

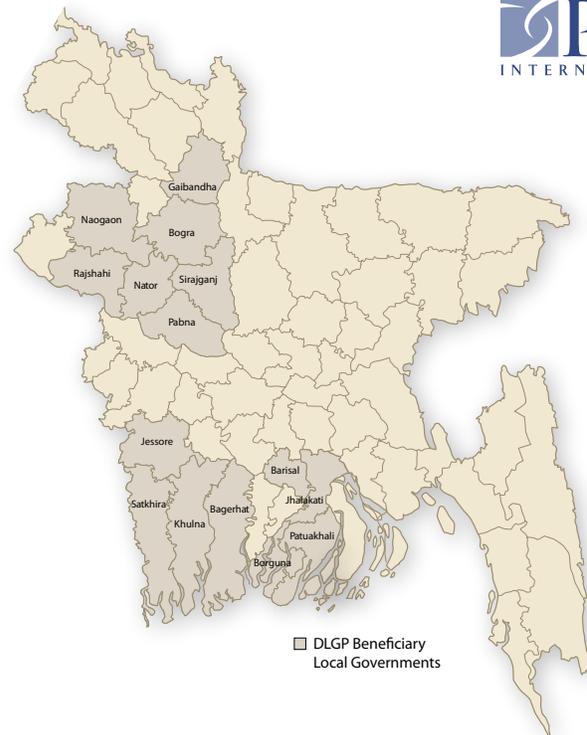


Increasing Transparent and Accountable Governance in Bangladesh

In one of the ironies of the developing world, democratic local government in Bangladesh was created during the years of the country's military dictatorships, and it has been generally opposed by its own national governments ever since "democracy" was restored in 1991. In the nation's British parliamentary-style system, Members of Parliament prefer to take credit for any improvements in the condition of their local constituents. Public services are overseen by central government appointees who are not accountable to local councils. Also, since independence in 1974, Bangladesh has received much international aid, which has resulted in NGOs funded from abroad performing many functions that elsewhere in the world are performed by local governments. An unexpected outburst of Islamic militancy and Bangladesh's ranking as the world's most corrupt country for five straight years further threaten democratic governance.

In this context, the USAID Bangladesh mission supports decentralization and the devolution of authority to democratically elected, politically responsible local governments. Through the Democratic Local Governance Program (DLGP), a three-year project funded by USAID, RTI will build on the successes of previous efforts and will continue to advance the capacity and sustainability of local governments and to improve public administration in Bangladesh.

Managed out of the capital in Dhaka, the project implements activities in 85 local governments in the northwest and southwest regions of the country, and also provides assistance to build the management capacity and sustainability of the country's main local government associations, the Municipal Association of Bangladesh (MAB) and the Bangladesh Union Parishad Forum (BUPF). To make effective use of its resources and to reach geographically dispersed governments, the project works through four highly regarded local NGOs: South Asia Partnership, Khan Foundation, Democracy Watch, and Power & Participation Research Center.



Expected results

- Significantly more efficient, independent, and responsive local governments;
- Democratically elected, democratically managed, politically unaffiliated, and sustainable local government associations; and
- Better informed public and political elites who are more inclined toward decentralization and the devolution of power to local governments.

Increasing Capacity of Local Governments

As noted, DLGP is working with 85 local governments—15 municipalities and 70 union parishads—to create more efficient, more independent, and more responsive local institutions.

The project will implement capacity-building activities such as training (including training of trainers, participatory workshops, and study tours) to help local government officials learn management skills, cost-effective ways of delivering services, and implementation of participatory planning and budgeting.

DLGP will also implement activities aimed at identifying potential areas of resource mobilization, such as public-



DLGP Chief of Party, Lamar Cravens (l) congratulates Mizanur Rahman Shikdar chairman of the Chotobighai Union Parishad, on signing a Memorandum of Cooperation for technical assistance.

(continued)

private partnerships; outsourcing; and improved management and collection of current or new fees, taxes, and licenses. In parallel, the program will help lessen public misunderstanding and mistrust of local government by bringing newspaper reporters and editors together with local government leaders to educate each about the functions of the other.

Merging participatory strategic planning with municipal strengthening and improvements in service delivery and finance will help bring communities together and reinforce the importance of a transparent government.



Recent Publication: *Institutional Mapping for Local Government Reform in Bangladesh*. Written by Dr. Mohammad Habibur Rahman, an eminent Bangladeshi scholar, this paper outlines the current state of local government and helps guide reform activities. See project website for full report.

Support to Local Government Associations

In addition to aiding the local governments, RTI also is providing direct technical assistance to the associations that represent them—the BUPF and the MAB—in order to increase their institutional capacity.

The MAB is an association for pourashavas, the municipalities or urban local governments; the BUPF represents union parishads, or rural local governments. Created with support from DLGP's predecessor to oppose further erosion of the authority of the urban and rural governments by an expanding central state, both associations now face serious challenges in achieving sustainability and decreasing their almost total dependence on foreign assistance.

Indeed, DLGP's main policy work will be to strengthen these local government associations as democratically led, financially solvent, and articulate advocates for the interests of local government.



Dr. Selina Hayat Ivy, Vice President, MAB, presenting findings of her breakout group during the association's Sustainability Workshop.

In pursuit of that aim, participatory workshops were held recently to address the sustainability of each organization. On February 17-19, 2006, the 33-member Executive Committee of the BUPF, along with the technical staff of DLGP and representatives of USAID and the Danish International Development Agency gathered in Khulna. A similar event was held March 1-2 in Tangail for the leadership of MAB. Both workshops were led by the social development organization Rupantar, and both employed adult learning techniques to obtain the leaders' opinions about their associations' institutional, operational, organizational, and financial sustainability.

DLGP is preparing sustainability plans for the MAB and BUPF, based on (1) an objective external review of each association's constitution and operating procedures, (2) international standards taken from the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA), and (3) the leaders' own subjective opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of their organizations.

Enhancing Transparency and Promoting Citizen Participation

Effectively engaging civil society and enhancing citizen participation in decision making are critical components of DLGP, and important steps in enhancing transparency.

Citizens will be encouraged to attend public planning meetings, such as open budgetary processes and joint municipal-community planning initiatives, to prioritize the needs of their community. In addition, the project will support the preparation of municipal information bulletins and radio programs in order to facilitate information-sharing with the public on objectives, progress, and other issues. These tools are particularly useful in rural areas without Internet access to information about local governments.

For more information about the project, please contact

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DEMOCRATIC
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