcate democratic values and norms of behavior. Finally, TAF supported programs designed to decrease societal constraints on the participation of women in politics, and to increase the representation of women in government.

Specifically The Asia Foundation focused on the following democratic principles as it developed, funded, and implemented a comprehensive elections program. These were:

- A strong democracy must have citizens who are fully aware of their rights as well as their responsibilities as voters.
- Targeted communication campaigns can rally citizens to take action and make changes that strengthen the democratic process.
- Women's political participation as voters and as candidates is critical to the growth and expansion of democracy.
- Parties and candidates need to conduct issue-based campaigning which invites performance-based assessments of public service.



- The media as well as political candidates need to focus on problems and solutions using in-depth analysis and reporting rather than relying on politically based information gathering, reporting, and decision making.
- Environmental monitoring and civil society groups can and should act as watchdogs for the broader society.
- The overall democratic electoral process in Bangladesh as well as its underlying commitment to democracy needs to be affirmed and encouraged by the international community.
- Bangladesh needs to ensure broad and inclusive citizen ownership of the elections in which voters themselves preserve and protect Bangladesh's right to hold free and fair elections.
- The Election Commission must be completely independent to serve people's constitutionally guaranteed right to free and fair elections.

### **The Asia Foundation's Role**

The Foundation drew on its long-standing relationship with civil society in Bangladesh to foster coordination and cooperation within the NGO community and to strengthen the capacity of civil society to address concerns about the credibility and safety of the election process. TAF provided technical assistance to implementing partners in proposal development, project design, implementation, coordination, and financial management. With its partners, The Asia Foundation established and implemented processes and procedures that made voter education, training, and election monitoring more cost-effective with greater accountability than in the past. This comprehensive election monitoring strategy provided diverse, inclusive, national coverage of the elections. Election reporting was uniform and there was a coordinated data aggregation and reporting system for the entire country for the first time ever. This model enabled civil society to identify more partners and increase ownership of the process while at the same time decreasing the per monitor costs. Overall, 2001 election programming encouraged organizations to draw on their own resources with the goal of greater self-sufficiency.

The Foundation also continued to serve as an information resource for the international and local stakeholders as the election and campaign period unfolded. Periodic discussions, coordination meetings, information updates, and exchanges with the donor community ensured that key activities were adequately funded, cost effective, and were not duplicated. As in the two previous national as well as local elections, The Asia Foundation successfully managed resources and facilitated communication between civil society groups, government officials, the media, and the donor consortium.

Before the 2001 elections, the Bangladesh NGO community had never attempted such a large and complex elections monitoring project. Never had so much funding been available for projects with



so little time for preparation and implementation. Nearly \$1,000,000 was dispersed in little over a week to some 29 TAF partners. Consequently, these NGOs faced enormous organizational and management challenges. Because The Asia Foundation had managed resources from the donor consortium in earlier elections and had already been providing technical assistance to local organizations to strengthen their capacity to develop and implement programs and to increase financial accountability, TAF was in a unique position to help meet these challenges. Foundation staff met frequently with grantees and potential grantees to help draft project plans and develop appropriate organizational and financial structures which allowed NGOs to spring into action when the funding finally arrived.

Foundation management assistance was not limited to Dhaka-based NGOs. In the four months prior to the election, Foundation election staff visited every district in Bangladesh. During these trips, conducted primarily for project monitoring, TAF staff provided important election information and organizational assistance to Foundation grantees, and to other NGOs involved in election activities.

To support the three broad election goals of deterring violence, increasing public confidence in election monitoring, and encouraging voters to take responsibility for free and fair elections, The Asia Foundation and its partners focused election activities in three critical areas -- voter information and awareness, training and capacity building, and election monitoring strategies.



## BACKGROUND

Bangladesh utilizes a Westminster style Parliament consisting of 300 members elected from single-member territorial constituencies. Candidates are allowed to run from up to five constituencies. Until 2000, there were 30 seats reserved exclusively for women members, appointed by the ruling party. When this provision lapsed, it was not replaced or amended. Therefore, currently there is no provision to ensure women parliamentary members.

Parliament has a tenure of five years unless dissolved sooner. The general election of Members of Parliament (MPs) is held within 90 days after Parliament is dissolved. The election is administered under a Non-Party Caretaker Government comprised of a Chief Adviser and cabinet members appointed by the previous elected government. A separate Election Commission oversees preparation of the electoral rolls and all other logistical matters pertaining to the election itself.

Citizens of Bangladesh who are not less than 18 years old and of sound mind are allowed to vote in the constituency in which they are resident. Citizens are considered registered to vote if their names appear on the official electoral roll for their constituency. Attempts in previous years to provide voter identification cards proved to be too unwieldy to accomplish and have been abandoned.

For a general election, there are approximately 30,000 polling stations for 300 constituencies in 64 districts throughout the country. Each constituency has a Returning Officer, which is ordinarily the Deputy Commissioner from the district level. An Upazila Nirbahi Officer, at the sub-district or upazila level, is usually appointed as the Assistant Returning Officer for a constituency.

Each polling station is supervised by the Presiding Officer, who is assisted by several Assistant Presiding Officers. Each polling station ordinarily has more than one polling booth, or room with a ballot box. Men and women vote in separate polling booths. One by one, citizens come forward to vote. Their names are checked off the official electoral roll, and then they are given a paper ballot. Each ballot has the candidates' names and parties written on it, along with the symbol for their party, since many Bangladeshis are illiterate. Citizens enter an area separated by a screen, where they mark their ballots in secret and bring them to the ballot box. Once they have cast their votes, their thumbs are marked with indelible ink by an official as proof that they have voted and may not vote again.

Each party is allowed to send one polling agent to each polling booth. These agents sit in a separate section and ordinarily mark off voters' names on their own constituency lists. They may challenge any prospective voter they believe may have already voted or who may be attempting to impersonate another voter, if they undertake to prove the charge in court. Proven violators are subject to jail terms. Parties are required to stop their campaigning the day prior to the election, and no party campaign materials are allowed on the premises of the polling station on election day.



If irregularities or problems arise, the Presiding Officer is authorized to hear complaints and take certain corrective actions. For example, if a voter arrives and finds that someone else has already voted under his or her name, he or she may apply to the Presiding Officer to cast a tendered ballot. Tendered ballots are set aside and not counted, but they are evidence of possible irregularities.

After the polls close at 4:00 PM, the Presiding Officer supervises the counting of all ballot boxes in a common room in the presence of polling agents and accredited observers. Ballots are separated by officials according to the party marked, divided into stacks of 100 for ease in counting, and the final results are tallied and announced immediately. Official result sheets are then filled in and taken personally by the Presiding Officer to the Assistant Returning Officer for the constituency, and then passed along to the Returning Officer at the district level.

The general election in 2001 was held on October 1.



## VOTER INFORMATION AND AWARENESS

The Voter Information and Awareness activities funded by TAF and implemented by its partners focused on three key precepts. First of all these activities sought to create and expand awareness among the electorate of their rights and responsibilities as voters. For example, the popular *pot gaan* shows performed by Rupantar actors did an excellent job of raising general voter awareness in southwestern Bangladesh. Secondly, these information and awareness programs used targeted communication campaigns to successfully encourage voter and citizen behavior modification and citizen action. The slogan contest and posters that were developed by Democracywatch and BROTEE sent a clear message urging voters to choose the best candidates independently and rationally, to oppose violence in the elections, and to value women as an important part of the electorate. Finally, these targeted campaigns rallied citizen effort and action. The campaign to verify the voter list empowered citizens themselves to correct the roll and to initiate a process of rectification as they encountered errors.

Through consultations held at The Asia Foundation, several voter awareness organizations identified three priorities for the 2001 elections. These were addressing the potential for violence against and intimidation of voters, ensuring free and full participation of women in the elections, and encouraging voters to cast their ballots independently and thoughtfully. The great concern that significant pre-election violence and voter intimidation would disrupt polling made it imperative that these issues be addressed in a timely manner. There was further concern regarding the possibility that violence and political instability would exacerbate long-standing cultural factors already mitigating against the participation of women and minority voters, resulting in a situation more detrimental than usual to the likelihood of their turning out in significant numbers. TAF and its affiliated voter awareness organizations were also interested in addressing the issue of party intimidation and corruption by focusing on party performance instead.

The organizations agreed that prior voter education investments had been successful in promoting a general understanding of the voting process. For the 2001 election, the participants would focus an intensive information campaign on the three critical areas outlined above. They agreed that this could be accomplished through large-scale saturation of the messages through leaflets, posters, other print media, radio and television spots, and *pot gaan* theater. Such communication campaigns have demonstrated in the past an ability to modify behavior and shape attitudes in Bangladesh.

### Slogan Contest

In an effort to ensure the greatest interest and involvement of members of the public in the upcoming elections, it was decided to hold a contest on "Popular Slogans for Free and Fair Elections." All Bangladeshi citizens were invited to submit slogan ideas in the three issue areas identified by civil society as critical for voters to understand. With United States Agency for



International Development (USAID) funding support, Democracywatch was identified as a TAF partner well-suited for conducting the contest.

## Objectives

- To create awareness among the electorate of their rights and responsibilities as voters.
- To encourage voters to educate themselves in order to be able to choose candidates independently and rationally.
- To promote public opinion against election violence and misconduct and in favor of the free and full participation of women and the disabled.

## Activities

As part of its Election 2001 efforts, Democracywatch developed a highly successful contest soliciting "Popular Slogans for Free and Fair Elections." While this may seem like a simple and rather obvious idea, it had unique impact in Bangladesh, a country born when their love for their native tongue united millions of Bengalis under the demand *Rastra bhasha Bangla chai*, "We demand Bangla as our state language." Rhythmic, easily chanted slogans were important to a population still largely illiterate, and they continue to be a unifying force after independence.

Most slogans used in past elections, however, were party-centric and the products of political professionals. In 2001, the time was ripe to utilize this approach to emphasize non-partisan messages, namely the right of voters to make informed, individual choices, free from violence and intimidation, and for women to be able to express their will equally through the electoral process. The idea of a popular contest to develop and identify the best slogans would further spread the impact of these messages.

**Contest:** Democracywatch published advertisements in two daily and two weekly national newspapers, soliciting slogans in three categories:

- Encouraging the right and responsibility of voters to cast their votes independently and thoughtfully.
- Discouraging violence and voter intimidation.
- Encouraging the full-fledged and spontaneous participation of women voters.

The contest was open to all Bangladeshi nationals. Each contestant was entitled to submit up to three slogans, written in Bangla, in each category. The winner in each category had to agree to make his/her slogan freely available to all organizations conducting voter education. The three first place winners each received Tk 5,000.



A total of 3,316 contestants from the Bangladesh divisions of Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal, and Sylhet, as well as those living overseas in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Malaysia submitted over 16,500 slogans, more than 5,000 in each of the three categories. A panel of five professionals (an advertising executive, a journalist, a social researcher, a representative of Democracywatch, and a representative of TAF) selected five slogans from each category as finalists.

**Slogan Selection and Field Tests:** The fifteen selected slogans were field tested in ten constituencies (six rural, three urban, and one semi-urban) to determine which conveyed the desired message most clearly. The field testing consisted of 175 face-to-face interviews based on a prepared, structured questionnaire and 20 focus group discussions with representatives of professional fields (teachers, lawyers, doctors, businessmen) and laborers (rickshaw pullers, vendors, day laborers). A special effort was made to adequately represent young people. The ratio of male to female participants in both the interviews and focus groups was about 60:40. The panel of judges made the final selection of three winning slogans using the field test results.

**Winning Slogans:** The winners were recognized at a ceremony held at the British Council Auditorium on May 6, 2001, which was attended by around 200 people, including nine of the 15 finalists. The winning slogans were:

- *Desher shebai jaake pabo amaar vote taake debo*, "I will vote for him/her who will best serve my country."
- *Deshe akhon projojon shantrashmukto nirbachan*, "Our country needs violence free elections."
- *Naree kimba purush noi voter amaar porichoy*, "Our identity is not as women or men but as voters."

## Impact and Analysis

A slogan contest remains a uniquely appropriate and effective tool given the prevailing socio-political culture in Bangladesh, the continuing low literacy rate, and the populace's shared love of their language and literature. The contest also served to enhance a sense of participatory democracy for a great many voters, as it is estimated that between 82,500 and 66,000 individuals worked together to enter 16,500 slogans, since each entry represented the collaborative effort of family and friends of the official entrant.

The contest was held at a time when the entire nation was eagerly anticipating a free and fair election under a neutral caretaker government. While in terms of voter turnout Bangladesh is in a much stronger position than many mature democratic nations, the chance of those voters making truly informed choices is slim. This is true for a variety of reasons, including the lack of information regarding candidates' backgrounds and platforms and the paucity of any issue-based campaigning; the generally low level of education and lack of knowledge about candidates' obligations and qualifications to carry them out; and the tendency of political parties, candidates, and their



supporters, and, in some cases, local administrations, to adopt unfair means of influencing voters. To the extent that the slogans represented the true voice of the people, they enabled the electorate to become more thoughtful and informed about their rights and more cautious about the choices they made.



Award Ceremony for slogan contest



Slogan contest winners



Slogan contest winners



## Voter Awareness Posters

The Slogan Contest identified three winning slogans that addressed the three targeted issues of deterring violence, encouraging women to vote, and encouraging citizens to vote independently and thoughtfully. TAF support for the design of posters illustrating these messages aimed to

- Increase the impact of the messages by saturating the environment with the same three core messages illustrated by the same three posters.
- Use a visual medium appropriate to a highly illiterate population.
- Use a network of coordinating NGOs (i.e., the Election Monitoring Working Group, or EMWG) to ensure the rapid, widespread, and inexpensive dissemination of the posters.

Because the simple, clear pictures and symbols typically employed on a poster can effectively communicate even quite complex ideas to a still largely illiterate population, the Foundation worked with Democracywatch and BROTEE to design, print, and distribute voter awareness posters in all 300 constituencies of Bangladesh with USAID funding support. The posters carried the three winning slogans from the contest.

Democracywatch chose to develop the first two posters which stressed independent thinking, the importance of performance based campaigning versus party intimidation and buy-offs, and the need for violence free elections. BROTEE, which is particularly concerned with women's issues, undertook the task of developing and distributing a poster to illustrate the winning slogan that directly addressed women's participation in the 2001 election.

BROTEE has long been concerned with the limited involvement of women and the disabled in past elections in Bangladesh. However, during the last three elections under a caretaker government, and as a result of previous voter awareness programs, women's participation has increased. According to BROTEE, "The caretaker government creates a comparatively secure environment where women feel more confident in coming out to vote." Despite this increase, there are still "hard line areas where women have not voted for decades." According to BROTEE, women's participation is considerably lower in nine areas of the country where they are restricted by religious *fatwa* (an edict from a religious authority), *purda* (confinement to the home), or general fear and insecurity. These areas include single villages in Madaripur, Patuakhali, and Noakhali, among others. Because of the overall increase in women's participation in other parts of the country, BROTEE believed that pre-election motivational materials such as posters could be used to good effect to encourage and bolster the rising political consciousness of women everywhere, and in particular in some of these more recalcitrant areas.

### Objectives

- To develop posters for three winning slogans from the Popular Slogans for a Free and Fair Election contest.
- To print 555,000 copies of an 18"x23" four color poster illustrating the slogan which addressed the issue of the right and responsibility of voters to cast their votes independently and thoughtfully, "I will vote for him/her who will best serve my country."



- To print 750,000 copies of an 18"x23" bi-color poster illustrating the slogan which addressed the issue of violence and intimidation, "Our country needs violence free elections."
- To print 900,000 copies of an 18"x23" bi-color poster illustrating the slogan, "Our identity is not as women or men but as voters."
- To distribute the posters to the district and upazila levels so that the messages would be communicated to voters at all levels and in all communities.

## Activities

**Poster Design and Printing:** Cartoons attract people of all ages and are particularly effective in a population largely illiterate or only marginally literate. From a variety of designs submitted by prominent Bangladeshi artists and cartoonists, Democracywatch selected the design of Maksudur Rahman, famous for his cover designs, as most appropriate for the slogan regarding the rights and responsibilities of voters. For the second slogan, regarding violence and intimidation, a design submitted by a renowned cartoonist, Shishir Bhattacharyya, was chosen. For the third poster which stated "Our identity is not as women or men but as voters," BROTEE's in-house designer and graphic artist prepared three draft designs which were field tested at six sites before the final design was chosen. BTT Communications was selected to finalize this design and produce the BROTEE poster. Democracywatch was able to have 550,000 posters of the first slogan printed in four colors and 750,000 posters with the second slogan printed. BROTEE had 900,000 posters printed with the last slogan.

**Distribution:** Democracywatch distributed their posters equally in the 300 constituencies. The distribution was facilitated by members of the Elections Monitoring Working Group (EMWG) and other social activists, which enabled the posters to be hung at the upazila and union levels throughout the country. The distribution effort was monitored through a combination of direct visits to 27 districts, concurrent with press conferences held in 19 districts, news of which reached newspapers in all 64 of the country's districts. In addition, all distributors were contractually obliged to provide photographs of their posting activities. In all, about 1,000 people were involved, directly or indirectly, in the poster distribution activities. Their enthusiasm and dedication to the job was matched by the curiosity and interest of the villagers who observed them on the job and took the messages of the posters they placed to heart. BROTEE's staff distributed 795,000 of its posters in 56 districts the third week of September, right before the elections. With assistance from seven other members of the Election Monitoring Working Group as well as five local organizations outside the EMWG, BROTEE also distributed another 60,000 of the other posters in the countryside.

**Distribution during Re-election:** BROTEE was able to distribute another 45,000 posters for the re-elections held in eight districts — Brahmanbaria, Comilla, Maulovibazar, Shariatpur, Lakhshampur, Mymensingh, Kishorganj, and Bagerhat.



## Impact and Analysis

The posters generated considerable interest and were particularly appealing to people in small villages and rural areas. There was some concern regarding the projected life span of the posters, given the fact that as election day neared more and more political posters were competing for the available space. The actual hanging of the posters was accomplished without much difficulty, although the cost of the labor involved proved to be higher than expected. Because of the number of political posters being hung, labor costs became quite competitive. Democracywatch attempted to alleviate this problem by using voluntary labor where possible. In addition, posters were sent by courier to organizations responsible for the larger areas, thus reducing carrying costs and enabling them to use some of the savings to hire labor. However, in some cases partner organizations found themselves out of pocket to get the job done.

It also proved to be difficult to hang posters in some villages, where there tend to be few large walls or other surfaces to accommodate them. Some villagers allowed posters to be hung on the walls of their homes; others were hung on the walls of shops, schools, and government buildings, and on large trees. Given the lack of competing diversions in most of the villages, the posters that did find a place to hang had a considerably larger impact than the more numerous posters hung in urban areas.

BROTEE's mobile monitors were asked to check the status of the posters on election day. The feedback was very encouraging as many polling centers were adorned with the posters. BROTEE district and constituency coordinators also reported lots of enthusiasm and favorable comment on the posters in the week right before the elections. The attractive blue, black, and white posters depicting many kinds of women voting alongside men was an effective tool in encouraging women who traditionally have not participated in the political process to vote in the October elections.



Democracywatch workers distribute prize-winning posters



BROTEE staff putting up posters



Democracywatch voter awareness posters



## Voter Verification Guides, Leaflets, and Posters

Prior to the 2001 elections, the opposition and ruling party alleged that the voter list was seriously inaccurate. Both sides contended that the list, based on a nationwide voter registration drive held in May and June 2000, contained many fictitious voters and failed to include other bonafide eligible voters. Whether errors in the registration process reflected deliberate political distortions or simple mistakes in procedure, there was a need to address the defects in the list while simultaneously increasing voter confidence in the election process. The Asia Foundation with funding support from the Public Affairs Section of the Embassy of the United States of America supported the work of the Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA) to empower voters themselves to improve the accuracy of the list.

The benefits of this approach were to redirect focus away from meaningless speculation about the size or quantity of error and to focus on the procedural means for citizens to correct the problems. This also served to demonstrate how a more transparent and sustainable national administrative system for parties and individual voters can be maintained and carried out in coordination with the Election Commission. While there will always be errors in any census or voter registration list, the challenge is to provide a workable system that all parties and voters can access for correcting those deficiencies they have identified. If people had believed the voter list was unfair and inaccurate, lack of confidence on the part of the voters and the political parties, especially the opposition, could have seriously affected the entire election process and ultimately encouraged the loser to discredit the results of the election based on a presumed biased or defective voter list.

The Asia Foundation worked with FEMA to address some of these concerns through the development and distribution of a guide for voters based on formal procedures of the Election Commission as well as an accompanying leaflet and poster. The guide included instructions on how to seek redress if they found that their names had been omitted and contained the sample forms needed to initiate the process. It also contained instructions for voters who recognized names of persons who should not be listed on the voter roll in their community and how to file an informal protest with the Election Commission. Finally, the material provided voters with contact information for FEMA, the Election Commission, and other watchdog organizations that provide information and assistance to voters.

### Objectives

- To verify the accuracy of the voter list by empowering voters themselves to check the voter roll and to initiate a process of rectification if they encounter any errors.
- To develop and print 210,000 copies of a guide that instructed voters on how to check their information on the voter list, make corrections, apply for inclusion if they had been omitted, and file a complaint if the voter saw names of false or dead voters on the list.
- To develop and print 420,000 copies of a leaflet that informed voters of the ongoing campaign to correct the voter list and provided relevant contact information to voters wishing to participate in this process.



- To distribute the guide and leaflet to all FEMA members; NGOs involved in election activities, governance programs, alternative dispute resolution, *shalish* (local arbitration) courts and other community based projects; local offices of micro-credit organizations such as Grameen Bank, BRAC, and ASA; and union parishad (local elected councils) Chairmen and women members.
- To organize meetings with the relevant individuals affiliated with the organizations listed above and review the contents of the guide, leaflet, and poster.
- To develop, print, and distribute 250,000 copies of a poster throughout the country that announced the ongoing voter list verification project and provided contact information to voters wishing to check their information on the voter list.

## Activities

FEMA carried out the voter list verification project from May 15 through September 30, 2001.

**Materials Production:** FEMA developed and printed 210,000 voter list verification guides, 420,000 informational leaflets, and 250,000 posters based on formal Election Commission regulations.

**Spot Campaigns:** FEMA organized 12 colorful and attractive public spot-campaigns in the metropolitan area of Dhaka with assistance from seven other NGOs (Rotaract, Women's Voluntary Association, Service Civil International, Gemasharta Batabagan Sangstha, the Journalist Association for Human Rights, the Association for Strengthening Grass-roots Peoples, and Vatree Shangha). Over several days these organizations distributed 11,500 guides, 11,500 leaflets, and 6,000 posters in Mohammadpur, Dhanmondi, Shaympur, Mirpur, Ramna, Tejgaon, and Farmgate. In addition, 2,500 posters were put up in 20 highly visible areas of Dhaka City, including NGO offices, markets, and bus depots, to highlight the voter list campaign.

**Press Conferences and Campaign Meetings:** FEMA opened the voter verification list campaign on May 15, 2001 at a press conference in the VIP lounge of the Press Club. The launching of the drive was widely covered by the national press as well as local television. FEMA then organized a press conference and two campaign meetings in two prominent upazilas in each of 50 districts. Here FEMA representatives presented the voter verification guides, discussed their importance, and explained how to use the guide. People from all segments of society attended these press conferences and meetings and were encouraged to participate in the campaign. During these district chapter meetings FEMA distributed a total of 178,200 guides, 215,000 posters, and 393,500 leaflets. In addition, FEMA held 27 press conferences in various districts to explain and promote the overall voter verification campaign.

**Distribution:** FEMA targeted 54 partner organizations to distribute the guides, posters, and leaflets. FEMA chose NGOs that were involved in election activities, governance programs, alternative dispute resolution, and other community based projects. These partner organizations distributed 6,300 guides, 11,700 posters, and 3,500 leaflets. Material also went to local offices of



micro-credit organizations such as Grameen Bank and integrated development organizations like BRAC. In addition, the material was packaged for union parishad Chairmen and women members. FEMA itself distributed another 1,500 guides, 2,000 posters, and 2,500 leaflets through several outside partner organizations.

## Impact and Analysis

By August 18, 2001 FEMA had distributed a total of 209,000 guides, 249,000 posters, and 419,000 leaflets throughout 63 districts, successfully reaching out to large numbers of voters across the country. The large, colorful red poster was eye-catching with a clear, easily understood message. Like the poster, the bright purple and yellow leaflets and guides were attractive, easily understood, and encouraged voters to check their registration information. Posters were widely distributed and posted in visible public areas such as markets, schools, and community centers. Newspaper articles on the "Let's Get the Voter List Right!" awareness campaign and accounts of press conferences held throughout the country appeared in all the major English and Bangla-language newspapers from May through August.

Press conferences were held in all districts except the Chittagong Hill areas. In these districts FEMA chapters distributed guides, leaflets, and posters but could not organize local press conferences. Twenty-three district chapters held "Let's Get the Voter List Right!" campaign meetings in each of two upazilas, and 29 district chapters held one campaign meeting each. Twelve districts, including the Chittagong Hill areas, were not able to hold campaign meetings due to high local political tensions.

The spot campaigns in Dhaka were very successful in encouraging citizens to check the voter list. In one drive more than 40 volunteers from the Journalist Association for Human Rights in association with Service Civil International distributed guides and leaflets and then displayed posters throughout Farmgate. The group began their distribution in front of Ananda Cinema and walked throughout the area raising voter awareness.

FEMA sources indicate that as a result of the voter list verification campaign many applications were filed with the election authorities for inclusion of names and a large number of complaints were received about fake voters. In two cases the Election Commission formed investigation teams to pursue voter complaints. Because of FEMA advocacy the EC investigated complaints of fake voters in Bhola and Uttara and, as a result of the investigation, fake voters were taken off the list. FEMA regarded citizen response to the campaign as very positive and the overall impact of the campaign as significant for updating and correcting the voter list. The campaign reached across the entire country with responses in every constituency.

At the request and insistence of FEMA, the Chief Election Commissioner made the voters' list available at the union level, though FEMA itself was never able to obtain a copy for distribution purposes. Voter lists were posted in all union parishad offices and in some cases at the ward level. In some areas union lists contained as many as 10,000 names, making it difficult to check voter information. Nonetheless, for the first time all voters had an opportunity to check their name if



they chose to do so. During July and August FEMA offices throughout the country were very active in aiding citizens to verify their registration information.

Though a longer voter verification campaign would have allowed more voters to check their names, registration offices at the district level received many requests to check or change voter names during the three-month campaign period. In their final report FEMA indicated that though the verification campaign was short, it was effective. Newspaper accounts show that citizens were filing applications to add their names to the voter list in large numbers throughout July and August 2001. On July 9, The Financial Express reported a large increase in the number of new voters, causing both major parties to complain but also clearly showing that the campaign was reaching large numbers of citizens who could then verify or add their names to the voter list. FEMA and other election observers viewed the voter list project as satisfactory and a significant improvement over previous election years. An important check remained for election day when domestic observers along with diverse civil society groups had the opportunity to ensure that false votes were not cast.

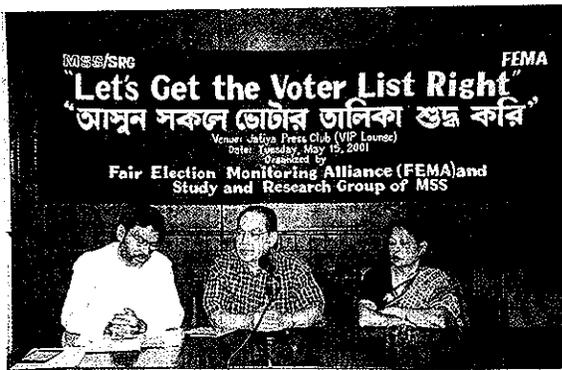
This project represented a very important initiative during the short period available preceding the election. It demonstrated that it is possible to carry out a mass communications campaign to address even highly sensitive politicized issues such as the perceived errors in the voter list. Posters and leaflets, together with voter guides, offered citizens ways to protect their own right to vote and to themselves guard against false voters. There still exist problems with the way the list is maintained and how readily available it is to the public. However, this project demonstrated that with very modest resources civil society can help strengthen the democratic process address a sensitive issue from a win-win approach and restore citizen confidence on this subject.



Voter list verification poster & leaflets



FEMA staff explain verification and correction procedure



Launch of voter list verification campaign



FEMA workers draw attention to voter list campaign



## Community Awareness Theater

To promote informed citizen participation in the electoral process, TAF with USAID funding support, selected Rupantar, a long time TAF partner, to provide voter awareness programs through theater. The popular pot gaan drama format was chosen to provide an intensive information campaign in four districts of rural Bangladesh -- Khulna, Bagerhat, Satkhira, and Norail. Rupantar agreed to focus on the pre-election and election period in 17 constituencies of these southwestern districts.

Using a method called alternative living theater, Rupantar has adapted issues of democracy and governance to a traditional form of theater or pot gaan. This method involves the participation of the actors in developing the script, draws on local experiences, and demonstrates practical ways to overcome obstacles. Local folk music is used for the performance and the plays can be staged without the use of lights, props, and expensive stage construction. These performances can be played for large audiences and will accommodate about 1,000 people per performance.

Rupantar has had a great deal of success with the pot gaan shows, especially in rural areas with low levels of literacy. They have used this popular form of drama to successfully promote a greater understanding of the voting process as well as a general voter awareness initiative.

### Objectives

- To educate voters on their rights and responsibilities, the role and responsibility of candidates, local election authorities, and the Election Commission through 300 live *pot gaan* theater performances in 17 parliamentary constituencies in southwest Bangladesh.
- To publish the following voter awareness materials: 50,000 *punthi kabitas* (booklet using a traditional lyrical poetry style); 25,000 booklets in Bengali; and 20,000 posters.
- To produce the voter awareness materials through community level workshops.
- To distribute these materials during live *pot gaan* performances and through other local NGO organizations.

### Activities

**Pot Gaan Shows:** Four theater teams of 12 members each staged 342 traditional *pot gaan* shows in 17 constituencies of southwest Bangladesh. The show involved a troupe of singers with instruments that used catchy tunes with a repeated chorus to focus on particular voter education issues. With music and song the performers pointed to a picture scroll that reinforced the meaning of the song. Within the theater group itself Rupantar produced songs and pot scroll paintings for



two different productions presenting several different messages against violence and intimidation, encouraging women to participate in the political process, and repeating the importance of voting thoughtfully and independently.

**Informal Community Workshops:** Rupantar developed two theater productions for the October elections and then field tested the shows for average citizens on the street as well as for several groups of teachers and civil servants in Khulna and in districts outside the targeted areas. Comments and suggestions were solicited in these informal workshops and were then incorporated into the productions which were tested yet a second time. Suggestions concerning lighting and staging as well as content were incorporated. Even as the *pot gaan* shows were performed, the actors and crew continued to ask for audience feedback, and people enthusiastically provided their input for the next performances.

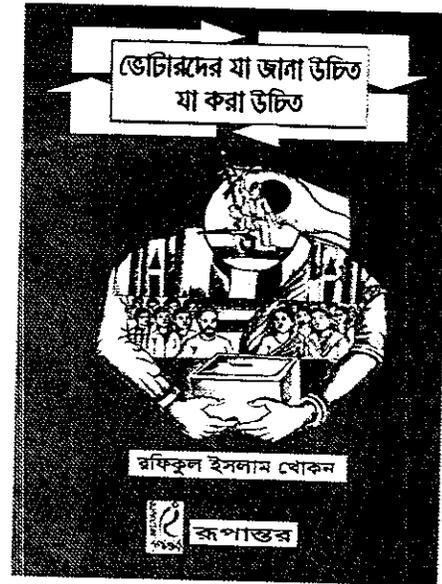
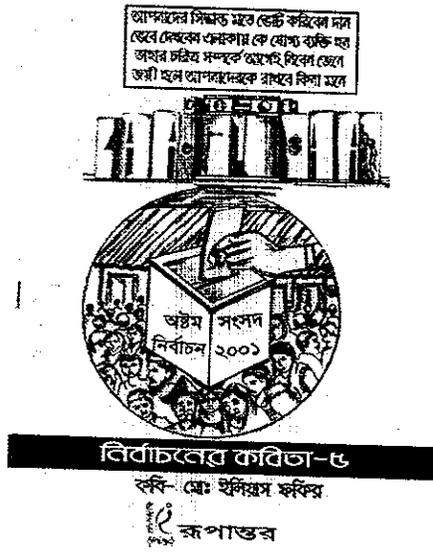
**Publications:** Rupantar produced 60,000 *punthi kabitas*, 30,000 booklets, and 10,000 posters that were distributed or posted during *pot gaan* shows. This material was also sent to other NGOs.

## Impact and Analysis

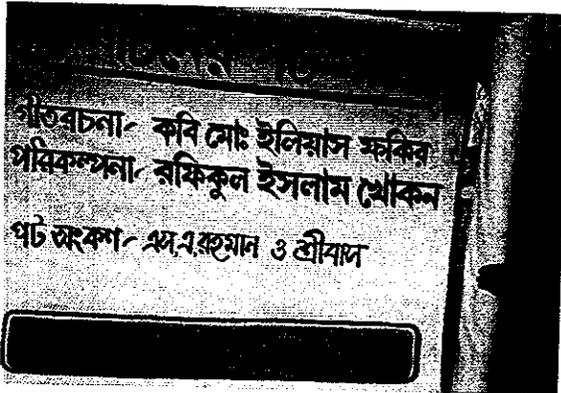
The bright and lively *pot gaan* shows drew large crowds and were very well received. People appreciated the neutral, non-partisan nature of the messages presented in the performances. Shows were well attended with as many as 1,000 people in each audience. Rupantar estimates that almost 340,000 people saw these live theater productions including about 88,000 women. The female audience was approximately 26% of the total, smaller than anticipated. Perhaps fewer women attended because many of the shows were in busy markets, places women are not as free to attend.

During each of the *pot gaan* performances, members of Rupantar handed out booklets and *punthi kabita* raising voter awareness and providing voter education material. Rupantar teams distributed 29,350 booklets and 59,020 *punthi kabita* and put up 9,560 posters during shows. In addition Rupantar also gave 650 booklets, 980 *punthi kabita*, and 440 posters to other NGOs for distribution.

An informal survey of 30 polling centers in the districts where *pot gaan* was presented showed that on election day more than 85% of registered voters participated and the number of women voters was very high also.



Rupantar voter awareness poster and leaflets



Scenic designs from Rupantar theater productions



## TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Like Voter Information and Awareness programming, the second set of election activities, Training and Capacity Building Strategies, focused on three democratic principles that are key for ensuring the growth of a young democracy. First, TAF funded activities that increase women's political participation. The women's candidate training program showed that women political candidates could be effectively trained and equipped to campaign confidently. Secondly, TAF sought to encourage issue-based campaigning which promotes performance-based assessments of public service and offers a model for opposition parties to reframe issues and establish national priorities through dialogue. The pilot project, in which a series of dialogues between the candidates of major parties and garment workers were organized, offered just such a model for issue-based campaigning. Finally, TAF sponsored training that encouraged the development of in-depth, analytical thinking and reporting rather than politically based information gathering, reporting, and decision making. The Gatekeeper Training targeted key personnel in the media and offered them the opportunity to improve their ability to provide accurate news coverage and political analysis as well as critically shape the broader focus and priorities of their papers, stories, and staff.

### Women Candidate Training

To increase the confidence and capacity of women candidates in Bangladesh, The Asia Foundation with funding from the Public Affairs Section of the US Embassy supported the Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR) to develop a training program on skills they would need to run an effective campaign. In general, this program was designed to include techniques on campaigning, fundraising, developing an issue-based platform, party dynamics and relationships, and serving constituents and community stakeholders. The training was open to all potential women candidates regardless of their political affiliation and drew on the experience of earlier TAF-funded training programs for women candidates in Bangladesh, especially those for women union parishad candidates in the 1997 elections.<sup>1</sup> The training session ended with a press conference to provide the women with more visibility in the media.

Historically, women in Bangladesh have faced difficulties participating as equals in the political process. The lapse of the constitutional provision for 30 reserved seats for women in Parliament presented women candidates in the 2001 election with both a challenge and an opportunity. To help them meet the challenge and make the most of the opportunity, BSEHR advocated with all the major political parties to motivate them to actively support their female members, both as candidates and as voters. In addition, BSEHR conducted an eight-day training program for party affiliated and independent women on the skills needed to run an effective political campaign.

<sup>1</sup>For more details about these programs, see The Asia Foundation, *Elections: Best Practices under the Democracy Partnership*, Dhaka, 2002, and *Voices of Women: A New Era of Political Leadership in Bangladesh*, Dhaka, 2002.



The training, which ran from August 16 through August 23, 2001, focused on recruiting, hiring, and managing volunteers and staff; fundraising and managing budgets; identifying local and national issues of concern to constituents and developing platforms based on those issues; selecting techniques for campaigning; dealing with violence, security concerns, and unfair campaign practices; and understanding lawmaking procedures once elected. The participants included representatives from the major political parties as well as independents and representatives of smaller parties and NGOs. While none of the participants received nominations from their parties for office this year, they represent possible future candidates and a more diversified and better-prepared future leadership.

Other elements of this project included an advocacy campaign to increase women's political participation and representation, a series of television programs on "Women and the Elections 2001," and a curriculum guide and instruction booklet based on the Women's Candidate Training to serve as a tool to inspire and guide future women candidates (see below).

## Objectives

- To increase the number of women candidates in the parliamentary elections through motivational activities aimed at encouraging them to run for office and educational activities that provide potential candidates with the information and knowledge they need to participate effectively in the election process.
- To increase the percentage of women candidates who win their constituencies by providing the strongest party-affiliated and independent women candidates with training in effective campaign techniques.
- To increase the capacity of elected women representatives to provide effective, accountable, and gender sensitive governance with on-going support, targeted capacity-building training, and expanded networks and forums for women in government.

## Activities

### 1. Campaign Training for Women Candidates

BSEHR developed and conducted an eight-day, experiential campaign workshop for 18 women candidates, drawing upon the experience and technical assistance of several previous members of Parliament.

To identify appropriate candidates for the training, BSEHR first held discussions with representatives of four of the major political parties. While all of the parties expressed tacit support for the idea of women's political activity, all also expressed reluctance to nominate or actively support women candidates in 2001, given the rapid approach of the election and the perception of inexperience, inarticulateness, and lack of a power base among even the most politically active



women. However, they did promise to send BSEHR the names of women most likely to benefit from candidate training and with the greatest prospects of becoming candidates in the future. In addition, BSEHR made contacts with a variety of socially active, professional, and politically independent women. Eventually, the names of 50 potential trainees were gathered; from this list, 20 were invited to participate, representing five parties or alliances, as well as including independents. The training was purposely kept small to allow for in-depth discussions, practical skill-building exercises, and networking among the participants. Of the 20, 18 started the training and 16 completed the week.

All of these women had been politically active in the past, either personally or through family connections. The expense of running a campaign and the perceived potential for violence made it difficult to find women not previously politically active who were willing to come forward to contest, and to find women who would run as independent candidates. Furthermore, these participants were women who had the greatest chance of being nominated by their parties, if not for the current election, then in future contests. The participants included seven members of the Four-Party Alliance led by the BNP, two members of the Awami League, one member each of Jagpa, Jatiya, and the 11 Party Alliance, and seven independents. No party was willing to support any of the participants for general seats. With direct election of women in the future a possibility, these women were identified as prime candidates for future nomination.

**Training:** During the first four days of the training participants identified issues and voter target groups and developed their campaign platforms, schedules, work plans, and budgets. Considerable time was also spent discussing a variety of topics, including the reasons motivating the women to become politically active, how to identify and recruit volunteers and staff, and how to combat discrimination, intimidation, manipulation, financial chicanery, and terrorism. On the fifth day, participants campaigned for the mock election held in Gazipur on the sixth day. The final two days were spent writing reports and summing up lessons learned from the mock campaign and election.

**Mock Campaign:** The mock campaign allowed the participants the opportunity to put the knowledge they had gained during the previous four days to practical use. Each "candidate" was assigned four workers to assist them; posters and leaflets had also been printed for each candidate and were distributed by the workers. The campaign was followed by 20 election observers who later reported on the effectiveness of each campaigner and made suggestions for improvements.

**Mock Election:** The mock election was designed to simulate an actual election as closely as possible. One presiding officer and two polling officers were assigned to each of the four election areas. Three or four candidates were assigned to each of the four election areas, and polling took place from 10 AM until 4 PM, with separate booths for men and women. The cooperation of the district administration, the police superintendent, and the local *pourashava* (municipal government) Chairman allowed village police stations and the office of the District Commissioner to be available to the candidates to lodge mock election related complaints. With the cooperation of local government authorities and the police, their trainers saw to it that the candidates were faced with a variety of mock threats of violence and intimidation, attempted vote buying and black market financing, and other obstacles to a fair and free election. Some false votes were cast to see how the candidates and their workers would handle the situation. The candidates used the



knowledge gained in the previous days' lessons to lodge formal complaints to the appropriate authorities to successfully combat all of these mock obstacles.

The populace played their roles to the full, "with great enthusiasm and fervor." Voter turnout was estimated at 90 percent. A perhaps unexpected outcome was the extent to which the "peripheral participants" – campaign workers, village voters, polling agents, even police and government officials – benefited and learned from the experience, suggesting that mock campaigns and elections are educational experiences that have significant possibilities for reaching even wider audiences. So intense was local interest in this first-ever mock election that neighboring villagers caused a slight altercation in one locale when they expressed their intention to cast votes as well, to the consternation of the locals who considered them ineligible. The candidates, presiding officer, and village elders were fortunately able to settle the dispute "without much acrimony."

**Training Results:** As a result of the training, mock campaign, and mock election, the participants gained experience in:

- Reviewing and confirming qualifications.
- Filling in required, official application forms.
- Identifying local and national issues.
- Identifying target voter groups in their constituencies.
- Developing focused, issue-based platforms.
- Developing campaign strategies, work plans, and budgets.
- Developing campaign materials (posters, leaflets, media spots).
- Participating in debates and discussions.
- Speech writing and public speaking.
- Combating, effectively and through legal channels, a variety of obstacles to free and fair elections.

Perhaps a less obvious, but no less valuable, outcome of the training was the realization on the part of the participants of the importance of their political activity in generating changes in their status and cultural roles. In a society of large, extended families where the expectation is that women will stay home to tend to a vast array of domestic needs (or work outside the home to provide additional income in addition to tending to those needs), the fact that only two women dropped out of the training because of the pressure of these competing demands is testimony to the awakened motivation and determination among those who stayed the course.

The report summarizing the topics, discussions, and exercises utilized during the training course is available and will provide a useful resource for subsequent training efforts.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Tanya Huq Shariar, rapporteur, *Training of Women Parliamentarians for the 8th National Parliamentary Elections*, Dhaka: Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR), 2001.



**Press Conference:** Journalists from several area papers covered the campaign during the day and a press conference was held following the election. BSEHR Secretary General Sigma Huda and several candidates discussed the objectives of the mock election and commented on their experiences. Journalists from the *Daily Janakantha*, the *Daily Mukta Khantho*, the *Daily Inquilab*, *Azker Kagoj*, the *Daily Prothom Alo*, and the *Independent* attended the press conference and submitted stories to their respective papers.

## 2. Booklet on Effective Campaigning for Women Candidates

In order to reach women who were not able to participate in the training program and to provide a resource for future candidates, BSEHR developed a brief instruction booklet based on the training sessions.<sup>3</sup> 2,000 copies of the booklet were printed in English and Bangla. The booklet was publicized on the "Women and Elections 2001" television program (see below), and has been further developed and prepared for wider circulation as well.<sup>4</sup> The handbook addresses the following topics:

- How to get on the ballot.
- Developing a campaign strategy.
- Identifying campaign issues and voter target groups.
- Developing a platform.
- Fundraising.
- Using media effectively.
- Recruiting and managing volunteers and staff.
- Dealing with election violence and cheating.

## 3. "Women and Elections 2001" TV Program

BSEHR, in cooperation with ATN Bangla and Channel 1, produced eight 55-minute television programs on "Women and the Elections 2001." The programs featured topical discussions between female candidates, discussions on women's political participation and gender issues, information on how women could compete in the election, and encouragement to women to vote and participate in the political process in other ways. The programs were aired in the evening on ATN Bangla and Channel 1 on August 26, 27, 28, and 29, 2001 and repeated the following mornings.

One of the programs, entitled *Nagorik Jiban O' Ain* (Law and Our Daily Life) featured the mock Parliamentary debate held during the Women's Candidate Training on the issue of politics in

<sup>3</sup>Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR), *Guidebook for Development of Skill for Women for Participation in the Parliamentary Election*, Dhaka, 2001.

<sup>4</sup>The Asia Foundation, *A Woman's Guidebook to Effective Campaigning in Parliamentary Elections*, Dhaka, 2002.



educational institutions. The *Kannakchapa* group, representing the government, proposed a bill banning all politics at educational institutions, which was opposed by the *JUI* group. A second program, *Sangshad-a-Nari* (Women in Parliament) featured participants of the candidate training discussing their past and present experiences in Parliament.

#### 4. Advocacy Campaign

To help ensure that all parties recognize the importance and legitimacy of women's political activity and support them as candidates, BSEHR conducted direct dialogues with key leaders of all the major parties. While all parties supported the idea of women's participation in party politics in theory, none were willing to actively support or nominate women candidates for the 2001 election. This initial negative reaction was particularly obvious among the BNP and Awami League leaders. Totally focused on winning the campaign before them, the parties were unwilling to expend time, energy, or funds on women candidates they perceived to be lacking in experience, qualifications, money, or political muscle.

Through on-going discussions, however, significant headway was achieved in setting the stage for the future participation of women as candidates, party workers, and voters, in particular regarding the pending issue of reserved seats for women in Parliament. The new government will be considering this issue, and through BSEHR's advocacy all parties have come down in favor of direct election to any seats so reserved. Previously, reserved seats were filled through party nominations, meaning the occupants were essentially puppets, without power or independent voices. The potential of as many as 64 such reserved seats (one per district, although the Awami League favors 60, with only one seat for the Chittagong Hill Tracts) opens up the promise of real representation for women in the new Parliament.

In addition, the Women's Candidate Training helped the participants recognize the real possibility of running independently, on a true people's platform focused on the needs of their constituents rather than the expediencies of party politics. According to Sigma Huda, Secretary General of BSEHR, even women for whom "party loyalty was of primary importance" expressed interest in contesting for reserved seats if they were to be filled by direct election.

#### Impact and Analysis

BSEHR's stated goals were to increase "the number of women who participate as candidates in parliamentary elections," "the percentage of women candidates who win their constituencies," and "the capacity of elected women representatives." Since political parties considered it too much of a risk to support women candidates, and the women themselves decided that a race as an independent at this time would be either unfeasible or would undermine a future bid for a reserved seat, BSEHR was unable to meet its program objectives. Nevertheless, the organization continued to pursue its objectives with its sight on the future. By developing and testing materials and methods to equip women to better understand and face campaign challenges, and by engaging



political parties regarding the issue of women's representation and political participation, BSEHR has contributed significantly to establishing the necessary momentum for real future change.

Granted that the trainee candidates' experiences were mock rather than real, the activities nevertheless engaged their interest, provided significant learning opportunities, and helped the women to understand the potential power they hold in spite of the impediments of societal bias, unequal access to resources, and lack of political influence. By developing platforms based on issues that affect them, their families, and their communities, these women candidates feel they stand a real chance to win the ballots of voters whose only other choice historically has been candidates of presumed power and status, running on outdated platforms based on long-standing partisan animosity and perceived historical injustices rather than on current issues facing society.

In addition, graduates of the women's candidate training, attending a post-election meeting held at The Asia Foundation's Dhaka office, noted that the mock election, in particular their experiences dealing with mock campaign and mock election related complaints, had proved valuable during the real campaign and election and allowed them to better support the political efforts of their husbands and other party candidates.

These future women candidates also still have the hope of being nominated as candidates to contest for reserved seats in the newly elected Parliament. All parties have expressed support for the idea of reserved seats for women; it remains to be decided how many of these there might be and whether they will be filled by nomination or by direct election. At the same TAF post-election meeting mentioned above, all but one of the 17 women in attendance favored direct election for these seats and expressed interest in contesting for them.

Most of the women, however, preferred to run as representatives of a party rather than as independents, for a variety of reasons. Women rightly see themselves as having earned such support by virtue of their past work and loyalty. The women felt that the financial commitment is too large and the problems of finding workers too difficult to allow for a successful independent campaign. Moreover, the women perceived that the burden once an office was won would be too large for any individual candidate without the support of a party administration.

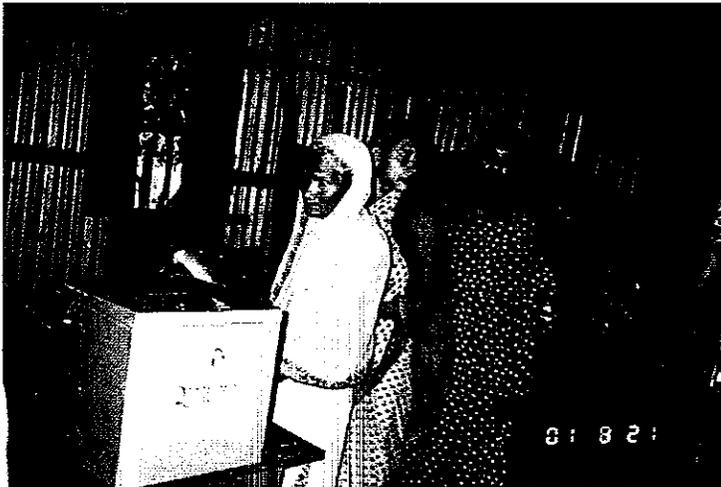
Despite the very difficult obstacles faced by women candidates, this project demonstrated that with very modest resources, the task of increasing women's political participation and recognition can begin to be tackled. First, women political candidates can be effectively trained and equipped to campaign confidently. Second, based on these achievements, political parties will be challenged to consider these trained women as top candidates for reserved seats, especially if they must be filled by direct election. With further sustained advocacy campaigns and engagement of political parties, these women may soon be seen as highly competitive candidates for general seats. Third, the project has demonstrated the unanticipated positive effects of the mock campaign and election as opportunities for training and awareness building for communities, local officials, and the general electorate.



Candidate training session



Mock campaign activities



Mock election procedures



## Candidate and Garment Worker Dialogues

Traditionally in Bangladesh candidates have been selected based on historic ties of personal and party loyalty. In the most extreme cases individuals are elected based on nepotism and the needs of the politicians themselves rather than their constituents. Because the system is so personality driven, candidates get the notion that they are entitled to privilege rather than being elected to serve and represent their constituencies. Campaign platforms of most parties fail to acknowledge even the most fundamental problems in society, much less offer solutions. In many other democracies political dialogue on specific issues has proven effective in ensuring that issues of importance to constituents take priority on the agenda of political parties and are eventually implemented as part of an administration's programs. While any number of problems could be taken up with political parties and candidates, the issue of worker's rights in the garment industry offered an excellent opportunity to advocate for change and increase accountability in the political process.

With over 3,000 registered garment factories employing more than 2 million workers in Bangladesh, issues in the garment industry affect significant numbers of workers. Because almost 90% of these workers are female, these issues are also women's issues. In recent years access to jobs in garment factories has dramatically increased opportunities for women to work outside the home and has contributed greatly to their ability to participate more fully in Bangladeshi society. The Factories Act of 1965 provides protection to workers through regulation of sanitation, safety standards, accommodations, and childcare facilities. However, factory workers, and in particular women workers, suffer because these regulations are not enforced.

With funds from the Swiss Embassy, The Asia Foundation assisted its long-time partner, the Bangladesh National Women's Lawyer Association (BNWLA), to establish a pilot project which brought the issue of garment worker's rights into the political arena. Working in three Dhaka constituencies with high concentrations of garment factories and workers, BNWLA organized a series of dialogues between party candidates and garment workers. The goal of the project was to encourage candidates to learn about constituent issues and to address those concerns in their election campaigns. In the long term, this project was designed to promote issue-based party platforms, invite performance-based assessment of public service encouraging parliamentary candidates to focus on constituent issues, and model a meaningful and effective way for opposition parties to reframe issues and establish national priorities through multi-party dialogues.

By organizing a series of dialogues between the candidates of major parties and garment workers, this pilot project allowed workers to speak directly to candidates and to raise their concerns about the workplace. The project highlighted the large numbers of working women voters represented in each constituency and the value of addressing issues that directly concern their welfare. These meetings also demonstrated how interaction between constituents and candidates could induce the political system to respond to the needs of the people rather than the needs of the politicians.



## Objectives

- To organize a series of 12 pre-election dialogues between garment workers and the candidates of major parties in Dhaka election constituencies 5, 6, and 11.
- To arrange a meeting with the officials of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturer Exporters Association (BGMEA) and the party candidates.
- To survey garment factories on issues discussed in the dialogues and share the findings with community leaders and the press to raise political accountability.
- To demonstrate how interaction between constituents and candidates will move the political system toward responding to the needs of the people rather than the needs of the politicians.
- To invite performance-based assessments of public service.
- To encourage policy-based dialogues between parliamentary candidates and their constituents and to encourage candidates to address and provide solutions to fundamental issues and social problems in their constituencies.
- To include the media at post-meeting press conferences to give voice to the garment workers and their issues, provide free campaign coverage to the candidates, and establish a precedent for issue-based campaigns in the eyes of the public.
- To serve as an example for other interest groups to advocate for inclusion of their issues on party agendas.
- To provide a model for a new political culture that creates a meaningful and effective role for opposition parties to reframe the issues, establish national priorities through multi-party dialogue, and assess majority party performance.

## Activities

**Survey:** BNWLA surveyed 101 garment factories in Dhaka looking at working conditions and the rights of the workers in each factory. The survey covered garment factories in Gulshan, Mohakhali, Banani, and Uttara (Dhaka-5 Election Constituency), Mirpur (Dhaka-11 Election Constituency), and Malibagh, Shobujbagh, Motijheel, and Khilgaon (Dhaka-6 Election Constituency). The study revealed that the majority of factories only marginally complied with labor laws. Furthermore, most did not have child-care facilities, many lacked adequate toilet facilities, most did not give even one day off per week, many did not keep fire-fighting equipment and only occasionally conducted fire drills, and many implemented unregulated work shifts and inconsistent payment schedules. These unsafe and harsh working conditions continue to be the norm in most of the garment factories.



**Meetings and Open Dialogues:** BNWLA organized three meetings with garment workers and seven open dialogues between garment workers and candidates from all the major political parties from September 8 through September 28, 2001. The candidates were from Dhaka Election Constituencies 5, 6, and 11. These meetings and open dialogues were held at the Bangladesh Institute of Administration and Management (BIAM) as a series of round-table discussions between candidates and garment workers and their union representatives. Party members and workers were also present. The well-equipped facilities were conducive to discussion and interaction and included equipment to record all presentations and discussions. Each meeting included from 26 to 41 garment workers, and a party candidate plus 8 to 10 party workers. Approximately 200 people participated in these meetings.

**Meetings with BGMEA:** Officials from BGMEA did not agree to attend the dialogues with the candidates. It is hoped that they will be willing to meet with the newly elected candidates if it can be shown it is in their interest to do so.

**Press and the Media:** There were two or three journalists and members of the press at each session. Their role was three-fold: to give voice to the garment workers and their issues; to provide free campaign coverage to the candidates; and to establish a precedent for issue-based campaigns in the eyes of the public. Channel I also videotaped several of the dialogues which were shown on television. Garment workers do not generate lots of attention in the news and it is only recently that the media has focused on the industry. The workers' enthusiasm and their exchanges with the candidates impressed a number of journalists who then wrote articles in three Bangla language newspapers.

## Impact and Analysis

The meetings were well attended and generated a great deal of enthusiasm and interest. The garment workers wanted these discussions and needed little encouragement to participate. In advance of the discussions, BNWLA distributed a series of possible questions for the garment workers to ask. The workers not only asked these questions but also posed others and pressed the candidates for substantive answers. Workers wanted to know what the candidates thought about the Factories Act of 1965. They asked pointed questions about particular working conditions the candidates cared about and thought could be changed should they win a seat in parliament. Workers also asked very savvy questions about what candidates would do should they lose the election. Would they carry these concerns to the party and see that some of the ideas were put into the platform for the next election?

The garment workers present were almost entirely female but they did not hesitate to speak up and ask questions of the candidates. In fact, sometimes it was difficult to pass the microphone to the next worker as each woman wanted her voice to be heard. The women clearly sent the message to the candidates that they wanted their needs addressed and would hold candidates accountable after



the election. The workers brought up specific issues and made the point that parliamentary representatives must listen to constituents. In particular the women workers raised the issue of transport and safety between homes and factories. They asked for space to pray and rest during the day, improved toilet facilities, regular payment of salary, and childcare facilities. Clearly through this series of meetings, these women gained experience and confidence in taking an active part in the development of democracy and change through dialogue.

BNWLA also invited candidates and party members to attend the sessions, and in fact, their advocacy was critical for getting candidates to participate. Candidates were extremely busy in the few weeks preceding the October 1 elections and were often more interested in attending fund-raising events than constituent meetings. Initially BNWLA had hoped to have candidates from all the major parties appear around the same table in order to debate issues and clarify party platforms. This proved impossible. Indeed, candidates refused to participate if other party candidates were attending the session. In the end individual meetings were held between party candidates and workers. Candidates from the Awami League, the BNP, the Jatiyo, and 11-Party Alliance participated in the dialogues.

In the course of the dialogues it became clear that many workers were not registered to vote because they work seven days a week. The political parties noted this and commented that these workers should be registered to vote. All parties were interested in seeing constituents receive time off from work in order to register. One option would be to give workers paid administrative leave for time to register. BNWLA sent a report to the Election Commission noting that a seven-day work week prevents garment workers from registering to vote.

Despite the lack of debate between parties, individual candidate-constituent dialogues were a very important step in making candidates and political parties aware of how important issue-based campaigns are to the garment workers. With modest funds BNWLA scheduled quite a number of events and reached an important audience. Because this kind of dialogue has never taken place in Bangladesh, seven separate meetings represent a real success and a significant step forward.

To date, political discourse in Bangladesh has been focused on historical grievances and generalities. This was a rare opportunity for workers to question their potential representatives and to make their voices heard. The lively and enthusiastic face-to-face discussions with garment workers showed candidates how vital current economic and social problems are to voters. Several of the candidates had already served in Parliament and were also owners of garment factories. Most prominent of these candidates was Major Kamrul (BNP) and Kamal Ahmed Majumdar (Awami League). As garment-factory-owners-turned-politicians, they hold strong positions in the BGMEA and have the opportunity to exert great influence in the garment industry. The ability to engage these politicians in dialogue and hold them accountable for their views and eventual performance either as government or opposition leaders was an exceptional opportunity in the Bangladesh political arena.



Major Kamrul was not able to attend the session himself but sent his son instead. The son was well received and presented his father's platform to the workers. The candidate himself then responded with written answers to all the questions raised within five days as requested. Workers at the dialogue were also invited to visit the candidate's factory unannounced. Some of the workers went and were impressed with the factory. As a result of the dialogue and the factory visit, a number of garment workers in Dhaka 5 joined Major Kamrul's campaign and actively worked to get him elected.

Since his victory, Major Kamrul has continued to make his office accessible to garment workers. His son and staff have met with a number of garment workers and union leaders and have promised full cooperation as well as the willingness to hold talks and listen to the garment workers in future. Clearly these policy-based dialogues showed political stakeholders that critical benefits can be reaped by responding to constituent needs. These dialogues offer an excellent model for issue-based campaigning which allow candidates to hear from their constituents and in turn to respond with a platform responsive to voter needs. Their importance cannot be underestimated.

These seven round-table dialogues have proven to be a very useful tool for helping candidates interact with their constituents and focus on issues -- in this case, garment worker issues. The women in turn have gained experience and confidence in the process of directly addressing party candidates. These candidate-constituent sessions help educate politicians about local problems and concerns and show that debate and dialogue are key to change and accountability in the political process. Clearly, face-to-face discussions between citizens, politicians, and local interest groups encourage the political system to focus on issues, to be held accountable, and to change. These dialogues are powerful tools which citizens and interest groups can use to advocate for change and debate. They have demonstrated the demand and, indeed, real possibility for issue-based campaigning, accountability, and true political debate in order to set local and national priorities.

The project held follow-up meetings with the winner of the Dhaka 5 constituency to remind him of his commitments to the garment workers. This is a very important part of the process and is necessary to ensure that future campaigns are issue-based and that politicians keep their campaign promises. Local NGOs and other interest groups need to follow a politician's actions and voting record throughout their terms in office to ensure accountability.

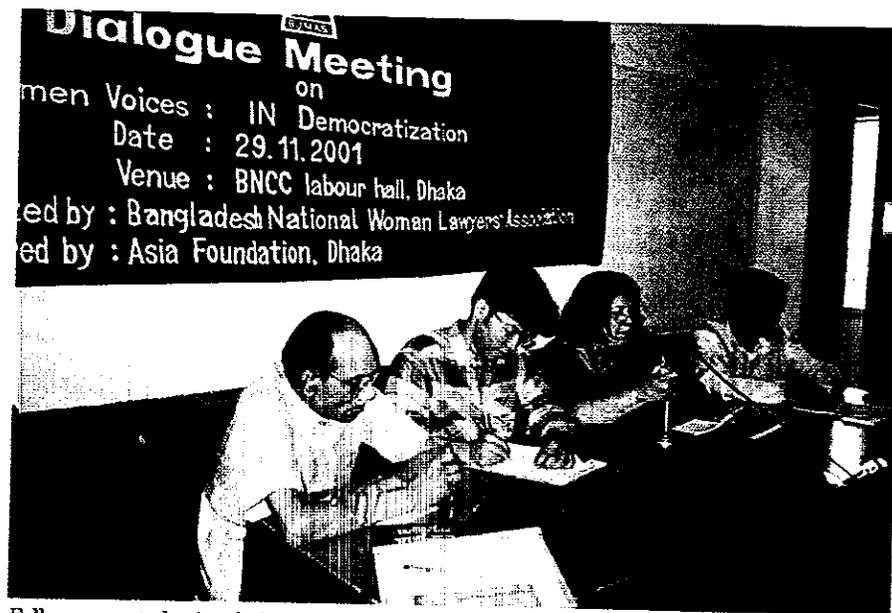
One issue that concerns both workers and owners is the end of the Bangladesh garment quota in the US market in 2004. The BGMEA has hired a firm in Washington to lobby for the Bangladesh garment industry. Because labor practices and workers' rights are important issues in the US, there are clearly areas where garment workers can support owners and in turn improve their own work situation. The garment industry needs well-trained, productive workers with design and finishing skills to compete in the global economy. Because of the recent economic downturn (1400 registered and unregistered factories have recently closed and nearly 400,000 workers have been laid off), there is a real impetus for workers, owners, and parliamentary officials in Bangladesh to dialogue and work together. This pilot project is an excellent model for establishing national



priorities for the garment industry as a whole through multi-party dialogue at the highest levels. It is also an excellent demonstration of how a focused pilot project can provide a first critical step in transforming political process that relies on relationships and status quo to dynamic, meaningful performances and issue based public service.



Pre-election dialogue session



Follow-on post-election dialogue



## Training for Newspaper Gatekeepers

As part of The Asia Foundation's effort to provide critical information to voters, support was given to the Bangladesh Centre for Development, Journalism and Communication (BCDJC) to conduct training for "newspaper gatekeepers" to improve their ability to provide accurate and in-depth coverage and analysis of election-related news. Gatekeepers are those journalists who assign news stories, mobilize reporters in the field, and make key decisions regarding what stories to run as well as where and how they will be displayed. Generally, these include news editors and assistant editors, city editors, chief reporters, national news editors, and shift editors. It was felt that the training of these key personnel would significantly enhance the role of the media in election reporting as they shape the broader focus and priorities of their papers, select stories, and guide reporters and journalists in the field.

The training was designed to cover issues related to election processes; the role of the media in monitoring pre-election events at the local level; and the challenge of reporting on parties and candidates in a way that is both topical, objective, and analytical. The training also focused on how to identify and cover the issues that are most critical to voters -- who do not generally have direct contact with journalists and therefore cannot get their interests addressed in print or on air -- rather than issues preferred by political parties.

### Objectives

- To expand the capacity of journalists to provide critical information to voters, political parties, civil society, and other interested stakeholders.
- To strengthen their investigative and reporting skills while focusing on the pre-election environment in Bangladesh.
- To continue to strengthen democratic processes in Bangladesh, increase citizen awareness of electoral issues, and promote transparency and accountability in government.

### Activities

**Training Materials:** In preparation for the training, in late July BCDJC brought together eighteen stakeholders, including representatives of Democracywatch, the Delegation of the European Commission to Bangladesh, the National Election Observation Committee, the International Labor Organization, Bangladesh Monobadhikar Sangbadik Forum (BMSF), the Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA) and BCDJC, media specialists from Ekushey TV and *Ittefaq* and *Ajker Kagoj* daily newspapers, and media and other educators from the Press Institute of Bangladesh, the University of Dhaka, and Chittagong University, to finalize the schedule of and evaluate the materials to be used in the gatekeeper training.



The materials reviewed included a *Pocketbook for Election Reporters* and a more complete *Handbook for Election Reporting*. The *Pocketbook* was written by Samar Roy, a contributing reporter to the *Ittefaq* daily newspaper. Mr. Roy has long been associated with activist organizations such as FEMA and BMSF and has written a number of books about election reporting. The *Pocketbook* was designed to be easy to carry and provide "on the spot" information needed by reporters in the field. *Election Reporting* was written by Tapan Roy, a researcher with the Press Institute of Bangladesh; it included a wider array of election-related topics.

The final schedule which the group adopted for the training covered the role of mass media in election reporting, from the reader's as well as the newspaper editor's perspectives; an analysis of election reports in the daily press; a discussion of problems faced by gatekeepers in providing election coverage and the shortcomings and mistakes common in reporting currently being done; developing a list of topics to be covered in election reporting; and an explanation of the election laws of Bangladesh.

**Gatekeeper Training:** BCDJC then held four training sessions during the month of August, two for gatekeepers of national news organizations and two for district-based news organizations, designed to update them on the best ways to cover election-related stories, prepare them for conducting long-term pre-election monitoring and reporting for the 2001 elections, and equip them for long term, quality election reporting. The discussion agendas for all the colloquia included:

- Problems faced by gatekeepers in election reporting.
- The existing status of election reporting.
- How to increase the coverage of election-related issues in the newspapers and the media in general.
- The role of the media in promoting free, fair, and representative elections.
- How to encourage public opinion in favor of free and fair elections.
- How to maintain objectivity in information dissemination.
- How to develop and maintain reporters' assignments and work schedules to ensure sufficient election coverage.
- How to improve reporters' abilities in covering elections.

**Training for Dhaka-based Journalists:** Twenty-six journalists from 13 leading Dhaka-based national newspapers participated in the first colloquium, held August 16 and 17, 2001. Resource persons for the colloquium included Motiur Rahman Choudhury, Chief Editor of the daily newspaper *Manavzamin* and Bangladesh correspondent for the Voice of America, and Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed, President of *Bishwa Sahitya Kendra*. They were joined by Burhan Uddin Ahmed, Member Secretary of FEMA, and Mahfuz Ullah, a senior journalist and Secretary General of the Centre for Sustainable Development (CFSD), who participated in all four of the colloquia.



The participants outlined their expectations for the colloquia, which included:

- Learning more about election reporting;
- Learning about different aspects of election laws;
- Sharing experiences about election reporting; and
- Better understanding the role of reporters in the election process.

On the first day of the training, Mr. Choudhury identified Bangladesh as "the only Muslim country where democracy is stabilized," and where an attempt is being made to implement democratic practices. He emphasized the role of newspapers in ensuring that the 2001 election was free and fair, and in providing the electorate the information it needed to avoid confusion and make informed choices. To do that, Choudhury said, "a group of election reporters has to be well versed in issues and events related to the election. Only then will we get proper reporting on the election."

Choudhury further spoke of the political bias currently present in most newspapers in Bangladesh, and the importance of eradicating it, not only in the press itself but also in journalists' unions, clubs, and associations. "I don't say that journalists should not support any party, but I urge that they should not be biased and there should not be any reflection of their sympathies in their work."

Professor Sayeed said that a major task of the press is to make their readers more interested in the elections; he felt it was important for newspapers to present readers with the "neutral but comparative qualities of the contestants," and to provide news space for those candidates who don't have enough money to provide their own publicity.

Following the presentations, there was open discussion on various topics regarding election reporting.

The second day of this and subsequent training included a session on the election laws of Bangladesh, presented by Burhan Uddin Ahmed, Member Secretary of FEMA and a former deputy secretary of the Election Commission of Bangladesh. Invariably these sessions revealed that journalists who thought themselves knowledgeable regarding election laws were in fact unaware of or mistaken regarding many aspects of the law.

The limitations and problems gatekeepers face in covering elections in Bangladesh that were discussed by and of concern to participants of all four of the colloquia include:

- The political connections of media owners result in "missions other than and in most cases contrary to the professional norms and ethics of the media" regarding objective and unbiased news coverage. The pressure of these competing and conflicting viewpoints is "foremost among the many deterrents to fair and balanced election reporting."
- Because election reporting is a short-term assignment, reporters have limited opportunity to develop their skills and perform to peak capacity while reporting on elections. The challenge therefore is to develop a core group of reporters who can perform political



analysis, report on elections, and observe, evaluate, and assess candidates' platforms and performance in light of such political analysis.

- Historically, election coverage in Bangladesh has concentrated on statements, opinions, views, and the actions of political parties and only sometimes on political violence. All incidents of violence and law breaking need to be covered in order to ensure that an informed public brings pressure to end them. Furthermore, broader political analysis should be brought to bear on election reporting and information about candidates or party positions to address these problems.
- Predictions of election outcomes are routinely given without any in-depth knowledge, study, or survey of public opinion.
- Some reporters try to market their own ideas and maintain and manipulate interest-based contacts with political parties and leaders.
- Monetary incentives for field level reporters are insufficient to ensure that the most talented, knowledgeable personnel are recruited.
- Journalists in general lack knowledge about election-related issues.
- Readers' voices and opinions are usually not given space in Bangladeshi newspapers. Lack of constructive criticism from readers results in newspaper staff being less concerned with accuracy of facts.

The second workshop for Dhaka-based gatekeepers included 27 representatives from 13 national papers. Resource persons, in addition to Mr. Ahmed of FEMA and Mr. Ullah of CFSD, included Moazzem Hossain, Editor of the daily *Financial Express* and Dr. Nazmul Lahasan Kalimulla, a professor in the Department of Public Administration at Dhaka University and convenor of the National Election Observation Committee (JANIPOP). This second colloquium identified some of the negative roles the media and the press play in elections.

**Training for District-based Journalists:** Participants for the two colloquia for district-based news organizations were selected from newspapers with the highest circulation and independent editorial policies. A total of 39 gatekeepers from as many newspapers took part in the two colloquia, which were held August 25 and 26 and August 28 and 29, 2001. Resource persons for the colloquia included Nayeemul Islam Khan, Advisory Editor of the daily *Ajker Kagoj*, Dr. Ainun Nishat, Country Representative for the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and a Professor of Bangladesh University for Engineering and Technology (BUET), at the first colloquium, and Mozammel Hoque, editor of the daily *Korotoa* in Bogra, and Fatima Jahura, Senior Research Fellow, Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad at the second, as well as Mr. Ahmed and Mr. Ullah, at both.

Mr. Khan said that the "numerous mistakes in data, figures, and information that we find every day in our newspapers could be minimized if gatekeepers [were] more diligent in checking and re-checking facts and insisting on accuracy on the part of their reporters." He also stressed the



importance of reporting all violations of election laws, stating, "We can create a different future by reporting these violations."

Dr. Nishat felt that Bangladeshi newspapers presented readers with inconsistent, confusing, contradictory, and biased reports: "Sometimes, I even find that the stories are far different from the real occurrence. . . . We want our newspapers to publish verified news, news beyond confusion, balanced reports."

Mr. Hossain, whose newspaper, the Bogra-based daily *Korotoa*, has the highest circulation of any paper outside of Dhaka, pointed out some improvements the media had made in covering the 2001 election. "I've noticed in this election the Dhaka papers are publishing a separate page of election news. They are also publishing news stories on candidates from all over the country." To avoid confusing and distorted news stories that have historically characterized election reporting in Bangladesh, he has appointed two election news editors who check all stories before publication. He credits this action for the increased credibility and circulation his paper has enjoyed as a result.

Ms. Jahura said that, although she routinely read four newspapers daily, she still didn't feel she was able to get complete or objective information regarding the election. "It is very unfortunate that we have to depend on BBC or CNN for local news." In addition to failing to give election news the priority it deserved, or in covering election news objectively, Ms. Jahura charged the press with the further failure of neglecting to follow-up on important events, and as a result "the readers forget or lose track of many issues. We also see some of our newspapers . . . act like the representatives of specific political groups." She also urged the papers to give increased attention to women's issues and activities regarding the election.

**Code of Conduct:** Participants of each of the colloquia spent a considerable amount of time discussing a Code of Conduct to guide journalists in election reporting. Their suggestions were later compiled into the following Code of Conduct for Election Reporting:

- Journalists shall report in an objective manner. Journalists should seek comments from all parties concerned while reporting on controversial issues.
- As far as possible, journalists shall report the views of candidates and political parties directly and in their own words, rather than as others describe them.
- Journalists shall do their utmost to correct any information found to be inaccurate.
- Journalists should avoid using language or expressions that may discriminate or incite hatred or violence on any grounds, including race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origins.
- Journalists shall not seek any favor from a politician or candidate which may influence objectivity of reporting.
- Journalists shall not make any promise to a politician about the content of a news report.



- Journalists shall take care in reporting the findings of opinion polls/surveys about the election situation. He/she should look for the following information while handling any release on the findings of a poll or survey:
  - 1 Who commissioned or carried out the poll and when,
  - 2 How many people were interviewed, where and how they were interviewed, and what the margin of error was;
  - 3 What the exact wording of the questions was.
- Journalists should make a clear distinction between editorial and opinion pieces and news reporting.
- Journalists may report on ongoing vote counts as long as there is clarity that the number reported is not the final count.
- On election day, journalists shall not ask anyone who they voted for, before or after ballot taking.

**Content Analysis:** The content of 10 national dailies was analyzed for a period of five months, from June to October 2001, to assess the impact of the colloquia and study the coverage of the Parliamentary Elections 2001. The papers chosen included seven Bangla language dailies — *Ajker Kagoj*, *Bhorer Kagoj*, *Ittefaq*, *Janakantha*, *Jugantor*, *Prothom Alo*, and *Sangbad* — and three English language dailies — the *Bangladesh Observer*, the *Daily Star*, and the *Independent*. Eight issues of each daily were randomly selected and analyzed each month. The following are the "salient features of the findings of the content analysis" by participating gatekeepers, according to BCDJC:

- No significant report was found on the obstacles to holding a free and fair election and how to remove them.
- Voters, the prime force in elections, were absent from news stories.
- Newspapers gave maximum coverage to event-based reports.
- Public meetings, party meetings, and press briefings were among the events most likely to be covered.
- There were few investigative reports.
- Most reports emphasized commentary over information and counter-information.
- The focal point of most reports was on the results of the election, rather than on the participation of voters in the election process.
- Reporting on candidates emphasized campaign strategies over information regarding the implementation or non-implementation of pledges made during the last election.
- Reporting on the management of the election was insufficient and inaccurate.



- Information on candidates' platforms was lacking, unclear, or insufficient to help readers make informed decisions.
- Reports on candidates lacked precise information regarding their actual status or qualifications for office.
- Qualified candidates were not given the coverage or priority in the press that they deserved.
- Most of the dailies reported on the same issues without any variation in their presentation from day to day.
- Women candidates were under-represented in the press. Few reports were made on female candidates, even those women candidates who were more qualified than their male competitors, or on the issue of the lack of female representation in general.
- Although some candidates spent more than the 500,000 taka limit (US\$ 10,000), most dailies did not report this fact.
- Candidates from rural constituencies were accorded less coverage than those from urban constituencies.
- Rich candidates were given priority over poor candidates.
- There were few stories regarding the number of election camps, colored posters, gates, etc., although these were important issues.
- Reports of voters' opinions on the candidates were negligible.
- Although the quantity of election reporting increased, it remained unplanned and stereotyped, with little improvement in the content or analysis.
- Although reports on violence were given priority in the post-election period, follow-up reporting on such sensitive issues as the Feni situation and the bomb-blast in Bagherhat was missing.<sup>5</sup>

## Impact and Analysis

The level of election reporting and media coverage in Bangladesh currently tends toward event reporting, with insufficient verification of facts and biased coverage of certain candidates and parties. This project initiative recognized the important role that gatekeepers play in identifying top stories, ensuring quality reporting, and providing the electorate with the information they need to make informed decisions.

The results of this project were much greater media coverage of the election, a common code of conduct for gatekeepers, and shared ideas about improving coverage in future elections. There is

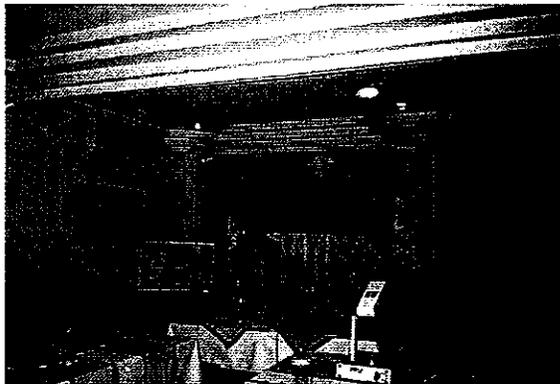
<sup>5</sup>These were areas in the southern part of Bangladesh where there were many incidents of campaign violence.



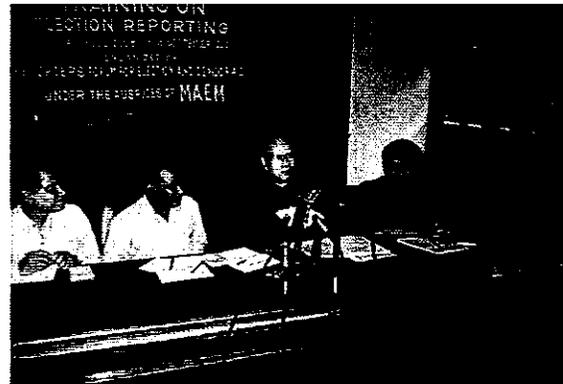
still need for improvement, however, particularly regarding the issues of balanced, objective reporting, verifying facts, identifying credible sources, reporting with a transparent point of view, and providing news space for competing points of view. There is certainly a need for more in-depth analysis of the political environment, the major problems and concerns of the country and the constituents, and the extent to which candidate or party platforms address these issues. There is a further need for long-term post election reporting on the performance of candidates and parties in fulfilling their promises, providing effective leadership, and constructively engaging opposition parties in decision making.



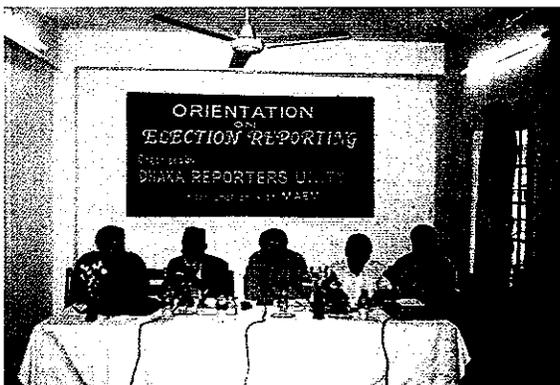
Pocketbook for Election Reporters



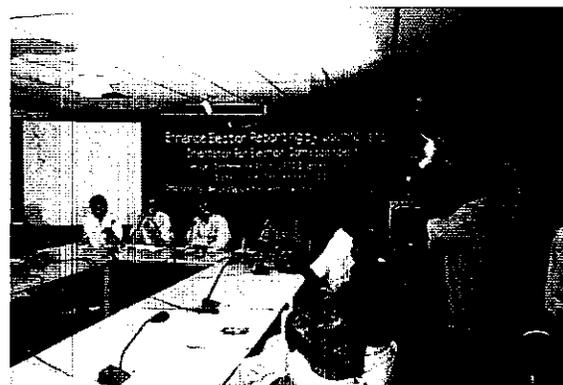
Gatekeepers training



Journalists training session



Journalists training events





## ELECTION MONITORING

Violence, incidences of intimidation, and abuse of power and privilege by political parties were observed in the election campaigns of 1991 and 1996. Despite the fact that elections in Bangladesh are administered under a caretaker government, fraudulent electoral practices utilized in the past have included vote buying through distributing cash, goods, offers of employment, promotions, loans, and special favors. Incumbents have expanded development projects and activities to impress voters in yet another way to buy votes. Influencing voters has also included buying promises to abstain from voting; intimidating voters to stay away from polling centers by threatening to harm businesses, and also by physically preventing minority voters from entering polling stations. Other tactics include forcing officials to open up booths for false balloting, and stamping or even snatching ballot boxes on Election Day. Certain districts and constituencies are always more prone to violence and fraudulent electoral practices and these areas in particular need to be monitored and reported on during the pre-election stage. In many of these districts, money, muscle power, and local influence have caused serious law and order problems. These abuses and irregularities have certainly threatened the maturation of democracy in Bangladesh. In order to strengthen the democratic process and deter such practices during the 2001 elections, the TAF election monitoring program focused on three key strategies.

First, TAF encouraged the development of pre-election monitoring by civil society groups who acted as watchdogs for the broader society. The long-term monitoring activities of FEMA, BCDJC, and Odhikar are excellent examples of how civil society organizations can actively deter violence, increase accountability of political parties' candidates and local officials, and increase public confidence in the election process.

Second, TAF actively sought to ensure broad and inclusive commitment to domestic monitoring, whereby Bangladeshis themselves understand and assert their role of preserving and protecting free and fair elections in Bangladesh. The comprehensive election day monitoring which TAF supported through the EMWG was an important achievement. For the first time ever, a diverse group of NGOs came together and met the challenge to mobilize over 150,000 citizens to provide 100% nationwide election day coverage. At the end of the day this monitoring coalition could declare unanimously and unreservedly that, despite exceptions in isolated locations (insufficient to affect the outcome), the national elections were free and fair.

Third, by supporting the involvement of the international observer team, the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL), TAF was able to ensure Asian participation in the international observation throughout Bangladesh to give Asian voice to the endorsement and affirmation of free and fair democratic electoral processes in the country.

### Long-Term Monitoring

Long before the Election Commission announced the election schedule in Bangladesh, candidates and parties began their campaigns. There was tremendous concern that political polarization in all



sectors of the society had reached such a threshold that there would be an even higher risk of conflict and intimidation and even more widespread violence surrounding this election than there had been in years past. In order to deter such violence and unfair tactics during the campaign period preceding the election and during the election itself, The Asia Foundation, with funds from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the British Department for International Development (DFID), embarked on a project that involved two complementary approaches to long-term monitoring – one involving observation by a civil society organization at the constituency level and the other incorporating investigative reporting by journalists at the district level.

Long-term domestic monitoring can contribute to making elections free and fair by providing a means for the public to scrutinize the quality and fairness of party or candidate campaigns well in advance of election day. Furthermore, the ability to place trained long-term monitors in each constituency to provide accurate and impartial observation in the weeks before the election allows local and national authorities the opportunity to increase security and take action to prevent further intimidation and excessive election campaign abuses where they have been reported previously. The resulting media coverage can further insure that the campaign and election proceed peacefully and with full voter participation.

As part of its long-term monitoring effort, TAF funded FEMA to provide observation and analysis by civil society at the constituency level. FEMA was funded for a two-month monitoring effort covering every constituency of Bangladesh. The Manabik Shahajya Shangstha/Study and Research Group (MSS/SRG) acted as fund manager and coordinator for this effort.

Another long-term observation plan was implemented by BCDJC and the Bangladesh Manobadhikar Sangbadik Forum (BMSF) and involved investigative reporting by locally-based journalists at the district level. This effort consisted of two distinct components: the long-term monitoring itself, and a series of workshops for national and district-level journalists, during which they received support training in analytical election reporting and were sensitized to the critical role the media play during elections.

In addition, Odhikar targeted 28 constituencies with a history of violence and irregularities and conducted pre-election assessments which contributed to a longer term monitoring effort rather than observation only on election day.

The shared goal of all of these approaches was to provide critical information to voters, political parties, civil society, and other interested stakeholders on the pre-election environment in Bangladesh, and by doing so deter, to the extent possible, election-related violence and conflict, and voter coercion or intimidation.

## **FEMA Long Term Monitoring**

The Fair Election Monitoring Alliance, a non-partisan citizen's coalition for monitoring elections and promoting democratic development in Bangladesh, was formed in 1995 with initial funding



from The Asia Foundation. Its members include over 200 non-governmental organizations, civic associations, clubs, and concerned citizens. FEMA has an established track record in election monitoring in Bangladesh and through its national committee, national secretariat, and district committees is able to deploy its many volunteers quickly for nationwide coverage.

## Objectives

- To conduct long-term observation in each constituency, starting 60 days prior to the election.
- To recruit and deploy 300 long-term observers (LTOs).
- To develop workshop materials for and train the long-term observers.
- To collect information from each constituency weekly and to issue press releases based on the reports.
- To complete a final report on the election.

## Activities

**Recruitment:** FEMA recruited one observer for each constituency who met the following qualifications:

- Completely non-partisan and perceived to be so;
- Capable of reporting accurately and objectively;
- At least 25 years old;
- College graduates;
- Resident in the constituency they observed; and
- Committed to free, fair, democratic elections.

All monitors were recruited locally with the assistance of local FEMA chapters. Many of the observers were teachers, social workers, lawyers, journalists, and other professionals. None were otherwise involved in election activities. A total of 302 Long Term Observers (LTOs) were recruited, two more than stipulated in the proposal, because two LTOs were appointed to each of two inter-district constituencies to coordinate activities among districts.

**Training:** The FEMA National Secretariat trained its observers with the assistance of Graham P. Elson, an LTO monitoring expert provided by the European Commission. The syllabus used in training included provisions of the electoral laws, the electoral Code of Conduct, guidelines for election observers, and techniques for gathering information required to judge the actual election



environment, including the use of a yes/no checklist designed by FEMA. The checklist was supplemented by narratives if LTOs felt it necessary to elaborate on their yes/no answers.

**Reporting:** FEMA deployed the 302 LTOs for the six weeks preceding election day, covering every constituency. FEMA observers were requested to take note of the following:

- The conduct and activities of the local administration and whether they performed their duties properly and impartially or in a partisan manner that could influence the electoral process in favor of one party or another;
- The law and order situation prevailing in the constituency, including incidents of violence and the general political environment;
- The extent to which local political activists were involved in questionable activities such as organized violence, coercion, or intimidation;
- Election Commission decisions and actions taken by the national government, district, and local authorities with respect to election administration issues;
- The fairness and impartiality of the nomination process;
- Campaign events such as public meetings, processions, and demonstrations, the campaign strategies used by candidates, and their campaign financing and expenses;
- Election related complaints and allegations made to the electoral inquiry committee, including any court cases and their outcomes;
- The number of voter education programs and their tendency toward political bias;
- The post election process, including re-polling, incidents of violence, and complaints filed with the authorities.

Observers submitted weekly reports to their respective District Coordinators. These were summarized and forwarded to the National Secretariat, where they were compiled into weekly reports to the media. FEMA submitted four pre-election campaign reports on September 3, 10, 17, and 24. A post-election press statement was released October 2 on the national election itself and another on October 19 regarding re-polling at various centers.

**Pre-Election Observations:** During the weeks of pre-election monitoring the following issues emerged as key concerns:

- There was no significant progress in illegal arms recovery. Just two days before the election, FEMA told the *Daily Star* that authorities in over half of the constituencies had still taken no meaningful steps to retrieve illegal weapons. Furthermore, no significant measures had been undertaken to improve the law and order situation in more than one quarter of all constituencies to that point.
- Incidents of election related violence were reported weekly in one fourth of the constituencies. Intra-party violence reached its peak before nominations were filed; inter-



party violence peaked after the nomination process ended. Most violent clashes were fairly evenly distributed between the Awami League and the BNP-led four party alliance. In its post-election report issued on October 2, FEMA reported that "Right up until polling day, violence across the country was running at an unacceptably high rate, with incidents gripping nearly two thirds of all constituencies." In its final report to TAF on the election, FEMA stated that "about 170 constituencies, that is, more than half of the total constituencies of the country, were marked by election related violence" at some point during the days before the election.

- Violations of the electoral code of conduct increased in the last three weeks before polling and were reported in more than half of all constituencies one week before the election. The illegal distribution of money and gifts was reported in almost twenty-one percent of constituencies. Excessive overspending on the part of candidates was also commonly reported and voter intimidation continued to be a cause for concern regarding code of conduct violations.
- Complaints about the non-inclusion of names, names appearing more than once, and the inclusion of false names on the voter list were also frequent.

Two specific positive observations emerged from the LTO reports:

- Over half of the constituencies had on-going voter education programs during the weeks preceding the election.
- An overwhelming majority of the public officials and election administrators conducted their work in a manner consistent with the electoral code, with few violations observed.

FEMA also implemented a Media Monitoring Project, through which it analyzed the space given to each of the main parties in seven of the country's leading newspapers (the *Daily Ittefaq*, the *Inquilab*, the *Daily Janakantha*, *Protham Alo*, *Jugantar*, the *Daily Star* and the *Bangladesh Observer*) in the days leading up to the election. The position, size, and content of photographs, and the trend of the editorials and commentaries published were also analyzed.

Some newspapers showed a tendency to side with one party or another. *Daily Ittefaq* gave maximum coverage to Anwar Hussein Manju, a leader of the Jatiya Party, who is also an owner of the newspaper. The *Daily Janakantha's* coverage was mainly in favor of the Awami League, while the *Dinkal* was supportive of the BNP. The Media Monitoring Project noted with some concern that although all the newspapers gave extensive news coverage to the election, there was insufficient political analysis and detailed information. However, *Jugantar* and *Janakantha* provided a special election section giving more information about issues of interest to voters. FEMA also noted that smaller parties received little coverage.

**Post Election Reporting:** FEMA continued its monitoring efforts after the election, reporting that acceptance of the election results was widespread and only a few constituencies received complaints from candidates alleging voting or vote counting irregularities.



FEMA's post election report, issued on October 2, 2002, stated, "The elections went off fairly smoothly, and in most places the voters were able to cast their votes in peace and security. The turnout of voters, particularly women, all over the country was uniformly high. . . . This testifies to the progressive improvements in the electoral process and the quality of the election this time. The uncertainty, apprehension, and sense of insecurity which marked the atmosphere during the pre-poll days were proved largely unfounded."

Post election violence, however, was high according to FEMA observers, while the number of arrests remained low, with only 17.4% of the constituencies reporting arrests related to incidents of post-election violence. Much of this violence was directed against religious minorities. Members of the Hindu community in particular were attacked, beaten, and had their belongings looted. According to FEMA, "Most of [this] violence [is] reported to have been committed by activists of the winning party . . . However, in some cases criminal elements have done it in the name of that political party."

Inter-party clashes also increased during the post-election period. Five Awami League supporters were killed between October 2 and 7 in Feni, and the local Awami League leader in Munshiganj was attacked by what were reported to be BNP terrorists, who beat her up in front of a mosque and cut her hair. A union parishad member in the same district was also severely beaten, again reportedly by BNP activists. In Khagrachari, FEMA reported that the General Secretary of the Freedom Fighters Youth Command was allegedly stabbed by BNP terrorists.

According to some reports, Awami League activists similarly targeted their BNP foes. Twelve people were injured in Tangail after Awami League supporters allegedly assaulted BNP activists and attacked their homes. Similar attacks occurred in at least four other villages. On October 4, AL activists reportedly attacked the home of a BNP activist, and although cases were filed against 24 individuals, there were no arrests until October 10.

Other reports indicate that supporters of the winning party have been engaging in extortion against supporters of the defeated party, as well as capturing or occupying markets, bus stands, and boat launches, destroying or looting shops, and damaging homes and other property. In many cases, however, the crimes were committed by armed groups either with no political affiliation, or who were opportunists taking advantage of the changeover.

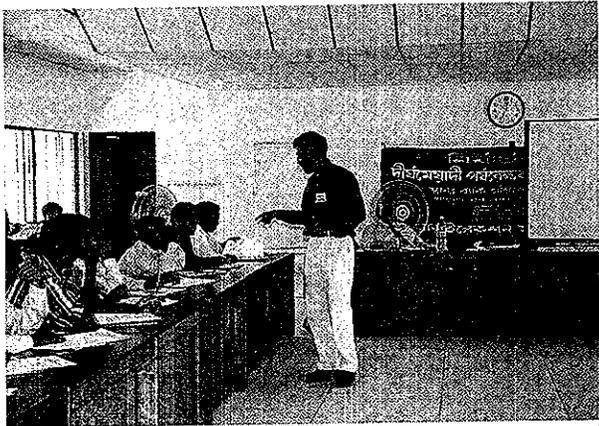
## Impact and Analysis

The FEMA long-term monitoring was designed to inform the public about the behavior of the candidates and parties before and during the election, in order to educate common citizens and to deter violence and illegal activity. In general, citizens have become more informed than ever about election procedures and the behavior of individual candidates in election campaigns. The weekly press conferences which FEMA conducted served to provide useful, educational, and awareness-raising material to the media which in turn had a positive impact on the electorate. In addition, the recruitment of observers and their training mobilized and educated these particular citizens to increase their civic participation.

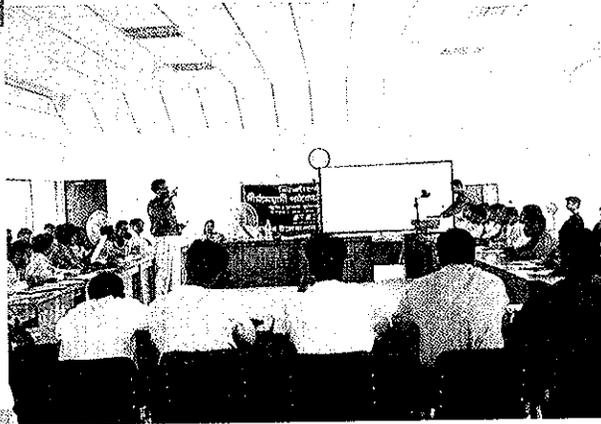


Despite the issuance of more information, the campaign leading up to October 1 was violent and marred by numerous illegal actions by candidates. Because donor funds were only available two months prior to the election, pre-election monitoring and reporting could not begin until after this date and training was completed. In future, longer term pre-election monitoring, initiated at the time of nomination procedures, will allow more visible reporting that might act as a deterrent to violence and illegal campaign actions. Even during the 2001 election, it is impossible to evaluate whether conditions would have been worse had the pre-election monitoring, despite its brief duration, not taken place.

On election day itself, however, violence and poll rigging were surprisingly absent, especially given the conditions of the campaign. Therefore, it does seem that FEMA's observation efforts were successful in contributing to an atmosphere of free and fair polling at election centers throughout the country.



Training for long-term monitors



Training session



Presenting the report of long-term observers



## BCDJC Long-Term Monitoring

The Bangladesh Centre for Development, Journalism and Communication (BCDJC) and the Bangladesh Manobadhikar Sangbadik Forum (BMSF) established the informal Media Alliance for Election Monitoring (MAEM) for the purpose of conducting a long-term monitoring and reporting project on the 2001 election. Later, they were joined by the Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU) and the Reporters' Forum for Election and Democracy (RFED). The project ran from July through November of 2001 and included media professionals from 63 districts of the country who attempted to gather and disseminate accurate, timely information regarding the candidates, their campaigns, and other election issues to the widest possible audience. The project was also designed to build capacity on the part of the participants in regard to their investigative and reporting skills by focusing on the pre-election environment in Bangladesh. During their long-term observations the participants obtained independent assessments of constituency-level election preparations on the part of election officials, political parties, and others.

By supporting BCDJC in coordinating the activities of the MAEM, The Asia Foundation, with the support of DFID and SDC, aimed to strengthen the role of the media in election reporting, and in particular to engage journalists over a longer period to increase their knowledge and awareness of pre-election issues; to build a more specialized cadre of journalists experienced in election reporting; to broaden the focus and improve the quality of media coverage of the entire election process; and to bring representatives of the media in Bangladesh to a better understanding of the importance and potential power of their role as "election watch dogs."

### Objectives

- To gather information regarding people's attitudes toward the election and their right to vote.
- To report on the candidates' campaigns in each constituency.
- To determine the importance of "money and muscle" in the election.
- To identify factors affecting the election in each constituency.
- To assess the relationship of poverty to the electoral process in each constituency.
- To question a cross section of people in each constituency about their opinions in regard to this as well as future elections.
- To enhance the capacity of journalists in covering elections.
- To get fair, objective, and impartial on-going reports on the 2001 parliamentary elections from each constituency.
- To gather and disseminate election news to the widest possible audience.



## Activities

**Participant Selection:** Two reporters from each district outside of Dhaka and 15 correspondents within the city were selected as long term observers for this project. The selections were based on the following criteria:

- S/he is a working journalist on the staff of a national or local newspaper;
- S/he has at least three years' reporting experience;
- S/he is committed to free and fair elections;
- S/he is committed to objective reporting and her/his professional track record makes this apparent;
- S/he is of voting age.

**Program Development Workshop:** Twenty stakeholders, together with representatives of BCDJC and BMSF, met for a half-day workshop on August 30, 2001 to finalize the orientation program to be given to the project participants. The stakeholders included media professionals with editorial, reporting, and public relations backgrounds, members of civil society, leaders of non-governmental organizations concerned with civil rights and democracy, government officials, and other election observers.

During their workshop the participants evaluated the short *Pocketbook for Election Reporters*, which had been published by BCDJC for the use of reporters participating in the project, and recommended some additions and improvements. These were incorporated into the longer and more thorough *Handbook for Election Reporters*.

Six thousand copies of the *Handbook* were later published and distributed to reporters, national and regional newspapers, participants of various election monitoring programs, press clubs, Election Commission officials, various NGOs and donor organizations, universities, libraries, television stations, and news agencies. The *Handbook* served as a basic resource book for reporters as well as election observers and proved to be very popular.

The workshop participants also finalized the program and materials for the orientation for election reporters, identified a variety of subjects and issues to be included on an observation checklist to be used by the monitors, and finalized the reporting format, developed by the project secretariat, that they would use. The participants recommended that the reporters be introduced to and familiarized with the reporting format during their orientation, since its structure was different from the type of narrative reports they were more used to filing.

**Reporter Orientation:** Two orientation programs were held for participating reporters from districts other than Dhaka, with the objectives of:

- Developing the reporters' understanding of the project and what would be required of them in their role as observers;



- Orienting the reporters to the observation format and observers' Code of Conduct;
- Updating their knowledge of election laws, procedures, issues, and priorities;
- Exchanging opinions and sharing experiences in regard to their previous election reporting assignments;
- Identifying any weak points in the election monitoring work plan.

A total of 126 reporters participated in the orientations. They represented all districts of Bangladesh outside of Dhaka except Kurigram. Among the topics discussed at the orientations were the role of mass media in the election, the electoral process and election laws, and election observation in the context of Bangladesh. The participants were also introduced to the observers' Code of Conduct and instructed on how to fill out the checklists and reporting forms they would be using during their observations.

The Media Alliance for Election Monitoring (MAEM) adopted three reporting forms for their observations: one for pre-election reporting, one for election day, and one for post-poll reporting.

The pre-election form was designed to solicit information regarding the types of election campaigns witnessed and the sorts of materials used for the campaigns (posters, leaflets, street drama, audio/video materials, whether microphones were used, public and private meetings and whether or not they were held with permission, press conferences, media advertising) and any violations of election laws observed (misuse of government property, misuse of microphones or posters, offering gifts to voters or providing food or entertainment, donating to social organizations or institutions once the election date has been set, or collecting revenue by pressure).

The form also requested information regarding the number of public meetings and motor vehicle processions; descriptions of the nature, number, and severity of any civil disruptions and the incidence of resulting injuries or deaths; and instances of voters being threatened or discouraged in regard to their participation in the electoral process. Observers were also asked to look for any collusion between candidates and elected officials that might give a candidate an unfair advantage in the election. The reporting format resulted in a wealth of detailed information and observation from every constituency in the country.

Seventy-five reporters from national daily newspapers, news agencies, and private television channels also participated in two two-day orientations on election reporting, one held in conjunction with DRU and the second in association with RFED. The resource persons for these programs included representatives of various diplomatic missions, renowned journalists, two former chief election commissioners, and representatives of other organizations involved in election observing activities. In addition to receiving an observers' orientation similar to that described above, the Dhaka journalists also discussed the need for reporters to maintain "neutrality and moral integrity" in their election coverage, the importance of strong reporting in helping to eradicate terrorism, violence, and financial and other types of election misconduct, the role of observers in making "the electoral process transparent," and the strengths and weaknesses of the Election Commission.



**LTO and Reporting:** Fifteen reporters were deployed to observe in Dhaka while 126 were involved in observations in the remaining districts of the country, for a total of 141 reporters. Constituencies in every district were divided into two sections, which were covered by the two observers alternately to minimize any possible bias in reporting. The observers were supervised through periodic visits from the Programme Coordinator, the Programme Manager, and two Assistant Programme Managers. Three reporters were replaced with new recruits when they experienced difficulty in understanding and completing the reporting form.

The journalists submitted a total of six reports to MAEM — four weekly pre-election reports, one on election day, and one on the post-election situation. The reports were distributed to the press, election monitoring organizations, civil society groups, political parties, the Election Commission, think tanks and research organizations, academia, and the international community. The reports were also posted on the BCDJC website, which had been established on September 1, 2001, and disseminated by e-mail to ensure that the expatriate Bangladeshi community and others living outside of Bangladesh had access to the information. At the time the final report was submitted to TAF, 521 hits had been recorded on the website. After the election, MAEM compiled all of the individual observers' reports into a booklet, *Election 2001 Through the Eyes of Journalists*.

The reports were covered, in news or feature formats, in the *Daily Star*, the *New Nation*, the *Bangladesh Observer*, the *Independent*, the *Financial Express*, *Prothom Alo*, *Sangbad*, *Bhorer Kagoj*, *Banglabazar Potrika*, *Manavzamin*, *Inquilab*, *Dinkal*, *Ajker Kagoj*, *Khabor*, *Muktakantha*, and *Provat* newspapers and on Bangladesh Television and ATN Bangla.

MAEM also held three "Meet the Press" programs, on September 22, September 28, and October 19, 2001. Representatives of the national media and all 141 reporters who worked on the project were present at the October post-election meeting.

To measure the impact of its observation activities, MAEM assessed feedback from the press, counted the number of reports used by newspapers and other media outlets, and counted the number of hits to the website.

**Voter Survey:** A delay in the final project approval meant a delay in the mobilization of observers to the field as well. The pre-election observation period was therefore limited to two, rather than the planned three months. The resulting budget savings were subsequently used in a post-election survey of voters' expectations and evaluations of the election.

The budget savings that resulted from the diminished monitoring period was applied to a post-election survey on voters' expectations and evaluations of the electoral process. The objectives of the survey were:

- To identify factors that might have influenced the decisions of a voter.
- To understand the relationship between the voter and the parliament member.



- To identify the gaps between reality and concept.
- To understand evaluation/comments by voters on the performance of past parliament members.
- To develop a list of qualifications and responsibilities of a parliament member.
- To list people's expectations of the new government.
- To identify people's expectations from the newly determined opposition parties, particularly the Awami League.

A pre-structured questionnaire was used to conduct the survey in all 300 constituencies. The constituencies were divided into eight regions and a coordinator was appointed to each to supervise and conduct the survey. Twenty-five samples were gathered from each constituency for a total of 7,500 respondents.

**Newspaper Study:** In addition, BCDJC conducted an analysis of the election coverage of 10 Bangladesh dailies to assess the ability of the press to provide a robust atmosphere for public debate; to ensure fair, accurate, and objective coverage of election issues; and to safeguard the rights of the disadvantaged and minority groups in the political process. The findings of this study were published in the booklet, *Election 2001 in Bangladesh Newspapers*.

## Impact and Analysis

Editors and reporters were very enthusiastic about the opportunity to implement newly acquired election coverage training. The training and deployment of 141 reporters for long term monitoring provided greater accuracy and more election coverage in the time leading up to the election. In particular it raised the awareness and commitment to provide responsible, in-depth reporting by journalists. Several newspapers ran separate election sections to help inform citizens. The four weekly report summaries released to the press by MAEM reported not only specific election-related events and incidents throughout Bangladesh but also began to report on overall trends with regards to women's participation and minority voting. The booklet, *Election 2001 Through the Eyes of Journalists*, reflected a real effort to provide accurate and detailed reports on election events countrywide, and to focus on issues rather than to advance personal or party rivalry. It also summarized party platforms on issues like corruption and law and order, the economy, the judiciary, and foreign policy.

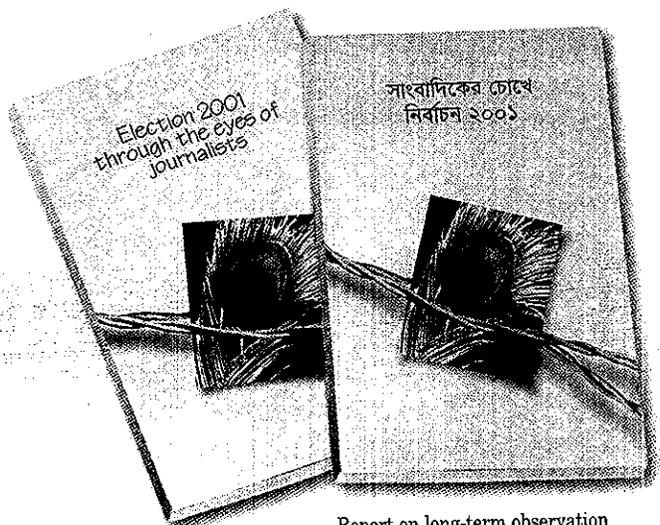
All 6,000 copies of *The Handbook for Reporters* were distributed to reporters throughout the country. The book was very popular and in high demand by reporters working as long term monitors. Project personnel could easily have distributed more copies if they had been available. The web site designed and developed for BCDJC had 521 hits in the month of September. The Meet the Press sessions were very successful and helped to establish an excellent rapport between project



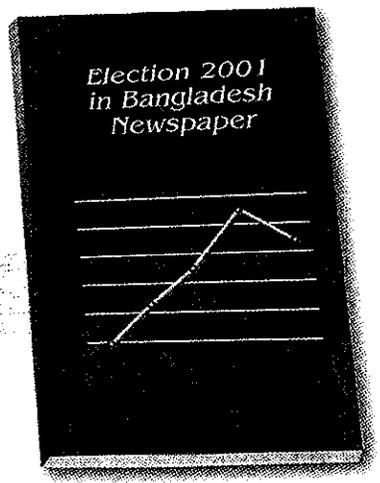
personnel and the news media. As a result, all the national news dailies, the state-controlled TV channel, and ATN Bangla gave wide coverage to the reports of the MAEM Long Term Monitoring project before and after the elections.

The project was viewed as challenging and innovative. As such it created a lot of interest and enthusiasm in the way it was carried out as well as in its results. The project also stimulated the idea of doing a survey of voters' expectations and evaluation of the electoral process with surplus funds. This gave reporters, most for the first time, the opportunity to poll voters' opinions and choices and learn their specific attitude toward the election, issues, and candidates. The survey was small but it was an important first step in providing voter opinion and feedback to candidates and parties.

The MAEM alliance proved to be popular with journalists and media professionals who want to see this alliance expanded and continued as an embodiment and outlet of their independent voice. Many journalists' organizations and forums both in and outside of Dhaka now express the desire to join MAEM to form a nationwide network of media organizations that have the strength to raise journalism standards and contribute to protecting free speech as well as a free press.



Report on long-term observation



Results of newspaper study



"Meet the Press" sessions



## Odhikar's Pre-Election Assessment

To provide an additional assessment of the election campaign period by a civil society organization, The Asia Foundation, with funding from USAID, supported Odhikar in efforts to closely monitor election procedures for 15 days prior to the parliamentary elections. Odhikar, one of the oldest human rights organizations in Bangladesh, has observed elections and documented election violations in the past. It was well-placed to conduct a pre-election assessment and document the last intense weeks of the election campaign utilizing its network of local human rights organizations.

### Objectives

- To recruit, train, and deploy six groups of five observers in each of the six divisions to observe the pre-election environment for 15 days.
- To collect information on the pre-election environment using the observer teams and to include it in a pre-election assessment report.
- To inform civil society organizations, the media, the Election Commission, and other interested groups about the situation.

### Activities

**Recruitment and Deployment:** Odhikar organized the pre-election observation through its network membership with a central coordinator, six divisional coordinators, and 30 divisional observers, five from each of the six electoral divisions. The divisional observers collected data on the pre-election situation from September 12 through September 26 and reported their findings to divisional coordinators. Information was then compiled by the central coordinator.

**Training:** Odhikar conducted training on election monitoring for these coordinators and observers September 8 and 9 at the BRAC Training and Resource Center in Dhaka. The training covered "Laws and Practices on Election and Election Monitoring," "Election Monitoring: Strategies for Monitors," and "Election Monitoring: Issues and Challenges of the 8th National Parliamentary Election." Sessions also reviewed and demonstrated how to collect information and fill out the pre-election monitoring form and reports according to the EMWG guidelines.

**Reporting:** Odhikar targeted 28 constituencies, many with past histories of vote rigging and buying as well as incidences of violence and intimidation. Divisional observers reported to the central coordination office regularly from the field and reports were then released for publication in daily newspapers. Reports of election-related violence were collected as well as examples of violations of election codes of conduct, the use of illegal arms, and direct vote-buying. The pre-election assessment report covered threats against minority groups as well as the lack of government protection and its inability to uphold law and order.

**Press Conferences:** The Pre-Election Observation Report on the pre-election assessment was released at a press conference held jointly with ANFREL on September 26 at 3:00 PM at the



National Press Club. The pre-election report was widely published in most of the daily newspapers on September 27. Ekushey Television covered the pre-election assessment as well.

## Impact and Analysis

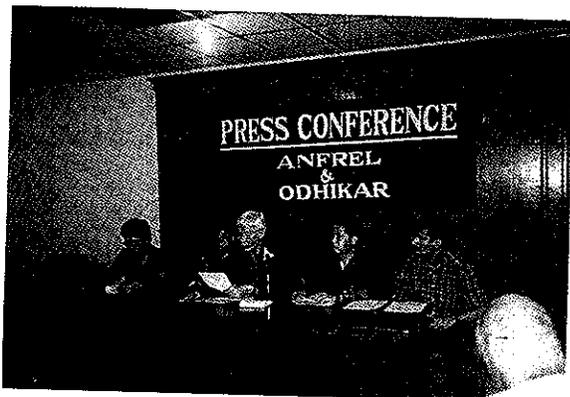
The pre-assessment reports provided thorough, detailed information on pre-electoral problems, and their publication was an incentive to avoid wrongdoing. By reporting on specific events and allegations in the press, observers were able to help advocate for greater transparency and to hold candidates and their parties accountable for acts of violence and intimidation. For example, in Khulna-2 an Odhikar assessment reported the murder of a political party worker in great detail — giving his name, age, the name of the alleged perpetrators, and details of the motives for the murder, demonstrating that it was politically motivated.

Election violations included everything from graffiti, oversized posters, and colored paper violations, to handing out large scale bribes. For instance, one candidate gave out 5000 taka (US\$100), while another provided 10 bags of cement to individual mosques. Violence appeared in many forms from campaign workers carrying knives, axes, and pistols, to mobile armed gangs, to violent clashes at party offices and on the streets. From August 19 to September 26, 127 people were reported killed and 7,729 people injured in election related violence. These observations were widely published in most daily papers and in a special report on Ekushey Television. Odhikar members, with their human rights experience, could draw on experienced social activists,

journalists, and lawyers to actively and accurately collect first-hand reports as well as other accounts and allegations in order to record the events and atmosphere of the pre-election period. Odhikar observers provided a valuable and insightful scrutiny of the pre-election environment.



Joint training for observers



Joint press conference on pre-election environment



Observers conducting pre-election assessments



## Election Day Monitoring

For more than a year before the election, there were calls on all sides to support civil society and international monitoring efforts as an important means of ensuring free and fair elections. The right to observe election day procedures from the opening of the poll through the counting process by domestic monitors is a key element in internationally accepted standards on free and fair elections. Monitoring offers citizens and the international community the opportunity to see for themselves that the election process is carried out in a democratic way.

For the 2001 election, The Asia Foundation with multi-donor funding supported the development and implementation of a comprehensive election monitoring network of civil society organizations that posted local election observers throughout the country. Using a standardized manual and observation form, the monitoring network gathered quantitative data that was computed to determine the degree and nature of any irregularities at election polls and the final average frequency of irregularities observed for each constituency. Of the 80,948 observations and the 79,423 overall assessments, there were only 719 reports of irregularities serious enough to affect the election results. These observations, however, were scattered across 132 of the 300 constituencies. The data revealed that in all 300 constituencies the total number of irregularities observed was insufficient to impact the election results. Furthermore, for any one parliamentary seat, the final vote counts observed and reported were consistent with official results for each constituency. The election at the constituency level was free and fair.

At the union level, however, of the 262 unions with some reports of irregularities, 32 unions received fails by at least one organization, and only 7 unions received a failed score overall. The government ordered re-polling in 90 polling stations across 35 unions. The EMWG observers identified 32 troubled unions, 25 of which overlapped with the government. Of the 32 troubled unions identified by the EMWG, only 7 received failed scores overall.

## Domestic Monitoring

Based on past experience in Bangladesh and other countries in Asia, The Asia Foundation identified domestic monitoring as one of the highest priority election-related activities. During the June 1996 parliamentary election in Bangladesh, The Asia Foundation had funded the deployment of 30,000 monitors, one per polling station. Because each polling station contains an average of three to five polling booths (often in separate rooms), observers in the 1996 election found it difficult to observe the entire process in any one booth.

For the October 2001 election, there were an estimated 150,000 polling booths. In order to achieve 100% coverage of the polling booths, 197,754 observers were deployed in total. This allowed 30% of polling booths in sensitive areas to be covered by two observers, usually from two different organizations, and allowed an observer to be present at all times throughout the voting day. By using a standardized observation form and a uniform data collection system, comprehensive coverage permitted monitoring organizations to accurately assess the outcome of the election in



each constituency collectively. Furthermore, the deployment strategy was designed to ensure objective observation by posting individuals from at least two organizations at each station.

This dramatic increase in the number of observers was designed to increase the visibility of civil society monitoring and the diversity of organizations with a stake in ensuring a free and fair electoral process. The use of standardized training manuals and observation forms by observers from different organizations improved the reliability of monitoring data and significantly increased public confidence in the election process and the assessment by civil society. The presence of observers throughout the country also promoted greater participation by women voters by providing a safer environment in which to vote. In Bangladesh, religious edicts and dictates from male family members and community leaders often prevent women from voting. Yet when mobilized, as seen in the 1997 local government elections where women participated both as candidates and voters in large numbers, women's voters and their active participation can have a significant impact on the outcome of the election. Reports indicate that in all 300 constituencies, not only was there a high turnout among women voters, but also there were many women who voted for the first time in their lives.

To establish such a broad-based monitoring effort, the Foundation began with its long-standing relationship with the two main monitoring alliances, FEMA and the Coordinating Council on Human Rights in Bangladesh, to bring solid experience and technical expertise to the challenge. The Foundation then identified a wide range of organizations, including women's rights organizations, advocacy or watchdog groups, and organizations with experience in governance programming. The objective was to establish a temporary working group that was inclusive of many different types of organizations representing the full diversity of interests within the country while encouraging a collaborative monitoring strategy that focused on coordination, standardization, and efficiency of organizations involved. This approach drew on the institutional resources of the organizations within each of these alliances and ensured cost-effectiveness and accountability. The Asia Foundation also supported a number of other civil society organizations outside the two alliances that were interested in monitoring the election independently for broader ownership of the monitoring process, and the potential for nationwide coverage.

## **Elections Monitoring Working Group**

The result of this collaboration was the Elections Monitoring Working Group (EMWG). This broad-based coalition of civic organizations, monitoring alliances, and NGOs embraced the goal of a comprehensive civil society election monitoring program for the 2001 elections in order to achieve 100% coverage of polling units on election day. Key to the effectiveness of this strategy was increasing the number of individuals and organizations involved in monitoring, developing a common monitoring methodology, and creating a system for sharing information between organizations. The Asia Foundation facilitated meetings and discussions among the EMWG members to assist them in formulating a methodology and plan of action for comprehensive domestic monitoring. These meetings brought together large NGOs with a national presence, small- and medium-sized NGOs with domestic monitoring experience, and others interested in fielding volunteers on election day. Through programming, technical assistance, and coordination



efforts the Foundation encouraged smaller community-based NGOs across the country to participate in election monitoring in their area. These NGOs were reached through the district- and constituency-level coordination committees, and were important for filling in critical gaps in coverage (see Appendix A for a list of all EMWG members).

## Objectives

The EMWG agreed on the following goals through discussion in their initial meetings:

- To achieve 100 % coordinated coverage of the polling booths throughout the nation by civil society organizations;
- To actively involve a sufficient number of civil society organizations so that the monitoring reports would have credibility and could not be viewed as politically biased;
- To encourage the use of a common monitoring methodology and standardized reporting, evaluation forms, and procedures by the different monitoring organizations;
- To report on election results for each polling booth and constituency in a way that allowed the identification of specific constituencies where the validity of the election was confirmed and where it was problematic;
- To issue timely and thorough reports on the election process; and
- To build the capacity of organizations in Bangladesh to develop a structure for large-scale domestic monitoring that was effective, cost-effective, and sustainable with declining foreign funding.

## Activities

**EMWG Coordination Office:** The EMWG established a neutral location for their weekly coordination meetings, sub-group meetings, and press briefings at the BRAC Center. The Asia Foundation supported the rental of this coordination office. The office was made available daily from August 20 to October 15. A full-time administrative officer was hired by TAF to support the EMWG. The officer was present whenever the EMWG office was open. Two additional people seconded from EMWG member organizations worked on media issues, logistics, and deployment. TAF contracted with the BRAC Center for 24-hour security coverage of the office space. The office was equipped with two computers, two UPS, one printer, three fax machines, and one photocopy machine. TAF also purchased necessary office supplies and tea-making facilities.

**Coordination Meetings:** The EMWG held a total of 51 working- and sub-group meetings during the reporting period. Of this total, there were 20 working group sessions and 10 media, 15 material, 5 data collection, and one Election Commission sub-group sessions. These meetings, chaired by rotating heads of participating NGOs, were essential for coordinating accreditation, advocacy, publication of the observer manual, election day observers, and press statements.



**Standardized Election Observation Manual:** A comprehensive election observation manual was developed by the EMWG, spelling out a code of conduct and dos and don'ts to be followed by observers during election day monitoring. The manual included information regarding the Bangladesh election law and proper polling procedures, common irregularities that observers needed to be watching for, and steps to take in the event of violence or other security concerns. The manual included copies of the Polling Booth Observation Form and the Vote Counting Form. It was printed in both English and Bangla.

**Recruitment, Training, and Deployment of Volunteers:** The EMWG through its 29 member organizations recruited, trained, and deployed 148,377 volunteers to observe the polls on election day, including in that number 12,810 from FEMA. Moreover, FEMA separately deployed an additional 49,377 for a grand total of 197,754 observers (see Appendix B for a breakdown of observers). Each grantee organization was provided funds to carry out training in standardized methodology, election procedures, observer codes of conduct, and procedures for observing and reporting on elections. There was a training of district and constituency coordinators in Dhaka and then these coordinators recruited and conducted training in the field. In general, at the national level, individual organizations shared resources and cross-trained their coordinators together. The central coordinating committees at the district level were responsible for interviewing and choosing observers based on select criteria. Training at the district level, lasting from one to four days with sessions for as many as 80 observers, was generally conducted by individual organizations using EMWG guidelines and materials. Organizations had the option to add additional materials to the training program.

**Data Collection System:** A data collection system was developed to aggregate the information provided by the observers on election day and to yield quantitative results to the monitoring organizations, the media, and the general public for reporting purposes.

**Advocacy:** The EMWG successfully advocated for changes in the rules governing election monitoring to ensure the process was open and transparent. A seven-member delegation from EMWG met with the Chief Advisor of the caretaker government on August 8, 2001 to discuss several demands, including accreditation of observers by organization, full access to polling booths for observers, reconsideration of the regulation requiring monitors to observe in a different upazila from the one in which they reside, voting by postal ballot for observers, and recovery of illegal arms.

The TAF Representative, Regional Elections Advisor, and Program Advisor met frequently with the Chief Election Advisor to discuss various problems faced by the EMWG member organizations and the process of accreditation. As a result of these meetings, the Chief Election Advisor agreed that the Election Commission would forward all accreditation cards directly to The Asia Foundation for distribution to the EMWG member organizations. The issuing of these cards by the EC occurred about seven days prior to election day. The Foundation released these cards to qualifying, participating organizations the same day they were received from the EC.

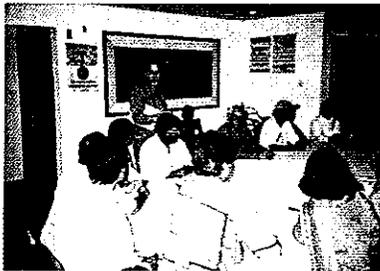
**Press Releases:** The EMWG submitted regular press briefings describing the objectives of the working group as well as information on member organizations. Members of the EMWG also



responded to and corrected misinformation in the press regarding coordination and the election monitoring process.

**TAF Role:** The Asia Foundation provided technical assistance to these organizations to assist them in making the transition from limited coverage of polling stations to coverage of each polling booth. With comprehensive coverage, the organizations were able to collect data on the election day process throughout the country and generate data that would offer a fairly complete picture of the proceedings constituency by constituency throughout the country. Technical assistance from TAF also included guidance on the development of standardized monitoring materials and an aggregation system for the collection of the election-day data and general program and financial management oversight. To ensure that the environment allowed such visible involvement by civil society, TAF also assisted its partners in continuing efforts to advocate for more transparent procedures for monitors.

This approach represented a dramatic shift for civil society organizations in the planning and implementation of election day monitoring. It required monitoring organizations to become more cost-effective on a per monitor basis while at the same time dramatically increasing the number of monitors. It was an opportunity for the monitoring organizations to respond to a changing democratic climate that requires greater civil society involvement in the electoral process. This approach also represented a scaling up of activities for the participating organizations to achieve broader ownership and objectivity and thus greater public confidence in the monitoring process.



Joint press conference on election results



Women waiting to vote



Signing to receive ballot



Using thumbprint to receive ballot



Being given ink as evidence of vote



Counting the votes



## FEMA's Election Day Monitoring

In addition to the EMWG monitors, FEMA claims to have deployed almost 50,000 volunteers on election day — two to each polling station, plus its coordination teams — to observe. Their reports, compiled from a checklist comprised of 17 questions about the polling station environment and incidents of violence, intimidation, or serious irregularities, were sent via a network of 4,500 union, 500 thana/upazila, and 64 district coordinators to the FEMA data center. In addition, mobile monitoring teams were deployed to back up the efforts of stationary monitors. This system seems to have worked effectively.

FEMA credited the "visible presence of the army" as a factor in the "largely peaceful Election Day" despite the "highly charged political atmosphere" and "popular speculation of [a] high incidence of violence." According to FEMA observers, "The law and order situation . . . appeared well under control except in some polling stations in Bhola, Shariatpur, Madaripur, Comilla district, and a few other places." The fact that many women voters had children with them testified to the sense of safety and security on the part of most of the populace. Voters belonging to religious minorities "were seen in many polling stations of Savar, Manikganj, Dhaka city, Gazipur, and other places to have exercised their franchise without any fear or intimidation." Some voter intimidation was reported in Dinajpur, Manikganj, Rangmati, Bandarban, and Khagrachari, however.

FEMA described the election as "fairly well administered, although in many places the polling officials lacked training and efficiency. Almost all election officials were present, adequate election materials were available, and most polling stations opened on time or soon thereafter." Although some voting irregularities were reported, and problems in the voter lists were reported in 4% of the polling stations, "these irregularities did not represent any organized pattern and were not on a scale or magnitude that would have altered the outcome of the election."

FEMA was initially unable to get enough accreditation cards for its observers, despite "a clear directive from the Chief Election Commissioner" and despite the fact that FEMA had been "scrupulous in following the guidelines set out by the Election Commission for accrediting the bonafide election observers." FEMA described the situation in this way: "Having failed to obtain all the needed cards because of the varying and, in many cases, arbitrary conditions set at the local level, we were given the cards we required on the intervention of the Election Commission." In fact, TAF was seconded by the Election Commission at the last minute to deliver accreditation cards to FEMA as well as other observer groups.

Despite having the proper accreditation, however, "FEMA observers were subjected to harassment, obstruction, and intimidation in many areas and even to court arrest in three constituencies: Brahmanbaria-2, Netrokona-4, and Narayanganj-2. This is the first time that any of its observers have ever been arrested in any national or by-election. FEMA deplors this trend." Overall, nearly 3% of its election day observers reported problems performing their duties.



## International Observation

To help promote a free and fair election process, the international community was asked by both the ruling party and the opposition to provide international monitors on election day. International election observers have become an essential element for assuring the credibility of election results in transitional democracies. While domestic monitors play a more important role over the long run, international observers can offer critical support to the consolidation of democracy at key stages. They can help discourage violations of the election process because international observers as opposed to domestic monitors are less subject to intimidation or coercion. Effective scrutiny by international observers can inhibit cheating and deter intimidation, and also provide confidence to voters that they can safely and secretly cast their ballot.

International observers offer a different type of visibility. Their presence is particularly important in transitional democracies because it offers regional and international endorsement and accountability of the democratic process in country. International observation can also provide endorsement of international standards of electoral process that might otherwise be ignored or rejected by local governments. In response to the request for international observers by the government and opposition, The Asia Foundation supported the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) observation mission with funding from USAID.

The Asia Foundation chose to support ANFREL election observers in order to add a needed Asian perspective to the international observation teams. The addition of an Asian group of observers increased the substantive value of the international observation effort by offering a regional endorsement of the democratic process in Bangladesh. ANFREL has observed elections throughout South and South East Asia and its observers have a greater appreciation for the challenges and realities of organizing and running an election in this part of the world. These observers are also free from the donor-beneficiary relationship that exists when representatives from Western countries participate in election observation in developing countries. ANFREL's 22 observers were drawn from their network of journalists, human rights activists, and election experts from 12 countries.<sup>6</sup>

ANFREL observation missions are conducted in cooperation with local partners in the country where an election is held. These partners provide transportation and logistical support, as well as staff who team up with the international observers on election day. In turn, ANFREL provides training and capacity building to its local partner in election observation. In Bangladesh, ANFREL's local partner is Odhikar, a network of organizations who support human rights. For this election period ANFREL provided technical assistance including training of Odhikar observers and assistance in project implementation. This was a successful collaborative effort that enabled Asian observers to monitor the election and that increased the overall capacity of Odhikar to observe and conduct election monitoring.

<sup>6</sup>These countries were Nepal, Myanmar, India, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Japan, Indonesia, Cambodia, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Malaysia.



## Objectives

- To help promote free and fair elections through the presence of international observers.
- To support the participation of Asian election observers to demonstrate Asia's endorsement of free and fair elections in Bangladesh.
- To strengthen the capacity of ANFREL's local partner, Odhikar, through the provision of technical assistance on election monitoring and reporting.
- To field a 25 member team of primarily Asian observers to monitor election-day activities in 28 constituencies of Bangladesh.
- To recruit, train, and deploy 280 mobile volunteers in 28 constituencies on election day in conjunction with the international observers.
- To issue a post-election statement and summary of election-day events at a press conference on October 2.
- To prepare a final report for distribution to the Election Commission, political parties, civil society, the media, the international community, and other stakeholders.

## Activities

**Training and Capacity Building:** ANFREL conducted a three day election day monitoring and human rights observation training in Dhaka with 35 young lawyers and professionals who work with Odhikar. A second training was held for 210 university and graduate students who met the age requirement to introduce them to basic techniques of election observation. A third district-level training for 45 Odhikar election observers was also conducted. The training focussed on human rights and the election monitoring process using guidelines from the EMWG. By working as partners ANFREL offered Odhikar a regional perspective and the experience of several recent elections in South Asia. Odhikar acquired valuable election monitoring experience and expertise for the future as a result of their collaborative efforts with ANFREL.

**Observation:** In coordination with the United Nations Electoral Assistance Secretariat (UNEAS), ANFREL partnered with TAF and Odhikar to deploy 27 international observers from 17 countries to monitor the elections. From September 25 to October 3, ANFREL observation missions observed in 28 sensitive constituencies and approximately 250 polling centers throughout the country. Along with the 27 observers, on election day Odhikar deployed another 280 semi-mobile and stationary observers who worked with the international observers translating, observing, and monitoring the election process in these sensitive constituencies.

**Post-Election Report:** On both October 1 and 2, 2001, ANFREL and its partner Odhikar issued an election day assessment to the press. This statement declared that despite pre-election violence and a few voting irregularities and obstructions in some polling centers on election day, voters were



free to cast their ballots for the candidates of their choice. At the press conference ANFREL mentioned several particular acts of violence including attempts to intimidate voters, acts of ballot- and ballot box-snatching, as well as a few administrative irregularities with polling officers and party agents. Overall, however, ANFREL and Odhikar observers declared the elections free and fair.

The Odhikar report on election-related killings and injuries showed that the pre-election period was much more violent than the same period in 1996. In the last week before the election there were more than 2,000 reports of election-related killings and injuries. Clearly, there was a significant increase in the polarization of voters and a diminished tolerance for different political opinions. The response of the caretaker government to deploy the army to sensitive areas was effective and provided a measure of safety the week before the election and particularly gave greater security for voting on election day itself. The people of Bangladesh seemed determined to vote and turned out in huge numbers to choose their next parliamentary leaders. ANFREL's international observers were impressed by the remarkable enthusiasm of the voting public, particularly women, who waited in long lines to cast their vote.

ANFREL noted that there were some technical problems in the arrangement and the setting up of polling centers in terms of security, order, and voting secrecy; however, polling officers did their best to ensure these vital elements. The Awami League and BNP party agents outside most polling stations to assist voters in locating their assigned station and voter identification number, while set up at a legal distance, seemed to ANFREL observers to be overwhelming and occasionally threatened to undermine voter's freedom of choice.

On election day there were some minor lapses and technical inconsistencies over activities such as the application of indelible ink or the verification of a voter's identity but the integrity of the overall voting process was upheld. The international observers noted throughout that key procedures were actively and dutifully followed by most polling officers.

## **Impact and Analysis**

According to ANFREL's report, observers and voters alike noted that the presence of foreign and domestic observers significantly strengthened voter's confidence in the integrity, transparency, and fairness of the polls. Despite heavy pre-election intimidation and violence, voters, both women and men, turned out in very large numbers to participate in the elections. Even with long lines and some irregularities people were able to cast their vote. For the most part representatives of civil society, particularly domestic observers and Bangladeshi journalists, were welcome and able to perform their duties independently and safely. The coordination and cooperation among international and domestic observers was particularly effective in strengthening voter's confidence in the integrity of the election process. The judicious presence of the army and the efforts of election civil servants to maintain law and order also contributed to the almost festive, and in general, peaceful atmosphere at most polling centers.



ANFREL, working in partnership with Odhikar, focused on the vote count, tabulation, and addressing of serious complaints of fraud and irregularity, all of which were critical to voluntary and peaceful acceptance of election results. The international and domestic observers found that counting and tabulation were conducted properly with only minor lapses. Like the domestic observers, ANFREL monitors observed that in almost all polling centers nationwide, a very small number experienced irregularities that affected the outcome. ANFREL reported satisfaction with the response of the Electoral Enquiry Committee, which investigated reports of the violence and irregularities that caused severe disruptions in 90 polling centers in 16 constituencies and subsequently ordered re-polling in these areas. ANFREL observers commented that because the elections were so widely and clearly declared to be free and fair by the Election Commission, the international community, and civil society, the opposition party was eventually forced to accept the results despite initial threats to call for strikes and agitation.

ANFREL observers noted a widespread sense of optimism that Bangladesh had reached a new level of political maturity. The October 1 elections were much more peaceful than expected. At the post election press conference on October 2, ANFREL declared that the elections were free and fair, endorsing the electoral process conducted by the caretaker government. In particular, ANFREL urged the international community to congratulate Bangladesh for holding peaceful elections that met international standards.



ANFREL/Odhikar observers



Joint press conference on election results



## Election Challenges

### Advocacy

While the outcome of advocacy campaigns is less certain than that of other forms of civil society participation, they have the potential to produce large improvements in the electoral process with minimal resources. Although advocacy is relevant at any time, historically the ascension of a caretaker government has provided a window of opportunity for making significant changes in election policy. The EMWG and other civil society groups as well as representatives from the international community were prepared for and took advantage of this opportunity.

Prior to the election campaign period certain laws and practices in Bangladesh did not conform to international standards on election monitoring. The Asia Foundation assisted the EMWG and its partners to advocate for the relevant changes as well as provided information to the international community to assist them in raising these issues, and the need for change, at the diplomatic level.

Working together, diverse segments of civil society and the international community played important roles as advocates. On the domestic side, the EMWG and FEMA lobbied for significant changes in the "Guidelines for Election Observers for the 2001 Parliamentary Elections." The international pressure for fair elections came from human rights and democracy groups as well as on a more formal level. Ambassadors and other representatives of the international community in Bangladesh met regularly to develop a common voice on election issues and a cooperative relationship on joint efforts to ensure consolidation in promoting free and fair elections. Former President Carter's visit in August helped facilitate broad support, especially government support, for 100% nationwide coverage by domestic observers.

Civil society groups through the EMWG with support from TAF advocated to:

- Permit at least one observer per booth -- successfully implemented. There was one observer per booth for this election as opposed to one observer per station in 1996.
- Permit observers to observe the process from beginning to end, including the counting process -- successfully implemented. The 1996 guidelines did not permit observers to observe all day or observe the count.
- Permit disabled persons to participate as domestic observers -- successfully implemented.
- Permit special needs voters to proceed to front of the queue (blind, physically disabled, elderly, and pregnant) -- successfully implemented.
- Permit observers to observe in their own communities to minimize cost of transport and increase ownership and quality of observation -- unsuccessful.
- Permit observers to vote by postal ballot if they could not observe in their own upazila unsuccessful.
- Lower minimum age for observers from 25 to 18 (voting age) -- unsuccessful.
- Facilitate early accreditation process -- unsuccessful.



In support of disabled domestic observers, TAF funded Action on Disability and Development (ADD) to become a member of the EMWG as a full and equal participant in the meetings. ADD served on two key subcommittees of the monitoring group; the subgroup that drafted the observation manual and forms to be used by all members of the alliance and the subgroup that dealt with outreach to the media.

As a member of the material subgroup developing the observation manual and form, ADD recommended that specific questions be added to the observation form for use by all domestic election observers. These additional questions helped raise awareness of disadvantaged voters. Question 12 of the observer form asked if aged persons, pregnant women, or disabled individuals got preference in the voting line. Question 13 asked if blind or disabled persons were able to select their own assistants to help them vote.

There was also a question allowing observers to note the voting conditions for religious and ethnic minorities. There was considerable discussion by the EMWG about where to put this item, and even whether to include it or not. The compromise was to place the item at the bottom of the form as an Additional Question (#26).

Women continue to be woefully under-represented in Bangladesh's government. To increase their representation, a coalition of women's organizations recommended 64 seats be reserved for women-only super constituencies based on the district boundaries. (The constitutional provision for 30 reserved seats expired prior to the last election.) In addition, these groups recommended that parties nominate women candidates for at least one quarter of the constituencies. When Jimmy Carter visited in August 2001, both major parties agreed to support setting aside 64 seats for women in parliament. This measure was not fulfilled prior to the election, but is now expected to be considered by the new parliament. Additionally, EMWG members ensured focus on the women voter turnout. Question 11 of the observer form asked observers to note if women were able to cast their vote without fear or pressure.

During the pre-election campaign period, various voter education programs and other election related activities such as the slogan contest, posters, women candidate training, and the garment workers project, emphasized the message that it is appropriate and beneficial to have women in government. These messages focused on how women can be effective leaders, that the participation of women in government is essential for good governance, and that women should participate in the elections by voting and by running for office.

## Contextual

Certain challenges exist in the voting environment in many areas throughout Bangladesh. Some of these include:

- Risk of increased violence and intimidation
- Possibility of decreased women's participation due to pre-election violence



- Regulatory constraints including public transport and cell phone use

The EMWG Observation Report of September 26 stated that through September 18 the pre-election period had been more violent than the same period of the 1996 election. The increase in violence was attributed to greater polarization of the electorate and a sharply diminished tolerance for differing political opinion. The ready availability of illegal arms also heavily contributed to the unprecedented level of violence in the pre-election period. The increased level of violence was clearly seen in the greater number of injured and killed throughout the country. Through the last day of September, the final day before the election, there were 408 political acts of violence including strikes, clashes, hijackings, abductions, and bomb blasts. There were 5,413 people reported injured and 97 dead as a result of the political violence. The violence was clearly much worse in some districts than in others, though the overall number of killings was spread fairly evenly between major parties.

Regulatory constraints on civil society activities included the banning of public transportation on election day. Only a few private cars and other vehicles clearly marked as election observers were allowed on the road. This was ordered to prevent the movement of thugs who would attempt to threaten potential voters, but it also made voting virtually impossible for anyone who did not live within walking distance of his or her designated polling center. Because observers were required to monitor outside their own upazilas, this ban on transportation created difficulties for them, especially for women, who ordinarily find travel over long distances in Bangladesh more troublesome than do their male counterparts anyway. One way to address this problem was to mobilize observers a day or two prior to election day, but this solution required the payment of lodging costs and per diem, which was prohibitive in most cases. Furthermore, the ban on public transportation in combination with the requirement that observers monitor outside their own upazilas meant that observers were not able to vote themselves in many cases.

A second regulatory constraint was the shutting off of all cell phones on election day. This was an attempt to keep political thugs from exchanging information and planning violent acts, but it also prevented observers, reporters, and others from communicating effectively. Although deterring violence was of course a legitimate concern, this order represented a non-democratic, authoritarian solution to the problem. Failure to offer democratic means to address the causes of violence slows the pace of democratic development, and perhaps even disguises the real causes themselves. As a result, it is impossible to know if the presence of large numbers of observers in a truly open environment would have had the same or even greater effect in deterring violence on election day. It can be said, however, that such coverage by domestic observers was a new element on the least violent election day that the country has ever experienced.

## Media

It is often difficult to get objective, unbiased, well-informed political reporting in Bangladeshi newspapers or on TV, especially during an election period. The political connections of media



owners often result in less than fair and balanced election reporting. Historically, election coverage in Bangladesh has concentrated on one-sided statements, opinions, views, and the actions of political parties and only sometimes on political violence. Well-balanced, carefully researched election reporting for all candidates and parties is not yet a reality. Providing information to the media and getting meaningful messages out remain a challenge.

The media subgroup of EMWG took a long time to begin producing and releasing its own press statements. The original press conference, announcing the formal inauguration of the EMWG and set for August 4, was delayed and then finally held August 13. Part of the problem was the process of understanding and formalizing their role as a coalition as well as overcoming constraints such as reaching agreement on specific information to be released by all 29 organizations. The final challenge was getting confirmation of their funding commitments from the donor community. Earlier funding commitments would have allowed time to work through many of these challenges. Eventually the EMWG learned to take advantage of the press, to stress common goals and objectives, and to send important voter education messages through this media. EMWG could have used the press earlier but it finally learned important lessons for cooperating and presenting a united front as a newly organized coalition.

## Accreditation

All of the members of the EMWG, FEMA, and other election observation organizations experienced problems ensuring that their observers were officially accredited by the Election Commission. Even though the leaders of the political parties publicly stated their support for non-partisan observation, and the election laws were specifically amended to allow the presence of observers during both the polling and the counting processes, an effective or consistent accreditation process was never developed.

In early August TAF suggested to the EC that they accredit organizations, and then allow those organizations to provide a specified number of accreditation cards directly to their observers. Another suggestion was for each organization to print and fill in the cards, and then send them to the Election Commission (at the district or constituency level) for a validation stamp.

Accreditation issues were difficult to handle and there was a great deal of pressure on the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) to meet this challenge. Initially both the BNP and AL objected to domestic observers inside polling centers and later objected to accrediting particular observer groups within the EMWG. The EC also continued to get requests to observe from groups outside the EMWG. Just a few weeks before the election most deputy commissioners (DCs) insisted on additional identification information in order to deny accreditation to political rivals. The size of ID photo, for example, was used as an excuse to deny ID cards to observer groups. In many districts, accreditation reviews were left to the last minute to avoid issuing ID cards.

The original requirements imposed on election observation organizations by the Election Commission (i.e., organization's registration information, income source, governing



body/executive/board of directors and name, address, date of birth, father's/husband's name, two stamp-sized photos and prior election observation experience, if any) were all met by the EMWG's members. Unfortunately, many DCs decided the official rules were not restrictive enough, and imposed their own independent standards for accreditation. Some examples of these ad hoc standards include:

- On September 22, a DC asked observers to submit a bank statement before they could receive accreditation. When that was submitted it was refused, and he instead asked for a letter of financial support from the funding organization. When questioned, he would not reveal the reason for his refusal to grant any accreditation cards.
- In one district the DC refused to accredit any observers because he said the area was sensitive or vulnerable, precisely the sort of area most in need of observers.
- In one area the DC said he would not accredit any mobile observers, only stationary observers could be accredited. This is noteworthy because the particular organization of the EMWG reporting this was only providing mobile observers.
- The DC in one area agreed to accredit only 10% of the observers who applied from one organization.
- The DC in another area refused all of the applications from one organization, while he required another's observers to get clearance from the Special Branch of police.
- The DC in one district required all observers to have police verification, and the officials concerned were expecting bribes to issue clearance certificates.
- An Assistant DC agreed to accredit only seven of the 211 observers (3.3%) submitted by one organization. No reason for the denial of others was given.
- In a violent district 80 observers from one organization applied for accreditation, but none were approved. No reason for the denial was given.
- One DC required all observers to go to his office for an interview only a week before the election. The observers were asked to bring Secondary School certificates, and other documents proving citizenship, age, and education.
- In three other districts the DC said all observers must come for an interview at the DC office.
- In one place the Magistrate decided to allow a maximum of three observers per polling center. When questioned he denied ever receiving any written directives from the EC on accreditation of observers. He claimed the selection criteria of observers were completely at the discretion of the DC and Returning Officer.

The additional information required by some DCs was superfluous, costly, and time-consuming to obtain, and far exceeded documentation requirements for international observers. A delegation



from The Asia Foundation met with the Chief Election Commissioner on several occasions throughout the pre-election period to discuss the problems associated with accreditation at the district level. At one particular meeting on September 24, 2001, the delegation learned that although 250,000 accreditation cards had been printed, only 100,000 had actually been distributed to the districts, so even if the DCs had wanted to accredit all observers, they would not have had sufficient cards to do so. At that time, TAF and the EMWG urged the Chief Election Commissioner to issue a formal statement to all DCs and other officials clearly stating that all EMWG organizations have met the original requirement and should have all of their observers approved without delay.

To help solve this serious problem TAF suggested to the Chief Election Commissioner that the remaining cards be delivered directly from the Election Commission in Dhaka to the EMWG members for distribution through their own networks. Finally, the CEC agreed to this proposal. For the next week TAF and EMWG volunteers went daily to the Election Commission to assist in applying the official validation stamp to each of the 150,000 cards for distribution before the election. Furthermore, the EC ordered the printing of additional cards to ensure the provision of the total number of approximately 200,000 required.

This approach of distributing a select number of accreditation cards to government-approved organizations for distribution to their staff and local representatives is not uncommon. In the end the Chief Election Commissioner's willingness to issue the ID cards in spite of all the delays and attempts in the field to sabotage the effort, allowed all 29 organizations to receive ID cards for their observers. This decision was taken just a week before the election, making it difficult to distribute the cards on a timely basis. However, all organizations received their designated cards and worked hard to get their allocated number to each individual observer throughout the country.

## Organizational

Most of the election monitoring organizations in Bangladesh were formed as coalitions of NGOs. In the past these coalitions have usually acted as separate organizations, independently building capacity to recruit, train, and deploy election observers. Rather than build new capacity specifically for elections, the Foundation actively encouraged these NGOs and coalitions to cooperate in order to effectively utilize their existing capacity, lower the overall cost of election monitoring, and increase the number of observers deployed. Specifically TAF worked with the EMWG to:

- Increase coordination and cooperation for greater coverage, minimal duplication and maximum public confidence.
- Insist on direct involvement of member organizations in monitoring to increase ownership and accountability of the civil society effort
- Balance the concern of objectivity of individual monitoring organizations.



- Demonstrate a new model which increases the capacity of organizations to scale-up programming and budgeting for maximum efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability.
- Break down the resistance to change and the preference to conduct "business as usual."

In a transitional democracy like Bangladesh, one critical concern regards the "neutrality," or more accurately, the political bias, of domestic observers. For some, the underlying assumption is that individuals must be neutral — or "apolitical." During the 2001 elections, the Foundation assumed instead that while it would not be possible to find observers who were truly unbiased, it would be possible to obtain monitors who represented the entire range of political opinion and/or agreed to act in non-partisan cooperation, and thus achieve balance and fairness. Therefore, TAF sought to open the observation process to be as inclusive of the complete variety of political opinions as possible.

Where the Election Commission and regulations in Bangladesh sought to limit observation — because of worries about interference or bias — the EMWG strove to open the process, believing that limiting the representation of interests through domestic monitors would ironically increase the potential for bias. As a result, the EMWG deliberately drew election day observers from a wide spectrum of organizations and coalitions, thereby demonstrating real inclusiveness. The EMWG directly met the organizational challenge to provide diversity and balance in election day monitoring. Furthermore, the deployment strategy was designed to ensure the presence of a minimum of two different organizations at each polling station.

The objectives of the Foundation's program as well as the EMWG was to maximize inclusiveness, while still ensuring some degree of accountability. First, all observers had to be representatives of an NGO or other officially registered organization. Second, all organizations supported by TAF had to have been approved by the NGO Affairs Bureau to receive foreign funds in support of a precise number of observers. Third, all organizations had to be issued accreditation cards for this precise number of observers. Fourth, organizations could only recruit individuals who fulfilled certain criteria, such as being 25 years or older, agreeing to a code of conduct, and observing in an adjacent upazila, as specified by the Election Commission.

## Data

The EMWG established a system whereby each observer at a polling booth filled out two identical copies of the observation form. One copy was to be given to the EMWG representative at the polling station, and the other copy to their organization. The next step required each of the observers to compile their individual observations into one polling station report as an aggregated count of the individual observations for each of the 26 questions on the form. The EMWG-appointed representative at the polling station was to then deliver this form (and the supplementary individual forms) to the EMWG constituency coordinating committee who was to compile these polling station data into constituency reports. These constituency reports were then supposed to be faxed to the EMWG coordinating office in Dhaka within 24 hours of the election. The hard copies



of this data form and all supplementary forms were to be sent by courier to the EMWG. In Dhaka the data would be entered into the computer by a separate contracted data management firm.

Two major issues eventually undermined the implementation of this system. The first was a tendency by participating organizations to prioritize individual organization reporting over aggregated reporting. The second problem was the decision by the EMWG to eliminate the involvement of the district/constituency coordinating committees from direct involvement in the aggregation process. Other issues came into play as well – the increased number of polling stations at each center; the difficulty observers had in identifying each other because of problems with accreditation cards, masses of people, being stationed in unfamiliar areas, and not knowing where to meet afterward; the varying challenges observers faced at polling centers, such as time limits within booths, denial of access to certain places, and rotation from booth to booth; and the limits placed on transport to allow for transferring of data to the next higher meeting site, among others.

As a result, by the end of election day, the EMWG office was inundated with faxes of individual observer forms. While efforts were made to get participating organizations to go back to the originally conceived system and work together to prepare aggregated data for each level, this proved nearly impossible at that point. As a compromise, each organization worked to prepare aggregated data for their organization for each of these levels. The Asia Foundation together with the data management firm worked to clean, check, and aggregate this data. Ultimately TAF successfully collected all observer forms from EMWG member organizations within a short period. Foundation staff checked the forms, made necessary corrections, completed the data entry, and compiled the final data. It was a difficult, time-consuming job that demanded a detailed and rigorous checking procedure. Obviously the actual data aggregation took much more time than originally envisaged. EMWG members now understand why joint, coordinated aggregation was so important and will be better situated in future elections.

Given the extreme limitations on time prior to the election, it was not possible to fully anticipate (and thereby avoid) this problem. Since the success of the EMWG involved a disparate set of organizations working together to make joint decisions, it is understandable that they prioritized organizational reporting in the field with the expectation that aggregation could easily be carried out centrally. They could not anticipate how their last minute decision astronomically increased the amount (and difficulty) of data to be entered. It therefore became impossible to get this data out before official data – though initial screening revealed that with the exception of 7 unions across 6 constituencies receiving failed scores due to serious irregularities, these together were not sufficient to alter the results of any parliamentary seat. The priority then shifted to getting EMWG organizations directly involved after the election in preparing their aggregated data so they would understand the process better and be in a better position to undertake aggregation in the field in the future. This process to aggregate the data took additional time. In order to clearly document the model, The Asia Foundation disaggregated polling station data as well so that a template for data collection and aggregation will exist for future elections.



It should be noted, however, that on election day 20 out of the 64 districts nationwide (almost one third) followed the original implementation system as outlined by the EMWG and submitted the observer forms through the coordinating committees as well as their individual organizations. In eight of these 20 districts, Foundation staff, while making site visits, met with representatives from all participating observer groups at the district level to reiterate the reporting system. These eight districts, along with 12 others, followed the original implementation system. Because organizations saw both kinds of reporting and aggregation in the field and the consequences of each, there is an incentive for the future to use the coordinating committees so that observer results can be reported quickly on election day.

In addition, there is a copy of at least one observer form from two organizations for every polling station nationwide that have been submitted to The Asia Foundation consistent with the number of observers funded. The coverage went as planned, with organizations in the field coordinating to cover gaps and move excess observers to stations where they were needed. When last minute changes were required the organizations reported changes by phone and fax. After the election TAF checked observer forms to verify the number and deployment of observers by organization. Organizations deployed observers with close to 100% coverage. In addition, it was possible to directly corroborate newspaper reports of violence and poll misconduct with observer reports from the field. Many incidents in the paper were confirmed by individual observer forms from that particular polling station.



## CONCLUSION

The Asia Foundation and its partners made a significant and positive impact on the 2001 parliamentary elections. TAF-supported NGO activities helped deter violence, increase public confidence in the overall election process, and encourage large numbers of voters to directly take responsibility for ensuring free and fair elections. The Foundation's election program nurtured and emphasized nine democratic principles of an election<sup>7</sup> as its NGO partners developed and carried out their activities. TAF and its partners began by successfully implementing several Voter Information and Awareness strategies. These included a nationwide slogan contest which resulted in the distribution of posters throughout the countryside encouraging women to vote and enabling the electorate to be more thoughtful and informed about their rights and more cautious about the choices they made. The Voter Verification Campaign was particularly significant because it demonstrated that a mass communications campaign could address even highly politicized issues and offer citizens ways to protect their rights. Large numbers of voters throughout the country responded to the voter verification campaign that for the first time gave every citizen the opportunity to check the voter list and apply for corrective measures if necessary. The *pot gaan* theater and drama presentations showed how effective and cost efficient it can be to inform and raise voter awareness among a largely illiterate population en masse through such a popular medium.

The Training and Capacity Building strategy included a Women's Candidate Training program that demonstrated women political candidates can be effectively trained and equipped to confidently campaign and present themselves as serious candidates within political parties for both reserved as well as general seats. The women candidates were enthusiastic about their week of training, mock campaigns, and a mock election that in the end also served as a teaching mechanism for local election officials and citizens. Current party politics and security and financial concerns for independent candidates, however, stand as critical obstacles to greater involvement of women in the political process without provision for reserved seats.

The Candidate and Garment Worker Dialogues also proved to be an extremely useful tool, indeed a model, for issue-based campaigning, accountability, and true political debate in order to set local and national priorities. These dialogues gave voice to women garment workers who gained experience and confidence in expressing issues of concern directly to candidates, and to political candidates who began to identify constituent issues as a priority in their own platforms and to capitalize on using this special interest to advance their campaigns. The challenge was raised to publicly debate voter issues and to hold all parties accountable for their campaign pledges. Though candidates were unwilling to engage face-to-face in any debates, they individually were willing to present their positions directly to gatherings of garment workers or representatives from the public media.

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<sup>7</sup>See Introduction, pp. 2-3 above, for these principles.



A third training and capacity building strategy, the Gatekeeper Training of editors, journalists, and reporters, resulted in increased overall election coverage and more in-depth analysis of news stories in newspapers and on television. The training also produced a common code of conduct for gatekeepers, and shared ideas about improving coverage in future elections.

The Election Monitoring strategy of TAF and its partners included three models of activities with significant, nationwide impact. First, long term monitoring began several months before the election with broad, national coverage of the pre-election campaign by a civil society organization and a group of trained journalists and reporters. These two "watch dog" groups successfully reported acts of violence, campaign misconduct, and election code violations, giving the Election Commission and local election and law enforcement officials the opportunity to recover illegal arms and investigate reported violence and misconduct. It most importantly gave notice to candidates and parties that illegal activities would not be ignored or overlooked. The first steps were taken to provide event- and issue-based political reporting in the news media as well as to conduct opinion polls and voter surveys.

The second election monitoring strategy, comprehensive domestic monitoring, was an enormous and complex undertaking. It was an important achievement that, for the first time ever, a diverse group of civil society organizations came together as the EMWG to meet this election day challenge. The successful deployment of almost 200,000 observers in an extremely short period of time is remarkable. This 29-member working group developed a structure for national and local election operations, a methodology for recruitment, training, observation, and data aggregation and collection, and a successful deployment strategy.

Although there were significant differences among coalition members, the EMWG committed itself to consensus-based decision making and a rotating leadership with support from both TAF and non-TAF members. Despite their diverse opinions and individual perspectives this group spoke with a unified voice. Their unity was effective when advocating for changes in the election guidelines and later when observers needed to be accredited for election day observation. It was critical to the democratic process in Bangladesh that a civil society monitoring coalition be able to declare unanimously and confidently, based on direct nationwide observation, that the elections were free and fair. In contrast to the expectations of widespread violence on election day, this was one of the most peaceful elections ever held in Bangladesh. The one new ingredient that helped to create a peaceful environment was the overwhelming number of domestic monitors.

Third, the International Observers supported by TAF and deployed throughout the country alongside domestic monitors provided a regional and international endorsement based on international election standards. The ANFREL team gave Bangladesh much-needed positive affirmation for its parliamentary elections as well as a strong endorsement for passing this critical step in the democratic process. The partnership of international and domestic observers was particularly effective in strengthening voter confidence in the integrity of the election process and contributed to high voter turnout.



The TAF 2001 elections program offered a comprehensive, diverse, and innovative approach to help Bangladesh successfully meet the challenge of open, transparent, and peaceful elections. Through the recent election process TAF's partner organizations have learned valuable lessons about the effectiveness of projects like the mass communication campaigns, the empowerment which comes with direct candidate-constituent dialogues, and the vital contribution that domestic monitors can make. These achievements demonstrate new progress toward strengthening Bangladesh's young democracy, which go beyond previous elections that focussed on voter education and mechanisms of voting. The 2001 initiatives represent a shift to greater ownership by diverse civil society organizations, greater citizen-candidate interactions, more issue-based campaigning, and higher standards of accountability for candidates and political parties.



## APPENDIX A: EMWG Members

Association for Community Development (ACD)

Action on Disability and Development (ADD)

Association for Social Advancement (ASA)

Association for Social welfare Media and Activity (ASMA)

Banchte Shekha

Bangladesh Human Rights Commission (BHRC)

Bangladesh Labour Research Foundation (BLRF)

Bangladesh Nari Progoti Sangha (BNPS)

BROTEE

Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR)

Coodinating Council for Human Rights in Bangladesh (CCHRB)

Coast Trust

Democracywatch

Jatiya Nirbachon Projobecon Parisad/National Election Observation Council (JANIPOP/NEOC)

Khan Foundation

Liberty Movement

Mass-line Media Centre (MMC)

Nari Pokkho

Odhikar

Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS)

Rudisof

Rupantar

Service Civil International (SCI)

Shariatpur Development Society (SDS)

Social Network

Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD)

Society On Health And Care (SOHAC)

Welfare Association of Village Empowerment (WAVE)



## Appendix B: Breakdown of Election Observers

### Status of TAF funded election observers

#	Grantee	Election Observers Planned as per L/A	Total Observers Actually Deployed	Stationary Observers	Forms Received	Balance Due to Observer Pairs <sup>1</sup>	Balance <sup>2</sup>
1	BNPS	43,600	43,600	39,955	36,138	3,817	3,645
2	Democracy Watch	9,616	9,616	8,748	8,324	424	868
3	Khan Foundation	10,000	10,000	8,842	8,803	39	1,158
4	Banchte Shekha	2,500	2,500	2,368	1,997	371	132
5	MMC	3,000	3,000	2,467	2,467	0	533
6	RDRS	2,000	2,000	1,708	1,628	80	292
7	BSEHR	1,650	1,650	1,600	1,600	0	50
8	BROTEE	18,288	16,985	15,158	10,608	4,550	1,827
9	ACD	1,200	1,200	1,178	1,178	0	22
10	SCI	1,700	1,616	1,510	1,510	0	106
11	FEMA (TAF funded)	12,810	12,810	12,810	6,558	6,252	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>106,364</b>	<b>104,977</b>	<b>96,344</b>	<b>80,811</b>	<b>15,533</b>	<b>8,633</b>

<sup>1</sup>only one form submitted for each observer pair

<sup>2</sup>see below

L/A: Letter of Agreement

### Additional Observers (TAF funded from balance above)

#	Grantee	Mobile Observers	District Coordinators	Constituency Coordinators	Union Coordinators	Total
1	BNPS	252	45	164	3,184	3,645
2	Democracy Watch	150	40	177	501	868
3	Khan Foundation	200	29	56	873	1,158
4	Banchte Shekha	30	0	6	96	132
5	MMC	40	0	32	461	533
6	RDRS	30	6	16	240	292
7	BSEHR	22	0	28	0	50
8	BROTEE	232	33	94	1,468	1,827
9	ACD	18	4	0	0	22
10	SCI	24	0	17	65	106
11	FEMA (TAF funded)	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>998</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>590</b>	<b>6,888</b>	<b>8,633</b>

**Other EMWG Observers**

#	Organization	Stationary Observers	Mobile Observers	Total
1	ADD	450	0	450
2	BHRC	32,500	0	32,500
3	CCHRB	6,760	0	6,760
4	JANIPOP	0	3,000	3,000
5	Liberty Movement	410	0	410
6	Odhikar	280	0	280
<b>Total</b>		<b>40,400</b>	<b>3,000</b>	<b>43,400</b>

**Total Deployed Observers**

#	Organization	Observers
1	TAF Funded Stationary Observers	96,344
2	TAF Funded Additional Observers	8,633
3	FEMA	49,377
4	Other EMWG Organizations	43,400
<b>Total</b>		<b>197,754</b>