



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

# **FINAL REPORT**

## **USAID/Bangladesh Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information (AWRTI) Activity Final Performance Evaluation**

**March 27, 2022**

This document was produced by ME&A, Inc., at the request of the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared independently by the USAID Bangladesh Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (BMEL) Activity.

# **FINAL REPORT**

## **USAID/Bangladesh Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information (AWRTI) Activity Final Performance Evaluation**

**March 27, 2022**

Contract No./Order No. GS-10F-154BA/72038819M00001

USAID Bangladesh Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (BMEL) Activity

Prepared by

ME&A, Inc.

4350 East-West Highway, Suite 210

Bethesda, MD, 20814 USA

### **DISCLAIMER**

This report is made possible by the support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the sole responsibility of ME&A, Inc. and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	i
1.0 INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 Background .....	1
1.2 The Activity .....	2
1.3 Evaluation Purpose.....	3
1.4 Evaluation Questions.....	3
2.0 METHODOLOGY .....	4
2.1 Evaluation Limitations.....	4
3.0 EVALUATION FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS.....	5
3.1 EQ 1: Effectiveness – To what extent has AWRTI been successful in achieving activity objectives? .....	5
3.2 EQ 2: Relevance – To what extent are the activity objectives still relevant to the current development circumstances in Bangladesh?.....	16
3.3 EQ 3: Client Satisfaction – To what degree do representatives of the Government of Bangladesh (GOB), civil society (non-governmental organizations [NGOs]), and communities perceive that AWRTI has been successful in achieving its objectives?.....	18
3.4 EQ 4: Sustainability – How much progress has the implementer made in ensuring sustainability of AWRTI activities beyond USAID support? .....	24
4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS .....	26
4.1 USAID .....	26
4.2 The Carter Center .....	27
ANNEXES .....	29
Annex 1: Desk Review.....	30
Annex 2: List of Trainings, 2017–2020.....	32
Annex 3: KII and FGD Participant Lists.....	34
Annex 4: KII Interview Guides and FGD Guide.....	39
Annex 5: Glossary of Terms.....	46

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: AWRTI Results Framework .....	2
Figure 2: Effectiveness of Training for Government Actors.....	10
Figure 3: Efficiency of Different Mechanisms Used to Enable Women’s Access to Information .....	11
Figure 4: Agreement with Various Statements Regarding Women’s Access to Information (A2I).....	19

# LIST OF TABLES

- Table 1: AWRTI Evaluation Questions and Sub-questions ..... 3
- Table 2: Geographical Distribution of Data Collection Activities ..... 4
- Table 3: Overview of AWRTI Sub-partners, Upazilas, and Union/Wards by District..... 6
- Table 4: Performance Indicators for Intermediate Result 1 ..... 7
- Table 5: RTI Working Group Meetings Held at the Various Administrative Levels ..... 8
- Table 6: Performance Indicators for Intermediate Result 2..... 9
- Table 7: Performance Indicators for Intermediate Result 3..... 12
- Table 8: Number of Courtyard Meetings Conducted ..... 13
- Table 9: The Barriers Women Face in the Different Districts..... 17
- Table 10: Examples of How RTI Was Made a Cross-Cutting Issue by CSOs ..... 21
- Table 11: Examples of the Range of Support and Benefits Sought and Provided..... 22
- Table 12: Overall Conclusions About AWRTI..... 24
- Table 13: Overview of AWRTI Sustainability Successes and Threats ..... 25

# ACRONYMS

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Description</b>
A2I	Access to Information
ACD	Association of Community Development
AS	Agrogoti Sangstha
AWRTI	Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information
BIGD	BRAC Institute of Governance and Development
BMEL	Bangladesh Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
COP	Chief of Party
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSA	Civil Society Actor
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAC	District Advisory Committee
DO	Development Objective
DRG	Office of Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance
EQ	Evaluation Question
ET	Evaluation Team
FCDO	(United Kingdom) Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FD-6	Foreign Donation-6
GOB	Government of Bangladesh
IAT	Implementation Assessment Tool
IDEA	Institute of Development Affairs
IR	Intermediate Result
KII	Key Informant Interview
LGI	Local Government Institution
ME&A	ME&A, Inc.
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MJF	Manusher Jonno Foundation
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOWCA	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs
MRDI	Management and Resources Development Initiative
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RTI	Right to Information
RTIOTS	RTI Online Tracking System
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SMS	Short Message Service

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Description</b>
TCC	The Carter Center
ToT	Training of Trainers
TUS	Trinamul Unnayan Sangstha
UN	United Nations
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The United States Agency for International Development in Bangladesh (USAID/Bangladesh) commissioned ME&A, Inc. (ME&A) to conduct the final performance evaluation of the Advancing Women’s Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh (AWRTI) Activity implemented by The Carter Center (TCC). The activity is being implemented under USAID’s Development Objective (DO) 1: *“Improved democratic systems that promote transparency, accountability, and integrity.”*

AWRTI began in August 2016 and is due to end in February 2022. Initially, its geographical focus was on Dhaka, Sylhet, and Khagrachari districts. However, the activity was expanded in September 2019 when it received a cost extension—allowing it to add two new districts, Rajshahi and Satkhira, and make structural and methodological changes based on lessons learned. At the same time, its work in Dhaka ended. AWRTI’s overall funding is \$2,399,415.

A five-person Evaluation Team (ET) conducted the final performance evaluation, focusing on four evaluation questions (EQs), between October 2021 and January 2022 with significant backup support from ME&A’s Bangladesh Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (BMEL) Activity. The ET collected data in the participating districts from November 13–25, 2021 using key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and online interviews. The evaluation report provides an overview of the ET’s findings, conclusions, and recommendations for both USAID/Bangladesh and TCC.

## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

### **EQ 1: Effectiveness – To what extent has AWRTI been successful in achieving activity objectives?**

#### **Findings**

AWRTI was effective in achieving the overall objective of *“Improved access to information for women in Bangladesh.”* It was most successful in achieving Intermediate Result (IR) 2: *“National and target local governments more effectively and equitably provide information to women in target districts,”* and IR 3: *“Civil Society Organizations [CSOs] and information liaisons in target districts advance women’s use of the right of access to information.”* Concerning IR 1, *“The legal and social environment is more enabling of women’s access to information,”* there was a clear change in the social environment with evidence that women were aware of their Right to Information (RTI) and had sought out and accessed services. This was particularly important for marginalized women, who are women that are relegated to an insignificant position in society due to various socio-cultural, geographic, ethnic, religious, and economic factors that act as barriers to inclusion, making them vulnerable to exclusionary and discriminatory practices, and depriving them of the rights and privileges enjoyed by the rest of society. AWRTI was particularly focused on meeting these women’s RTI needs with government, civil society, and community leaders—including religious leaders. One way in which the activity worked to achieve this goal was by supporting marginalized women to make requests for information through Tottho Apa, Tottho Bondhus, youth, sub-partners, and CSOs. Another way was by strengthening the government through the RTI Working Group to better support women’s RTI needs. AWRTI also trained government officials and staff at all levels to better understand women’s RTI needs and provided gender training, which helped them see and understand the challenges faced by women, including marginalized women.

The most effective awareness-raising activities for women were courtyard meetings, trainings, and booth camps. Courtyard meetings were mentioned by everyone interviewed as effective because they brought women together in a safe space to learn about RTI. Trainings and booth camps provided marginalized women the opportunity to come into contact with government officials to ask questions and make requests. Capacity-building of CSO members and using the multiplier effect through Training of Trainers

(ToT) with CSO members and youth led to an increase in RTI awareness. At least half of the CSOs interviewed noted that RTI is now integral to their programs. Examples of how it is being integrated included incorporating RTI modules into CSOs' staff training and creating RTI corners in their offices. Interviewees also noted how AWRTI's reach was successfully extended through the work being done by CSOs, journalists, and religious leaders, creating a multiplier effect. However, while the impact of this multiplier effect was anecdotally evident, it was not measured by the project. AWRTI also supported marginalized women to make requests for information through Tottho Apa, Tottho Bondhus, youth, sub-partners, and CSOs. While Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused programming challenges, TCC and the sub-partners creatively addressed these challenges to minimize disruptions as much as possible.

## Conclusions

AWRTI improved women's access to information and there was clear evidence that the social environment improved substantially in the areas where the activity was implemented. However, significant barriers such as language, poverty, and geographic variation remain—preventing marginalized women from accessing information. Some of these barriers were addressed on a case-by-case basis by AWRTI's sub-partners and CSOs, however, better government policies are needed if they are to be overcome.

The activity also had unintended positive consequences, e.g., relationships and links made at the local level between government, CSOs, and communities/women were created that improved women's access to RTI. Sub-partner CSOs played a coordination role at the district and upazila levels and were a major factor in the overall success of the project, contributing to its effectiveness and sustainability. One area that needs improvement is the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) system that is in need of revisions to better measure improvements in marginalized women's access to RTI and the multiplier effects of programming.

## EQ 2: Relevance – To what extent are the activity's objectives still relevant to the current development circumstances in Bangladesh?

### Findings

AWRTI is aligned with and supports both the supply and demand side of RTI implementation. From early on in its implementation, AWRTI contributed to creating an enabling environment for women's access to information. In early 2018, the multi-stakeholder committees set up during the first years of AWRTI were absorbed into the RTI Working Group.<sup>1</sup> This move, which came with TCC's engagement, prompted a broadening of the RTI Working Group's focus to work on women's RTI at the national, division, district, and upazila levels.<sup>2</sup> The new mandate required female representation and CSO participation for the first time, and circulars with directives to this effect were distributed in May 2018. This was a change in how RTI operated at the national level and was considered a major success for the project.

Regular engagement through the RTI Working Group facilitated ongoing engagements with the Cabinet Division and other government actors. Over AWRTI's five years, TCC engaged over 50 government institutions, trained over 1,500 government officials, supported the government with awareness-raising material, and fed into terms of references of government working groups on women's RTI.

AWRTI also supported the Information Commission's RTI Online Tracking System (RTIOTS), which helped facilitate requests for information. This was especially relevant given the challenges posed by COVID-19. Creative approaches were used to help women, including marginalized women, access the internet, though using online tools was and remains a challenge for many of them.

---

<sup>1</sup> Until 2018, TCC—with relevant non-governmental organization (NGO) and government partners—organized multi-stakeholder committees focused on identifying priority areas for policy-level efforts to improve women's access to information.

<sup>2</sup> The Carter Center Annual Report, 2017–2018, p. 2.



## Conclusions

Due to the low level of knowledge and awareness of the RTI Act throughout Bangladesh, raising awareness remained a priority of AWRTI throughout its five-year implementation. It strengthened the RTI Working Group to prioritize a focus on women's RTI needs and engaged in online measures in response to disruptions that arose due to COVID-19. AWRTI is now in a strong position to further mainstream women's RTI needs—including marginalized women—and push for reforms at the policy level.

**EQ 3: Client Satisfaction – To what degree do representatives of the Government of Bangladesh (GOB), civil society (Non-Governmental Organizations [NGOs]), and local communities perceive that AWRTI has been successful in achieving its objectives?**

## Findings

There was evidence from all sectors engaged in the evaluation that AWRTI increased women's awareness about RTI. A major finding was that the combination of training and increased interaction with local communities, including women who are aware of RTI, encouraged government actors to be better prepared and do work regarding women's access to information. There was evidence government actors, both civil servants and local government representatives targeted by the project, improved relationships with CSOs and developed a better understanding of women's RTI needs and its importance. Their attitude was also more positive about their work with women's RTI.

CSOs, journalists, and religious leaders interviewed demonstrated their understanding of the importance of RTI for women in general and for marginalized women in particular. They all contributed to increasing awareness using their networks. The sub-partners highlighted improved relationships with government actors and gained a greater ability to tackle issues on a case-by-case basis. Women reported increased engagement with government actors through visits to their offices and activities that facilitated engagement such as booth camps, where they could ask questions and make requests on the spot. Women also talked about how much taking these actions, often for the first time, increased their confidence and leadership skills. Marginalized women reported their involvement with AWRTI had a major impact on their lives.

## Conclusions

All stakeholders from the GOB, CSOs, and local communities noted AWRTI was successful in achieving its objectives because of how well TCC and the sub-partners worked together. A major contributing factor to the achievement of the activity's objectives was the sub-partners' success implementing AWRTI's project mechanisms. One such mechanism mentioned often was booth camps, which proved to be a successful mechanism for helping women learn about RTI directly from government actors and allowed them to submit on-the-spot requests. As a result of their success, sub-partners were well respected by all stakeholders. CSOs from all participating districts made RTI integral to their programs, e.g., holding discussions on RTI in their regular staff meetings, including a module on RTI in all their training of staff and partners, and encouraging the further mainstreaming of RTI working through deputy commissioners and other government actors. Although not within AWRTI's scope, stakeholders noted that many socio-economic barriers limiting women's access to information remain prevalent in Bangladeshi society, and that access to information for women will not be fully addressed until these barriers are dealt with at the policy level.

**EQ 4: Sustainability – How much progress has the implementer made in ensuring sustainability? Of AWRTI activities beyond USAID support?**

## Findings

TCC made efforts to ensure AWRTI would be sustained in the long term. These efforts included hiring local staff and strengthening existing government structures such as the RTI Working Group for implementing RTI. AWRTI also helped build the capacity of the sub-partners, government actors, and civil society actors (CSAs) through trainings, workshops, and other institutional capacity-building mechanisms.

Today, all four sub-partners are well-respected institutions in their regions. AWRTI also engaged with youth, which proved helpful in moving activities online during COVID-19.

AWRTI also targeted multipliers such as CSOs that are integrating RTI into their programs, journalists who are writing good news stories, and religious leaders who are incorporating it into their Friday prayer services. Women also noted how once they were able to access information needed to obtain benefits and entitlements, they became empowered and were able pass the information to others in their family and communities, thereby sustaining and dissemination the knowledge and skills they had learned.

## **Conclusions**

AWRTI is a relevant and effective project because it accounts for both the demand and supply elements of RTI. Incorporating a women's rights dimension has helped to increase women's engagement in RTI. However, the activity operated in only 14 upazilas, 28 unions, and two wards within four districts, and will have impacted only a small geographical area once funding ends. Participants felt strongly that the activity or something similar should continue and be expanded to other areas.

It is important in the next phase of the project that greater efforts be made to ensure the GOB fulfills its responsibilities and obligations under the RTI Act. It will also be important for AWRTI to increase its breadth by: 1) strengthening current partners to reach a wider area and maybe engaging new partners; 2) continuing to advocate for the mainstreaming of women's RTI in all government offices in Bangladesh to ensure the supply side continues to be addressed; and 3) becoming an integral part of CSA programming to ensure that the demand side continues to be supported.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Provide increased financial support for RTI with a continued focus on marginalized women, making continued support conditional on achieving sustainable results.

### **IR 1: The legal and social environment is more enabling of women's access to information.**

- Encourage and support further efforts to integrate gender mainstreaming of RTI at the policy level—including requiring gender sensitivity training as part of all RTI training for civil servants and local government representatives at the national, district, upazila, and union levels.
- Encourage and support efforts at the policy level to address existing barriers to RTI for marginalized women, *i.e.*, geographical, socioeconomic, and language barriers.
- Encourage and support efforts to increase government action on the demand side of RTI by engaging the Ministry of Information and increasing public awareness through TV, radio, and awareness days.
- Further mainstream RTI by encouraging the Ministry of Education (MOE) to incorporate gender sensitivity and RTI in education curricula at all levels.
- Continue strengthening the RTI Working Group so it plays a monitoring role in the implementation of the 2022–2028 strategic plan for implementing RTI.
- Encourage further reforms such as advocating for a women's corner in all government agencies to further mainstream women's rights issues.

### **IR 2: National and target local governments more effectively and equitably provide information to women in target districts.**

- Further the supply side of RTI by mainstreaming RTI training for government and local government representatives.

- Advocate for policy to overcome the barriers that marginalize women and impede their access to information.

**IR 3: CSAs more effectively and equitably provide information to women in target districts.**

- Develop a user-friendly “good practices” guide that covers both the demand and supply sides—drawn from the existing ToT RTI curriculum and cost-effective practices.
- Develop a training strategy that utilizes the “good practices” guide to conduct ToT to support marginalized women’s needs across the country. Ensure incentives are provided to designated officers, Tottho Apa, and CSAs to encourage adoption and roll-out.
- Engage with relevant government agencies and CSOs to develop a draft policy aimed at addressing all barriers that marginalized women face accessing their RTI needs.

**Other**

- Follow up on the Cabinet Division’s efforts to convene all the donors and United Nations (UN) agencies such as the World Bank and the United Kingdom’s Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) to gain a deeper understanding of current RTI programming efforts and potential areas for USAID intervention.

# I.0 INTRODUCTION

The United States Agency for International Development in Bangladesh (USAID/Bangladesh) commissioned ME&A, Inc. (ME&A) to conduct the final performance evaluation of the Advancing Women’s Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh (AWRTI) Activity implemented by The Carter Center (TCC). The activity is being implemented under USAID’s Development Objective (DO) 1: *“Improved democratic systems that promote transparency, accountability, and integrity.”*

AWRTI began in August 2016 and is due to end in February 2022. Initially, its geographical focus was on Dhaka, Sylhet, and Khagrachari districts. However, the activity was expanded in September 2019 when it received a cost extension—allowing it to add two new districts, Rajshahi and Satkhira, and make structural and methodological changes based on lessons learned. At the same time, the activity’s work in Dhaka ended. Its overall funding is \$2,399,415.

The final performance evaluation was conducted between October 2021 and January 2022 by a five-person Evaluation Team (ET) with significant backup support from ME&A’s Bangladesh Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (BMEL) Activity. Data collection took place from November 13–25, 2021. The evaluation report provides an overview of the ET’s findings, conclusions, and recommendations for both USAID/Bangladesh and TCC.

## I.1 BACKGROUND

The Right to Information (RTI) Act (2009) provides citizens of Bangladesh with a clear process for exercising the right to access information and calls for public agencies to proactively disclose and publicize certain classes of information. These provisions promote people’s access to information held by any public agency, including the judicial and legislative branches of government.

Access to information is considered a crucial element of women’s empowerment. Women’s unrestricted access to information widens their access to social, political, and economic opportunities available for education, land, agriculture production, business, and political office. This has positive impacts on the purchasing power of women and their greater role in decision-making, both within and outside the household. With genuine access to information, women can take advantage of opportunities to change their lives, families, and communities.

Findings from a baseline study conducted by TCC and Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) in May 2016<sup>3</sup> found that women in Bangladesh face disproportional challenges exercising their fundamental right of access to information, which hinders their economic empowerment and the promotion and protection of their rights.<sup>4</sup> Although the RTI Act went into effect in 2009, the study found its implementation was slow, and there was little evidence that it was reaching the full population.<sup>5</sup>

The benefits of meaningful access to information for women have still not been fully met. While sporadic progress has been made, the continuing struggle to implement the RTI Act effectively and fully due to barriers such as a lack of engagement/awareness by women and women’s civil society organizations (CSOs); information flows that actively exclude women; and longstanding obstacles such as illiteracy, fear, safety, household responsibilities, language, lack of support, distance, immobility, and mindset of predominantly male public officials continue to play a role in creating gender asymmetries in the implementation of the RTI Act.

---

<sup>3</sup> The Carter Center/MJF’s Global Access to Information Program: Women and The Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh, May 2016.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

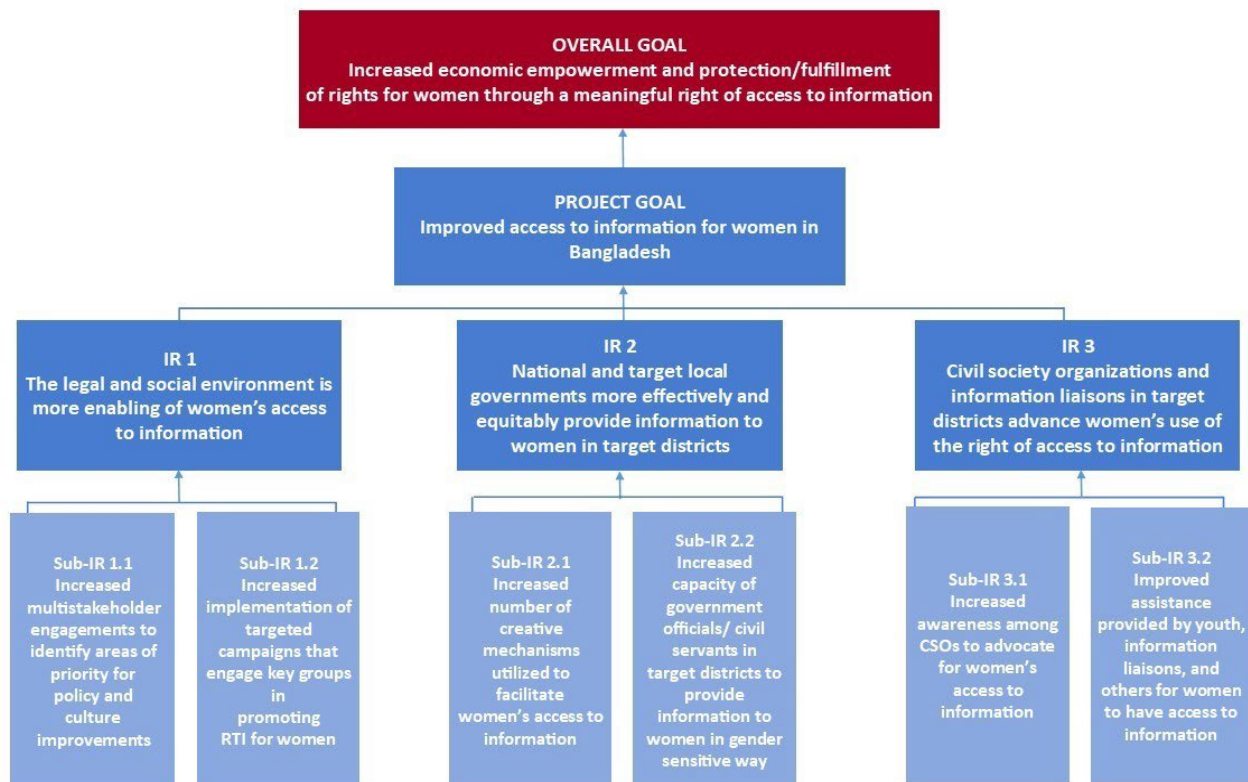
<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.18 and 56.

## I.2 THE ACTIVITY

AWRTI’s goal of “improved access to information for women in Bangladesh” aligns with the USAID/Bangladesh Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) Democracy and Governance results framework objective: “Increased citizen confidence in governance institutions” by contributing directly to Intermediate Result (IR) 1.2: “Greater accountability and transparency in public institutions,” as well as the listed sub-IR: “Informed citizenry actively engaging in democratic processes,” and the larger cross-cutting issue: “Increased women and youth in democratic processes.”<sup>6</sup>

To address the current inequities to women’s access to information in Bangladesh, and to further advance meaningful RTI for women in the targeted districts, AWRTI has worked to achieve three mutually reinforcing IRs highlighted in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: AWRTI Results Framework**



<sup>6</sup> The Indicator Matrix and Performance Data Table in TCC’s Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plan includes indicators for the overall project objective, IR 1, Sub-IR 1.1, Sub-IR 1.2, IR 2, GNDR-8, Sub-IR 2.1, Sub-IR 2.2, IR 3, Sub-IR 3.1, and Sub-IR 3.2. These are the indicators reviewed for this evaluation (The Carter Center AWRTI MEL Plan [Revised], pp. 22–25).

### I.3 EVALUATION PURPOSE

The purpose of the final performance evaluation is to measure the development outcomes of the activity and draw lessons learned for the selection, design, and implementation of any future RTI and/or transparency activity. The evaluation will: 1) assess the relevance and sustainability of the program outcomes; 2) review the activity’s overall performance by assessing actual results against targeted results; and 3) develop recommendations for USAID/Bangladesh concerning future programming in the governance sector. The primary intended audience for the evaluation findings and recommendations is USAID/Bangladesh’s Office of Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) and TCC.

### I.4 EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The ET conducted AWRTI’s final performance evaluation by answering four main evaluation questions (EQs) and sub-EQs (Table I).

**Table I: AWRTI Evaluation Questions and Sub-questions**

<b>EQ 1: Effectiveness – To what extent has AWRTI been successful in achieving activity objectives?</b>	
<b>Sub-EQs</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Is the activity implemented as intended according to the agreement?</li> <li>2. Have the methods of delivery contributed to ensuring that the activity is on track and moving toward achieving its annual and life-of-project targets?</li> <li>3. Are the intended results in the agreement occurring?</li> <li>4. Were there any unintended outcomes or consequences?</li> <li>5. What are the major factors influencing progress toward achievement or non-achievement of the objectives?</li> <li>6. To what extent did the activity integrate youth in implementation?</li> </ol>
<b>EQ 2: Relevance – To what extent are the activity’s objectives still relevant to the current development circumstances in Bangladesh?</b>	
<b>Sub-EQs</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How responsive has the activity been to changing needs within the policy environment and seizing opportunities for impact?</li> <li>2. What are the benefits of the activity’s policy analysis to policy actors and stakeholders? Are the benefits reaching them and, if yes, how? If not, why not?</li> <li>3. How do policy actors and stakeholders use the activity’s policy analysis and recommendations? How do policy actors and stakeholders assess the utility of the activity’s work?</li> </ol>
<b>EQ 3: Client Satisfaction – To what degree do representatives of the Government of Bangladesh (GOB), civil society (Non-Governmental Organizations [NGOs]), and community perceive that AWRTI has been successful in achieving its objectives?</b>	
<b>Sub-EQs</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To what extent do GOB and relevant civil society actors (CSAs) think that AWRTI has been successful in achieving its objectives?</li> <li>2. To what extent has the activity engaged multiple stakeholder groups (private sector, policy actors, think tanks, CSOs, etc.) to achieve its intended outcomes?</li> </ol>
<b>EQ 4: Sustainability – How much progress has the implementer made in ensuring the sustainability of AWRTI activities beyond USAID support?</b>	
<b>Sub-EQs</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What measures has the activity put in place to ensure the sustainability of the interventions?</li> <li>2. What measures should be taken to enhance sustainability?</li> </ol>

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

The ET used a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to conduct this evaluation—including an extensive desk review, which took place throughout the data collection phase. A total list of documents reviewed is in Annex I. Once USAID/Bangladesh approved the evaluation work plan, the ET conducted fieldwork from November 13–25, 2021. The ET divided into two sub-teams to conduct in-person data collection. One team collected data in Dhaka City, Rajshahi, and Satkhira districts, while the other team conducted data collection in Sylhet and Khagrachari districts. Overall, the ET conducted 39 key informant interviews (KIIs), 20 focus group discussions (FGDs) with five people in each FGD, and administered 81 survey questionnaires.<sup>7</sup> The team conducted 11 KIIs in Dhaka City—three with national government actors, three with TCC staff, four with national non-governmental partners, and one with USAID staff. The targets for the KIIs included seven categories of stakeholders per district: 1) sub-partner; 2) journalist; 3) religious leader; 4) district information officer; 5) deputy commissioner; 6) CSO leader; and 7) local government institution (LGI). Five categories of stakeholders participated in FGDs: 1) CSOs; 2) local government representatives (union parishad chairman, members including women); 3) RTI Working Group members; 4) women—including women heads of households and marginalized women; and 5) public servants (upazila-level government officials).

Table 2 provides an overview of the number of participants by division, site location/district, and data collection methods.

**Table 2: Geographical Distribution of Data Collection Activities**

Division	Site Locations / Districts	Method of Data Collection		
		KIIs	FGDs <sup>8</sup>	Surveys <sup>9</sup>
Dhaka	Dhaka City (national level)	11	-	-
Rajshahi	Rajshahi	7	5 (25)	7
Khulna	Satkhira	7	5 (25)	15
Chittagong	Khagrachari	7	5 (25)	32
Sylhet	Sylhet	7	5 (25)	27
	<b>Total (1 Dhaka City, and 5 districts)</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>20 (100)</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Total Respondents 39 + 100 + 81 = 220</b>				

The ET ensured both men and women participated in KIIs and FGDs.<sup>10</sup> Upon completing fieldwork, the ET coded the KII and FGD transcripts to synthesize and analyze the data. The ET held one out-brief with USAID/Bangladesh on December 13, 2021, and another with TCC on December 15, 2021. Feedback from the out-briefs has been incorporated into the draft evaluation report.

### 2.1 EVALUATION LIMITATIONS

As with any proposed evaluation design, biases and limitations are inevitable. To avoid selection bias and minimize the risk of speaking to only those who had positive experiences, the ET collected a full list of

<sup>7</sup> The survey respondents were comprised of 72 percent government actors, 21 percent CSO members, 4 percent CSO leaders, 2 percent other, and 1 percent sub-grantees. Additionally, the breakdown by district included 40 percent from Khagrachari, 33 percent from Sylhet, 18 percent from Satkhira, and 9 percent from Rajshahi.

<sup>8</sup> Estimates based on a minimum attendance of five participants in each of the proposed FGDs.

<sup>9</sup> Survey administration was conducted using the ArcGIS Survey123 and the Zaman short message service (SMS) blast platforms.

<sup>10</sup> Thirty (30) men and nine women participated in the KIIs. Sixty-six (66) men and 34 women participated in the FGDs.

contacts from TCC and randomly selected individuals from the list to participate in KIIs and FGDs. Social desirability bias may have been an issue—especially in the FGDs, where respondents within the group may have been reticent to contribute in a way that differed too much from the views of others in the group and, more generally, what was perceived as acceptable to the group. The limited timeframe for fieldwork meant that the ET missed feedback from several key individuals who were not available due to other commitments. While replacements were made for these individuals, they did not have the same level of engagement with AWRTI. To address these limitations, the ET conducted an extensive desk review, included survey findings from respondents who were selected from databases of all trainees, grantees, and other beneficiaries, and separate out-briefs with USAID and TCC helped address gaps and clarify remaining issues. The use of different data collection methodologies (KII, FGDs, survey, desk review, and out-brief feedback) and data triangulation mitigated these limitations.

## 3.0 EVALUATION FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

### 3.1 EQ 1: EFFECTIVENESS – TO WHAT EXTENT HAS AWRTI BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN ACHIEVING ACTIVITY OBJECTIVES?

#### Findings

In 2014, TCC piloted the Global Access to Information Program in Bangladesh using the Access to Information Legislation Implementation Assessment Tool (IAT) and found significant lags in the implementation and operationalization of the RTI Act 2009.<sup>11</sup> In 2016, TCC and MJF conducted a baseline study, which found that women are unable to exercise the fundamental right of access to information with the same facility (frequency, ease, and rate of success) as men.<sup>12</sup> The study provided a better understanding of women’s poor knowledge of their rights, including the right to access to information and the places where they can receive information. The study also found that, compared to men, there were inequities in accessing information and barriers to accessing information because of—among other reasons—a lack of awareness, illiteracy, and lack of family support.<sup>13</sup> The study also found that findings differed by age and area where women lived.<sup>14</sup>

TCC started AWRTI in August 2016 to address inequities and barriers women—including marginalized women<sup>15</sup>—face accessing information. The activity was implemented in two slums of Dhaka City by Management and Resources Development Initiative (MRDI) and selected areas of Khagrachari and Sylhet with sub-partners Trinamul Unnayan Sangstha (TUS) and the Institute of Development Affairs (IDEA), respectively, working under the auspices of MJF. In Dhaka, the intervention that lasted from the beginning of the project until 2019 focused on a group of young women living in two different slums who were trained in RTI and became “changemakers.” During the cost extension in 2019, USAID/Bangladesh provided more funding to continue AWRTI with two major changes: 1) The Dhaka City portion ended; and 2) TCC took over full management of AWRTI. MJF—a well-known national organization involved in

---

<sup>11</sup> Pilot Findings in Select Agencies: Bangladesh: The Carter Center’s Access to Information Legislation Implementation Assessment Tool, November 2014.

<sup>12</sup> The Carter Center/MJF’s Global Access to Information Program: Women and The Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh, May 2016, pp. 26–27 and 53.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.51.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32 and 34, respectively.

<sup>15</sup> Marginalized women are women who are relegated to an insignificant position in society due to various socio-cultural, geographic, ethnic, religious, and economic factors that act as barriers to inclusion, making them vulnerable to exclusionary and discriminatory practices, and depriving them of the rights and privileges enjoyed by the rest of society.



programming, research, studies, and assessments related to RTI—had no further involvement with AWRTI after 2019.

TUS and IDEA continued to work in Khagrachari and Sylhet, respectively, adding more areas to the ones they had already been working in. In 2020, the Association of Community Development (ACD) and Agrogoti Sangstha (AS) were brought in to work in selected upazilas and unions within Rajshahi and Satkhira, respectively. Overall AWRTI activities took place across the four districts in a total of 14 upazilas, 28 unions, and two wards.<sup>16</sup> Table 3 provides a more detailed overview of the areas covered by the activity. In the extension period, marginalized women and youth remained the focus with Dalit women as one of the target groups.

**Table 3: Overview of AWRTI Sub-partners, Upazilas, and Union/Wards by District<sup>17</sup>**

District	Sub-partner	Upazila	Union/Ward
Sylhet	IDEA	Sylhet Sadar	Tultikar, Tukerbazar
		Jainta Pur	Chikanagul, Fatehpur
		Dakshin Surma	Tetli, Boroikandi
		Bishownath	Bishownath, Alankari
		Osmani Nagar	Dayamir, Tazpur
Khagrachari	TUS	Matiranga	Matiranga Sadar, Belchhari Union
		Khagrachari Sadar	Golabari, Perachara Union
		Panchari	Latiban, Panchari sadar
		Dighinala	Boalkhali, Kobakhali Union
Satkhira	AS	Satkhira Sadar	Bramarajpur, Fingri
		Kaligonj	Bisnupur, Kushulia
		Shyamnagar	Iswashripur. Munshiganj
Rajshahi	ACD	Rajshahi City Corporation	Ward-5, Ward-6
		Godagari	Gogram Matikata
		Tanore	Chanduria. Saranjai

The key challenges to implementing AWRTI were: 1) a later-than-anticipated start of partner activities caused by the long Foreign Donation-6 (FD-6) approval process; and 2) delays in the change of programming due to restrictions imposed by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Although the FD-6 applications were filed promptly every year, there were often delays in approvals. For instance, IDEA did not receive its approval until February 2020 and TUS did not receive its until March 2020. The selection of new partners in Satkhira and Rajshahi also took time, but by the second half of 2020 all four sub-partners were finally fully on board.

The main delays and changes in programming due to COVID-19 restrictions included moving activities online and postponing others until it was safe to meet in person, following all COVID-19 safety protocols. Activities that could not be conducted online, such as street dramas, were replaced by essay and art contests. Using proactive steps, TCC and its sub-partners managed the challenges and largely implemented AWRTI according to the agreement. The COVID-19 disruptions impacted aspects of the project in different ways, including meeting project targets, which are highlighted in more detail below.

<sup>16</sup> The reason for highlighting the number of upazilas and unions across the districts is to show that only these areas within the targeted districts were covered.

<sup>17</sup> This overview accounts for the sub-partners that worked on AWRTI after the 2019 cost extension.

## Analysis of 2019-2021 performance indicators

There are two types of indicators included in AWRTI's Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) system. Performance indicators were set at the beginning of the project to measure progress toward: 1) targeted IRs and sub-IRs; and 2) core performance indicators—including one cross-cutting gender indicator, GNDR-8. Until 2019, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) worked in close coordination with TCC to implement the MEL system, with TCC maintaining overall authority and responsibility for the system itself. In 2019, TCC hired an MEL officer to take full responsibility for the system with support from TCC in Atlanta, Georgia. Feedback from the donor indicates reporting improved once TCC took full control of the MEL system.

AWRTI's Indicator Matrix and Performance Data Table includes two indicators for IR 1, one for Sub-IR 1.1, one for Sub-IR 1.2, one for IR 2, one for GNDR-8, one for Sub-IR 2.1, one for Sub-IR 2.2, one for IR 3, two for Sub IR-3.1, and one for Sub-IR 3.2. These indicators are discussed in greater detail in Tables 4, 6, and 7.

Five of the indicators focus on the perceptions of people surveyed, and the remaining are output-oriented indicators that focus on the number of people engaged in an activity, the number of meetings held, or the number of policies produced. Narrative reports make a clear connection between the indicators and the relevant activities to be measured.

The narrative quarterly and annual reports are rich in detail and help show the significant amount of work carried out through AWRTI. The reports may have benefitted from a glossary of key terms and activities, and numbers of trainings or meetings in boxes at the beginning of sections. The lessons learned sections included in the annual reports are good practice measures, and there is evidence they have been used to guide AWRTI programming.

### IR 1: The legal and social environment is more enabling of women's access to information

Reviewing results for Years 3, 4, and 5 show that in no targets were met in Year 4. However, in Year 5 all targets were either met or exceeded. This result reflects the disruptions associated with COVID-19 impacted AWRTI's ability to meet results in Year 4. Additionally, narrative reports confirm that some activities were shifted from Year 4 to Year 5 due to COVID-19.

**Table 4: Performance Indicators for Intermediate Result I**

Performance Indicators	Status
IR 1 Indicator 1: Number of policies and procedures advanced to address gender inequities in RTI.	Years 3 and 4 target not met. Year 5 target met.
IR 1 Indicator 2: Percent of surveyed community leaders and experts in target districts that indicate increased community and family support for women's right to access to information.	Not measured annually. TCC notes that this will be measured through the end line evaluation.
Sub IR 1.1 Indicator: Number of multi-stakeholder or other joint meetings held including representatives from both government and civil society.	Target met in Year 3, but not in Year 4. Year 5 exceeded target.
Sub IR 1.2 Indicator: Number of targeted campaigns conducted that engage key groups in promoting RTI for women in target districts.	Target not set in Year 3; set in Year 4 but not met. Year 5 target met.

According to TCC's MEL system, creating an environment that better supports women's access to information includes engaging with civil society and government actors to support reinvigorated RTI Working Group meetings, identify policies that negatively impact women's access to information, and advocate for policy reforms or amended implementation and design awareness campaigns targeted at both supporters and detractors.

At the national level, TCC partnered with national organizations such as MJF and MRDI that had previous experience working on RTI in Bangladesh. TCC also partnered with the Cabinet Division and Information Commission to set up coordination meetings.<sup>18</sup> At the district and upazila levels, IDEA and TUS worked with the District Advisory Committee (DAC) in the same way.<sup>19</sup> In early 2018, discussions between TCC and government partners resulted in the multi-stakeholder committees established earlier to coordinate activities being absorbed into the RTI Working Group.<sup>20</sup> The aims of TCC and the sub-partners in supporting the establishment of the RTI Working Group were to promote the inclusion of CSO participation and a focus on women’s access to information in Bangladesh.<sup>21</sup> In May 2018, the Cabinet Division issued a Government Gazette on the revision of the RTI Working Group/committees, with a special focus on ensuring women’s RTI. These circulars also announced the formation of the revised RTI Working Group, with the focus on women’s RTI, at the national, division, district, and upazila levels.<sup>22</sup> The circulars included specific requirements for female representation in the RTI Working Group and included CSO participation for the first time.<sup>23</sup> Also, the directives required three of the seven agenda items to focus on women’s RTI issues, which ensured that they were discussed regularly. Quarterly meetings took place; however, disruptions at the national level due to COVID-19 in 2020 meant only two meetings took place in Dhaka. In 2021, ACD and AS held RTI Working Group meetings at the upazila level for the first time, including representatives from government offices such as deputy commissioners, local government staff, CSOs, and marginalized women (Table 5).

**Table 5: RTI Working Group Meetings Held at the Various Administrative Levels**

Year	Upazila	District	Division	National
2018–2019	5	12	1	3
2019–2020	11	4	-	2

The TCC and the Cabinet Division maintained a close relationship throughout the five years of the project and had many opportunities to interact. TCC provided training on women and the right to access information that was attended by government officials. The Cabinet Division also asked TCC for advice and feedback on ways to streamline women’s access to information for ministries’ work plans, which showed a strong commitment to advancing the issue.

Beyond the RTI Working Group meetings, TCC and its partners held meetings at the national, district, and upazila levels on a range of topics aimed at improving the environment for women’s access to information, including Dalit and other marginalized women. Workshops and meetings have been opportunities to gain experience, discuss, and share ideas.

**IR 2: National and target local governments more effectively and equitably provide information to women in target districts**

There were four indicators associated with IR 2: one for IR 2, one for GNDR-8, one for Sub IR 2.1, and

<sup>18</sup> The Information Commission was created in 2014 to oversee the development of the strategic plan to implement the RTI.  
<sup>19</sup> The DAC is a group of advisors in every district consisting of government officials, lawyers, journalists, or civil society members to provide necessary guidance and advice to citizens on filing requests, appeals, and complaints.  
<sup>20</sup> Up until 2018, TCC—with relevant non-governmental organization (NGO) and government partners—organized multi-stakeholder committees focused on identifying priority areas for policy-level efforts to improve women’s access to information.  
<sup>21</sup> More specifically, it was agreed that the RTI Working Group would: 1) develop a one-year joint strategy action plan to improve the enabling environment for women’s access to information in Bangladesh; 2) lead an annual forum to engage with key stakeholders around the right of access to information for women; and 3) actively work to develop their own awareness on the issue and how access to information for women can be improved through the design of targeted campaign materials. (The Carter Center Annual Report, 2017–2018, p. 3).  
<sup>22</sup> The Carter Center Annual Report, 2017–2018, p. 2.  
<sup>23</sup> TCC drafted and shared draft terms of reference for the national and district-level RTI Working Groups with the Information Commission and CSO partners.

one for Sub IR 2.2 based upon the Indicator Matrix and Performance Data Table (Table 6). The IR 2 indicator is only reviewed at the end of the activity. In Year 4, the GNDR-8 indicator was disaggregated by sex and location, which enhanced its utility. The disaggregation by sex shows that despite AWRTI’s focus on women, there are more men than women being trained. It is an important number to highlight because often when projects focus on women, the impression is that only women are targeted and benefitting. However, as there are more men in government and other positions of leadership, there are often more men than women who benefit, making sex-disaggregated data important to monitor. Sub-IR 2.1’s indicator focused on “creative mechanisms” to enable women’s access to information.<sup>24</sup>

According to the MEL system, the focus of IR 2 is to help build the capacity of key agencies to implement the RTI Act 2009 with an added focus on gender-sensitive implementation. At the national level, these included the Information Commission and Cabinet Division. In addition, AWRTI also worked closely with the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWCA). At the district, upazila, and union levels, AWRTI actors regularly engaged with Youth Development, Social Welfare, Agriculture, and Livestock offices; and the Health and Family Planning Office, Information Office, and Women’s Affairs Office—as they were considered the most critical government entities for women’s economic empowerment and rights.

**Table 6: Performance Indicators for Intermediate Result 2**

Performance Indicators	Status
IR 2 Indicator: Percent of surveyed community leaders and experts in target districts who perceive improvement in government provision of information to women.	Not measured annually.
GNDR-8 Indicator: Number of persons trained with United States Government (USG) assistance to advance outcomes consistent with gender equality or female empowerment through their roles in public or private-sector institutions or organizations.	Desegregation of data by district and sex was done in Year 4 but not Year 3. Year 5 exceed target for men, and women in Rajshahi, but did not meet target for women in the other locations.
Sub IR 2.1 Indicator: Number of creative mechanisms utilized to enable women’s access to information.	Not reached in Year 3 and met in one district in Year 4. In Year 5, Rajshahi exceeded the target, Satkhira met the target, and Khagrachari and Sylhet did not meet the target.
Sub IR 2.2 Indicator: Percent of government officials/public servants that perceive increased government capacity to effectively implement the RTI Act.	Not reached in Year 3 or Year 4. Year 5 exceeded the target.

#### *Training and capacity-building of government actors*

Evaluation findings show AWRTI conducted training for government actors at all levels. Over five years, AWRTI trained more than 1,500 government officials. At the national level, AWRTI targeted a wide array of ministries. In one instance, it targeted 16 ministries for one training.<sup>25</sup> At the district and upazila levels, it regularly worked across local government agencies, particularly those most relevant to women. Gender-sensitive workshops that targeted both government and CSOs focused on helping participants understand

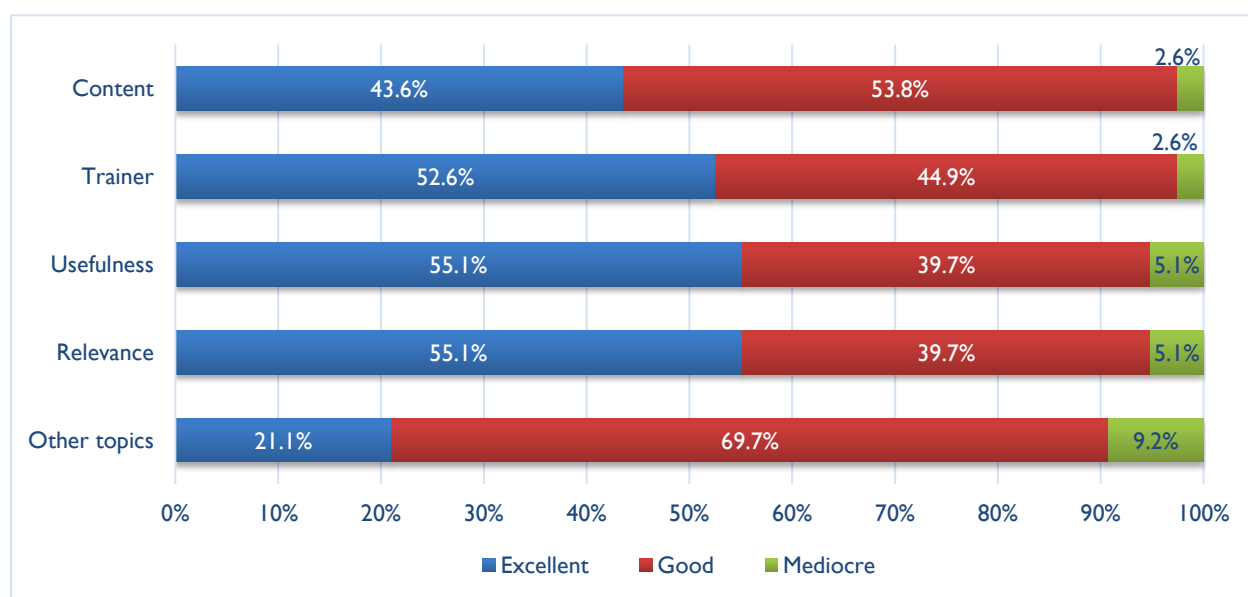
<sup>24</sup> Creative mechanisms include “placing information in public places where women gather, reaching women through media and other technologies such as the RTI Online Tracking System (RTIOTS), or the production of a secondary survey of women’s information needs to help match the needs of the women with relevant government institutions and where to target and create a robust proactive disclosure regime.”

<sup>25</sup> The donor felt AWRTI should streamline the number of agencies it engaged with at the national level.

their biases and see through a gender lens.<sup>26</sup> The training targeted the designated officers responsible for information-related issues within their agency. Most civil servants had prior training on the RTI Act, therefore, RTI intensives were considered a refresher course. Interviews with government civil servants revealed that the training was useful because it taught them about developing and managing records.<sup>27</sup> The survey findings show that respondents see the usefulness and relevance of training—each rated as excellent by 55 percent and good by 40 percent of respondents (see Figure 2)—consistent with this finding.

Feedback on the mechanics of the training included suggestions on how to improve the online training put in place as a response to COVID-19 challenges. It was suggested that more effort be made to ensure that online training is more participatory, PowerPoint is used, and quizzes be provided at the end of training to make sure people understood what was taught. It was also recommended that the Tottho Apa’s (information lady’s) contact information be shared with everyone after training. Training for elected local government representatives (upazila chairman, members, and women members) took place separately. Unlike civil servants, elected local government representatives are not given training by the government, therefore the majority of them have little knowledge of RTI. Providing awareness-raising, capacity-building, and gender sensitization for local government representatives helped them learn how to better reach women with information.<sup>28</sup>

**Figure 2: Effectiveness of Training for Government Actors**



AWRTI supported local governments and actors to use “creative mechanisms” to enable women’s access to information. Annual campaigns were centered around International Right to Know Day, where AWRTI used TV, billboards, and radio spots with messaging focused on helping the public understand women’s particular need for information. Survey findings highlighted in Figure 3 show that respondents found campaigns (86 percent), television (84 percent), community leadership training (88 percent), community

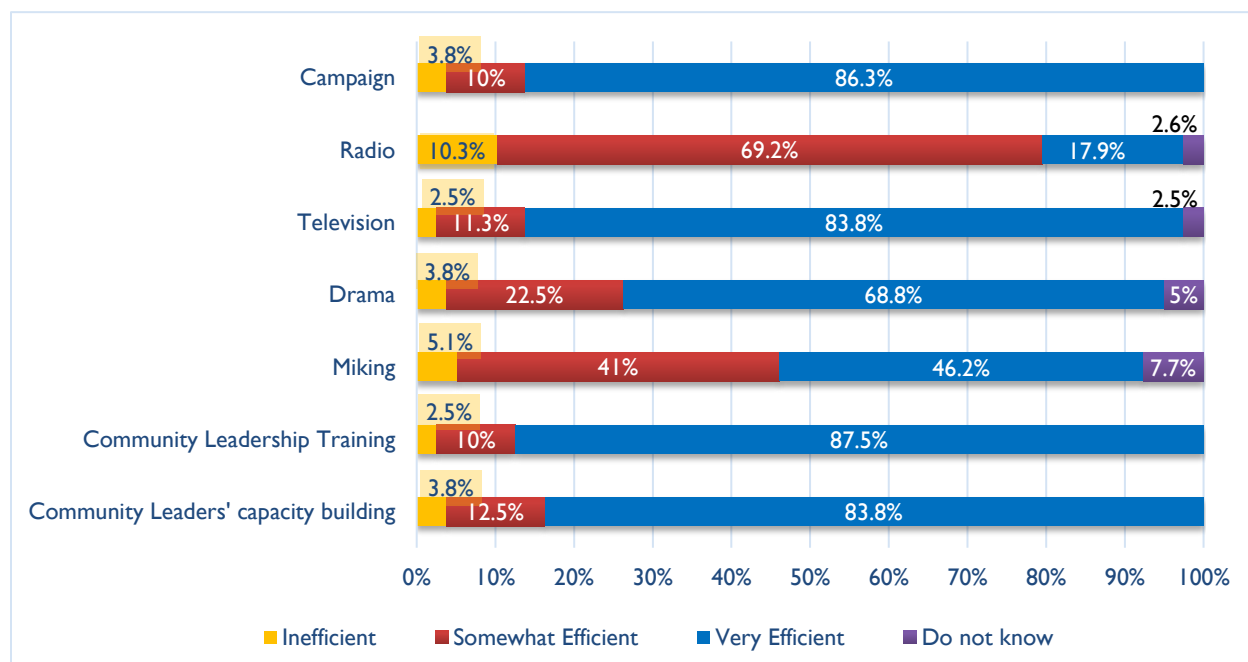
<sup>26</sup> Survey findings show that 49 percent of respondents participated in two trainings and 28 percent participated in three trainings since 2016. The survey also revealed that of all the available trainings, the majority of respondents participated in RTI intensives and gender training.

<sup>27</sup> The RTI Survey 2019 found that designated officers and heads of offices’ awareness of RTI was close to 100 percent, with over half of them receiving training on the RTI Act. Others became aware through the internet, newspapers, etc. The main gap was found in records management.

<sup>28</sup> One of the many lessons learned that shaped AWRTI highlighted in TCC’s annual report is the need to focus on local government actors (The Carter Center Annual Report, 2018–2019, p. 37).

leadership capacity-building (84 percent), and drama (69 percent) as very efficient mechanisms for raising RTI awareness. Findings from the KIIs and FGDs revealed that a majority considered campaigns and TV the most effective ways of raising awareness. TCC provided support to the Information Commission to develop awareness-raising materials as part of the campaign for International Right to Know Day. These annual campaigns were also seen as popular ways of learning about RTI by FGD participants. Radio was rarely mentioned as being very efficient by survey respondents (18 percent). Drama, especially street drama, was mentioned particularly by women interviewees and FGD participants.

**Figure 3: Efficiency of Different Mechanisms Used to Enable Women’s Access to Information**



Another “creative mechanism” was TCC’s support to Dnet, a national-level non-profit social enterprise, to develop software for the RTI Online Tracking System (RTIOTS).<sup>29</sup> Once Dnet created the software, it was turned over to the Information Commission. RTIOTS allows: 1) users to submit information requests online; and 2) government service providers and staff to respond to requests electronically. According to Dnet, there were initial delays because the Information Commission faced implementation challenges.<sup>30</sup> In response, Dnet provided training and made a helpline available to government staff. There was evidence that government officials found having access to RTIOTS helpful for reviewing requests for information, especially during the COVID-19 lockdown period.

*“There were many obstacles in the online learning process like lack of devices and cost for internet access. Many could not understand online applications and software as there were no proper guidelines for using computer, mobile, and websites. We contacted the ACD representatives to share the obstacles. ACD has taken the obstacles seriously and made phone calls to share the knowledge and information.”*  
CSO in Rajshahi

On the other hand, as highlighted by a CSO leader in Rajshahi, there were examples where women faced challenges with online access, which led to most of the online applications being facilitated by a sub-partner, youth, or the Tottho Bondhus

<sup>29</sup> The support to RTIOTS was also in line with support of the RTI Act implementation plan 2015–2021.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with national partner—November 23, 2021.

(information liaisons).<sup>31</sup> AWRTI kept track of requests submitted, including types of information requests and whether they were responded to by the relevant government agency. Although this information was gathered, it was not clear how it was used to inform the project. Numbers were collected and reported, but other information—such as the type of requests being submitted—was not analyzed and shared in a way that could inform the project.<sup>32</sup> Evaluation findings suggest that youth helped support women with online requests through information hubs they set up. However, the number of online requests that these youth helped women with was not tracked in the narrative reports, therefore, it is difficult to know their effectiveness beyond perceptions and anecdotal accounts provided in KIIs and FGDs.

The RTIOTS proved to be an example of a government program that needs support from both the government and civil society to be effective.

**IR 3: CSOs and information liaisons in target districts advance women’s use of the right of access of information.**

All indicators under IR 3 were met. Even though there was a decision to focus on marginalized women, there was no corresponding indicator developed to measure their engagement. However, there was an indicator for youth. Following a review in 2019, the indicator: *“The number of women assisted in accessing information by Tottho Bondhus, change-makers, and the RTI help desk,”* was replaced by: *“The percent of persons who perceive improved assistance provided to women for access to information by Tottho Bondhus, youth/community, volunteers, or others associated with center programming.”* Not only does this indicator take the focus off women (let alone marginalized women), who the “persons” are is not clear.<sup>33</sup>

**Table 7: Performance Indicators for Intermediate Result 3**

Performance Indicator	Status
IR 3 Indicator: Number of CSOs in target districts advancing women’s access to information.	Met target in Year 3 and Year 4. Exceeded target in Year 5 in Satkhira and met target in the other districts.
Sub-IR 3.1 Indicator 1: Number of CSOs in target district attending awareness-raising or capacity-development activities related to women’s right of access to information.	Met target in Year 3 and Year 4. Exceeded target in Year 5 in all four locations.
Sub-IR 3.1 Indicator 2: Number of youths participating in awareness-raising or capacity-development activities.	Added in Year 4, but target not met. In Year 5, exceeded target in Khagrachari and Rajshahi, met target in Sylhet, but did not meet target in Satkhira.
Sub-IR 3.2 Indicator: Percent of persons who perceive improved assistance provided to women for access to information by Tottho Bondhus, youth/community, volunteers, or others associated with center programming.	Added in Year 4, and target met. In Year 5 exceeded target in all four locations.

According to the MEL system, AWRTI gave grants to the sub-partners to conduct awareness-raising activities—including conducting training with marginalized women, government actors, and CSOs, and Training of Trainers (ToT) with youth, CSOs, and journalists. They also conducted campaign activities similar to those highlighted under IR 2. The sub-partners helped create women-only spaces and youth

<sup>31</sup> Anticipating these challenges, TCC equipped the Tottho Bondhus with a mobile device and internet access to support women in submitting online requests.

<sup>32</sup> Feedback from women interviewed gave the ET the sense that online requests take longer to answer, so they preferred to submit in-person requests.

<sup>33</sup> There are performance indicator sheets which provide details of how the indicators are measured, however it does not explain who is referred to as people (The Carter Center AWRTI MEL Plan [Revised], 2021, p. 28).

clubs, as well as opportunities for marginalized women to engage directly with government actors at various levels. They also benefited from training and capacity-building activities from TCC and other partners such as MRDI and MJF, and were active members of the RTI Working Group at the national, district, and upazila levels.

The sub-partners in each of the regions were critical to the achievement of AWRTI’s objectives. The sub-partners were members of RTI’s district Working Groups, and this helped in solution-related discussions. CSOs promoted and supported women’s RTI—especially through their role in training and organizing courtyard meetings and booth camps, an effective mechanism for engaging women.

There are examples of how language barriers have been dealt with by government actors, including one example where the Tottho Apa from Khagrachari said that when she arranges courtyard meetings, she also brings along a female staff member who speaks Marma and Tripura to make sure there is no language barrier. She also is aware that the women from these communities will more easily speak with a woman.

Women interviewed had not known about RTI, what they were entitled to, what benefits they could seek, or how to obtain benefits. One woman from Khagrachari talked about how she learned about services: *“I did not know about the Right to Information Act 2009. I came to know about the benefits like pregnancy benefits [and] old-age benefits by going to [the] courtyard meeting. In [the] courtyard meeting of our area, there were ten women participants, and TUS informed us about the services of social welfare, women’s affairs, youth development, and [the] agricultural office. We also attended meetings [at the] district and upazila levels. I now have the courage to go [to] any offices to demand my rights. But this courtyard meeting [was] held in only one para [neighborhood].”*

Courtyard meetings are women-only gatherings that took place one to three times a month where small groups of women gathered and learned about RTI from sub-partners, youth, and CSOs. At courtyard meetings, TCC’s Tottho Bondhus shared information that had been proactively disclosed by the local government, such as training information or other services. They explained how to request the information per the RTI Act and supported information requests and follow-up. Information about COVID-19-related relief was also provided at courtyard meetings. Table 8 provides an overview of the number of courtyard meetings held through September 2021.<sup>34</sup>

**Table 8: Number of Courtyard Meetings Conducted<sup>35</sup>**

Number of Courtyard Meetings	IDEA	TUS	AS	ACD
2016–2017	44	8	-	-
2017–2018	134	121	-	-
2018–2019	49	100	-	-
2019–2020	139	145	12	-
2020–2021	189	335	84	80

In Khagrachari, women thought courtyard meetings should be more frequent and include a larger number of people. There was also feedback from women in two FGDs that courtyard meetings should be more participatory. Sub-partners trained volunteers to conduct courtyard meetings. As this information is

<sup>34</sup> ACD is not included because it did not start conducting courtyard meetings until the second half of 2020 and 2021.

<sup>35</sup> These numbers were collected from annual reports. (Carter Center Annual Report, 2016–2017, p. 10; Carter Center Annual Report, 2017–2018, p. 9; and Carter Center Annual Report, 2018–2019, p. 19). In the annex of the report on p. 14 it states over 400 courtyard meetings were held, but the number is not disaggregated by sub-partner (Carter Center Annual Report, 2019–2020, p.16).



tracked through the sub-partners, it would be interesting to see the potential for further expanding the project deliberately in this way.

The training that the women undertook not only gave them knowledge but provided them with the platform to act on the information they obtained. However, of all the activity trainings, courtyard meetings and booth camps were the most effective ways of learning about RTI.

Every person interviewed across all sectors and categories of stakeholders said they considered courtyard meetings the most effective approach to engaging marginalized women.

*Trainings.* These focused on the implementation of the RTI Act and the specific support available—both through proactive disclosures and, more generally, from the various government agencies AWRTI engaged with. There were two main training topics: 1) RTI and its implementation; and 2) gender awareness. Trainings where government staff acted as trainers and resource people were considered very effective. These trainings provided opportunities for networking and for the women participating to interact directly with government officials.

*Booth camps.* Another highly-regarded strategy was booth camps, especially in Khagrachari and Satkhira districts. At booth camps, government representatives sat at information booths where women and community members could approach them to ask questions and submit requests. According to reports, at one Khagrachari booth camp event in December 2019, 119 in-person requests were made—more than 70 percent of the total in-person requests made (and almost half of the total [in-person and online] requests recorded by AWRTI) in the entire country in Year 4.<sup>36</sup> Booth camps held by TUS in October and December 2020 produced 37 and 95 requests for information, respectively. An added benefit to making these requests at the booth camps was the high potential for an immediate response to the requests.<sup>37</sup> Information reported in the AWRTI 2020–2021 annual report makes this point very clear: “Local government officials, supported by the partner organizations and the Carter Center, participated in 12 information booth camps across all four program districts. Remarkably, 372 requests for information were submitted, and 350 (94 percent) were answered promptly.”<sup>38</sup> The remaining requests TCC monitored were supported through the Tottho Bondhus, who were hired to work at the district level to support women in making requests for information and are equipped with a computer and internet access.

*Tottho Bondhus.* These also supported the Tottho Apa, a MOWCA initiative started in 2018 that employs young women as information ambassadors who provide communications technology, health, and wellness information to women—especially marginalized women. The Tottho Apa also participated in courtyard meetings and trainings and engaged with the sub-partners to support women.

*Youth.* Starting in 2020, there was a greater emphasis on involving youth—both as a target to benefit from the information and services and to help facilitate online access for marginalized women. Youth were encouraged to create youth clubs or join existing ones. These clubs were then tasked with creating awareness about the RTI Act and helping women submit requests online.

“By choosing youth from the Dalit community, this helped when problems arose regarding computer access and internet problems and helped to make sure people got access.” Sub-partner Satkhira

#### *Unintended consequences*

The focus of AWRTI is to build awareness of women’s RTI needs. However, there was also evidence it had other positive, unintended consequences: 1) improved relationships between government and women, including marginalized women; 2) greater civic engagement of women; 3) greater solidarity among women; and 4) a sense that AWRTI was contributing to developing and building women leaders in the

<sup>36</sup> The Carter Center Annual Report, 2019–2020, p. 37.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>38</sup> The Carter Center Annual Report, 2020–2021, p. 19.

community. Women also reported feeling more courageous, self-assured, and supported by their husband or other family members—highlighting that, to a large degree, the social environment has become more enabling of women’s access to information. There were also examples of women’s engagement in RTI that benefitted their immediate families through learning how to obtain a birth certificate so that a child could go to school, getting a loan to start a business, and learning new skills.

*“There is a meeting every month where I share information I learned from the TUS training. After taking training from TUS, I keep records about how many people I am giving information to. When people come to me, I maintain a record book and give them receipts so that I can track how many people I am giving which type of information. Then I also inform them about the formal application of A form or C form. But the fact is that only four or five people file applications, maintaining all the process formally. But many people ask about information verbally.”* CSA, Khagrachari

## Conclusions

AWRTI’s strengthening of the RTI Working Group resulted in a significant change in both the legal and social environment (IR 1). Both the requirement that women be represented and CSOs be encouraged to participate in the RTI Working Group were significant developments in the policy environment. Regarding the social environment, the ET found that women, including marginalized women, in some of the areas are willing and able to visit government offices, ask for help in filling out information requests (or filling them out themselves), actively engage government staff, and freely leave their homes without fear. While there are areas where women still face considerable barriers in realizing their RTI, e.g., in some of the most conservative areas such as Sylhet, their experiences have provided valuable lessons and insights for AWRTI’s programming, especially in newer districts such as Satkhira, where women face similar challenges.

Efforts to improve government officials’ provision of women’s RTI have been effective (IR 2). The training of elected local government representatives has been especially effective. As the main service providers at the union and upazila level, the trainings have helped them be more responsive to women’s RTI needs. Government engagement in training and activities such as booth camps has been particularly effective because it helped further their understanding of RTI, pushed them to understand their responsibilities more fully, and helped them better understand the needs of marginalized women in their communities. Doing so with even greater intentionality could help further increase women’s access to information at the local level.

Regarding civil society actors (CSAs), the inclusion of sub-partners, CSOs, youth, journalists, and religious leaders played a leading role in target communities (IR 3). The involvement of youth was effective in supporting online engagement—both for the youth themselves and in helping women make requests through online platforms. The youth took to the information and proved to be invaluable helping sub-partners go online. It was especially useful in helping sub-partners change course during the COVID-19 pandemic.

AWRTI’s impact has gone beyond awareness-raising as women have taken active steps to make requests and succeeded in getting benefits and information. The consequences of the activities have been greater civic engagement with more women, including women presently working in government offices. For example, greater solidarity is being expressed among the women themselves, they have increased confidence, and they are demonstrating increased leadership skills. AWRTI is also contributing to development as women learn their rights, claim them, and become more economically and politically empowered.

There are still barriers that persist, which differ by area. However, there is evidence that sub-partners have helped address issues and barriers that women faced on a case-by-case basis. There was also evidence from the most conservative areas, such as Sylhet, that there have been changes—providing lessons and insights for the newer districts such as Satkhira, where women face similar challenges. More steps are

needed to better capture the impact of the project—especially utilizing data AWRTI already has. There is also evidence CSOs are collecting useful ideas that could be shared to produce good practices around facilitating information requests. TCC collects data on the number of information requests submitted by the Tottho Bondhus, which are reported in quarterly and annual reports. While this is only a snapshot of all information requests, tracking this information over time, understanding the type of information that is being sought with the greatest frequency, and tracking response times to different requests could be worth analyzing for further advocacy, programming, or policy work around marginalized women’s RTI needs.

### **3.2 EQ 2: RELEVANCE – TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE ACTIVITY OBJECTIVES STILL RELEVANT TO THE CURRENT DEVELOPMENT CIRCUMSTANCES IN BANGLADESH?**

#### **Findings**

AWRTI enhanced the supply side of RTI by building the capacity of government officials through training. These engagements with relevant government actors at all levels helped government staff better understand their roles under the RTI Act. There are examples where this led to a more positive attitude toward their work. Also, AWRTI has been building the capacity of government actors to help them further understand the unique needs of marginalized women through gender-awareness training and direct interactions with government officials. Increasingly, more women visited government offices and had interactions with government officials through organized programs such as booth camps and RTI training with government staff as trainers and facilitators.

*“Government allowed an NGO representative in the information-related working group. According to the government gazette, there should be three NGO representatives and two female representatives as members, and it is ordered that women’s access to the right to information should be implemented at the division level. These are important changes.”* Government actor, national level.

AWRTI also helped build an enabling environment for marginalized women by teaching them about the RTI Act, including targeting government agencies that provide services most relevant to their needs. In turn, this helped facilitate women’s access to the information services and benefits to which they are entitled. The main changes AWRTI made at the policy level were including women and civil society representation in the RTI Working Group and including permanent agenda items focused on women’s access to information. The Cabinet Division

issued directives and provided circulars announcing the formation of the revised RTI Working Group and specific requirements for female representation. Awareness-raising strategies also included helping strengthen the institutions associated with RTI Act implementation, such as the Information Commission.

At the request of the RTI Working Group, AWRTI produced a report that assessed the status of proactive disclosure of information within nine ministries. The study, shared with the Cabinet Division, found that ministries have implemented some level of required proactive disclosure efforts through a gendered lens. However, there is a need for further improvement. One recommendation from the study was the creation of a women’s corner in all government organizations’ offices. This recommendation was also a priority for the Information Commission, which highlighted how important it was to be implemented during its KII.

Policy actors at various levels welcomed AWRTI’s approach. Findings from a national-level workshop focused on challenges facing Dalit women exercising their right of access to information and mechanisms to reach them with meaningful information. Recommendations from this workshop were shared with local government and civil society partners; however, steps have not yet been taken to push for policy change. Ensuring women’s needs are at the center of implementation of the RTI Act remains important. RTI training on women’s RTI needs currently only happens on an ad hoc basis and needs to be integrated as a mandatory part of the government’s RTI training curriculum.

RTIOTS, now part of the Information Commission, helped facilitate requests for information. Incorporating youth into AWRTI was also helpful, especially with COVID-19-related disruptions. Booth camps conducted in all the districts helped provide a platform for government agencies to raise awareness about their services and interact directly with CSOs, communities, and women. The Tottho Apas have been supportive to women and are recognized by women as a helpful resource.<sup>39</sup> While all these efforts have been recognized as useful strategies, there has not been any effort to make them a dedicated focus at the policy level.

### Remaining barriers

There are still barriers in marginalized communities—especially for marginalized women—including poverty, geographical, illiteracy, and language (Table 9).

**Table 9: The Barriers Women Face in the Different Districts**

Districts	Khagrachari	Sylhet	Rajshahi	Satkhira
<b>Barriers</b>	The major issue is language.	Socially conservative. Network challenges. 30 percent of the district is Dalit.	Distance from all services. Network challenges. Buy-in is slow.	Cut off geographically. Lack of money for transportation. Lack of family support.

However, there are no provisions in the current RTI Act that address these potential barriers except a reference to exempting individuals or groups from paying fees: *“The government may also exempt an individual or class of individuals or any other class from paying the fees.”* It is not clear from ET findings whether this had been tested by AWRTI. The other barriers highlighted, such as language and internet access, were addressed on a case-by-case basis.

In Khagrachari, sub-partner TUS felt its good working relationship with the government helped solve problems locally and also helped with long-term sustainability. For instance, in Khagrachari there are four ethnic groups—Chakma, Marma, Santal, and Tripura—but only the Chakma understand the Bangla language. Therefore, when non-Chakma women visit the office, they cannot communicate. In response, the sub-partner conducted advocacy on behalf of the women. A representative of the sub-partner stated: *“We also did advocacy to the ministerial offices so that they can appoint ethnic people in their office who can understand the complaints of ethnic women. Thus, ethnic people can also seek information freely.”*

Internet access and networking challenges were dealt with by sub-partners by grouping women together with one smartphone. They also linked them to youth in their area. It was also suggested that Union Digital Centers be used to assist citizens in submitting requests.<sup>40</sup> The strengthening of the RTI Working Group—active at both the national and district levels, provides opportunities for government and civil society to discuss and engage on RTI issues regularly.

However, there was also a need expressed by a majority of the CSOs to have recognized coordination structures at the union and ward levels. The best possible coordination is at the upazila, union, and ward levels through RTI cells and/or RTI groups for information sharing and coordination.

It was also noted that AWRTI is one of the only projects working on marginalized women’s RTI needs.

<sup>39</sup> The ET did not interview any Tottho Bondhus as part of the evaluation’s fieldwork. Also, they did not take part in any of the FGDs. Tottho Apas, on the other hand, did take part in some of the FGDs held in the districts.

<sup>40</sup> This issue was raised during the December 13, 2021, out-brief with USAID/Bangladesh by the USAID Chief of Party (COP) and further research showed the RTI Working Group also highlighted the need to increase the use of Union Digital Centers and their entrepreneurs to assist citizens in submitting requests as a potential solution for both increasing awareness, applications, and easier access to already disclosed information (The Carter Center Annual Report, October 1, 2019–September 30, 2020, p. 4).

## Conclusions

Given the low level of awareness of the RTI Act, AWRTI's focus has been on raising awareness—with the added focus on building awareness of women's information needs. Through AWRTI's activities, gaps in the government's approach to and implementation of the RTI Act have been exposed. AWRTI confirmed that for the effective implementation of RTI, a symbiotic approach of implementing both the supply and demand side is most effective.

The government's approach to RTI focuses on training public servants, providing support to the public through an information officer in each government office, and providing support to women through the Tottho Apa program. Gaps include no mandated training for elected local government representatives and limited provisions for awareness-raising. Currently, this gap is being filled by AWRTI; however, the reach of the project is limited.

Therefore, from a policy perspective, it makes sense for AWRTI to document the gaps that it is currently filling for the government, such as providing RTI training to elected local government representatives and gender training for all government actors.

AWRTI also showed that despite the support provided, barriers remain—including a lack of support for women at the family and community levels to access information. These barriers differ by area and are related to language and geography which, to date, have been addressed on a case-by-case basis rather than at the policy level.

AWRTI could also encourage further reforms such as advocating for a women's corner in all government agencies to further mainstream women's rights issues.

### **3.3 EQ 3: CLIENT SATISFACTION – TO WHAT DEGREE DO REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH (GOB), CIVIL SOCIETY (NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS [NGOS]), AND COMMUNITIES PERCEIVE THAT AWRTI HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN ACHIEVING ITS OBJECTIVES?**

#### Findings

ET findings show there has been an increase in women's access to information in the areas where AWRTI is active.

#### Government of Bangladesh

National-level government staff expressed a high level of satisfaction with AWRTI. The Cabinet Division, Information Commission, and MOWCA all expressed solid support for TCC and AWRTI. The Cabinet Division representative committed to *“support TCC as soon as it is related to human welfare.”* All government actors appreciated the efforts made by AWRTI to seek government feedback and keep them informed about the different aspects of the work. TCC's high level of preparation before events to make sure that all those involved were aware of their roles was also appreciated. One national government actor said, *“TCC shared a demonstration of the entire program—which was very helpful for the participants, moderator, and the cabinet to know their roles about the session from the beginning.”*

The main achievement highlighted by upazila and union-level government officials in KIIs and FGDs was the increased engagement of women, especially marginalized women, on RTI. Government officials also found activities such as trainings and booth camps helpful in increasing their knowledge of RTI. Trainings where government officials served as resource persons or facilitators provided opportunities for direct engagement. Booth camps were also designed to increased interaction between women and government officials.

Feedback highlighted a noted increase in the number of women visiting government offices; asking questions about services, benefits, and trainings; and filling out requests for information. There were dozens of examples where government officials highlighted the increase in the number of requests for

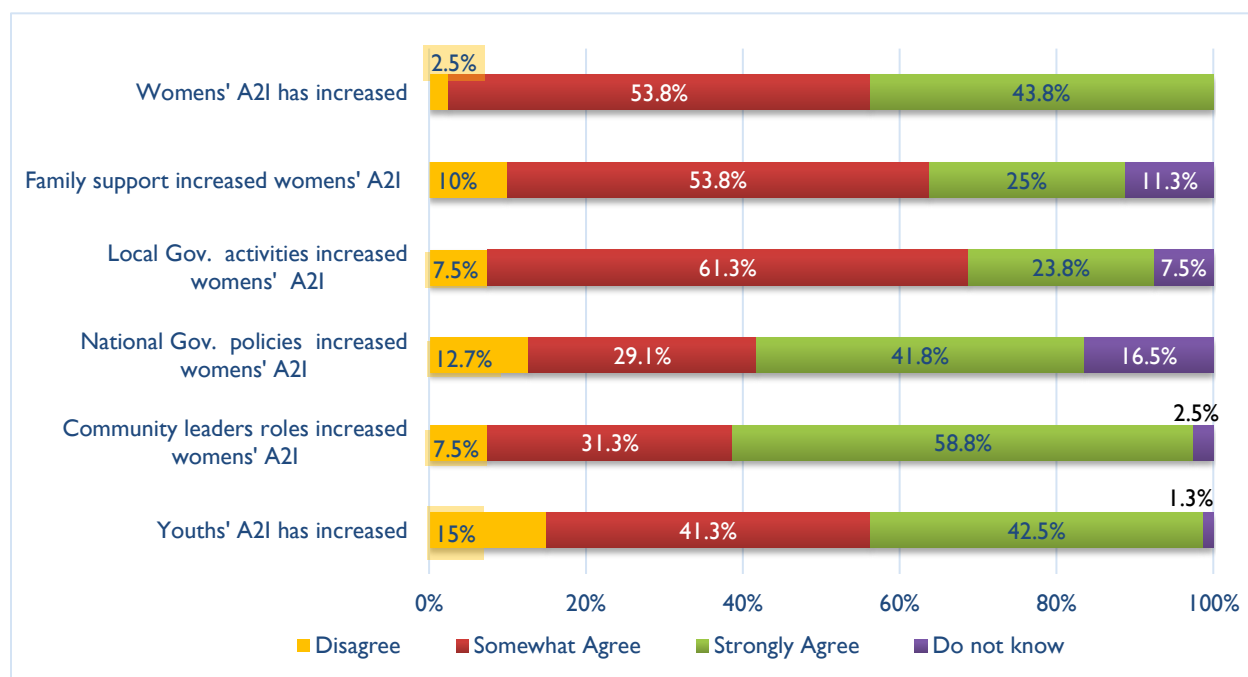
services and information. For instance, one government official from the fishery department in Rajshahi District said there was a 40 percent increase in women asking for fishery support.

One of the most frequent comments made by government actors at different levels was how AWRTI helped them do their jobs better. With the increased demand and a more astute public asking questions, government staff had to either seek out more information to better respond to queries or demands from women or learn how to do so on the job. Government actors recognized AWRTI helped them understand where their gaps were—especially around raising awareness of RTI and providing the public with information about which forms to fill out, what questions to ask, how to follow up, and the timeframe for doing so. As a result, there was great appreciation for AWRTI because women were being taught how to fill out forms correctly, which made the government actors’ work easier.

Close to half of the government actors interviewed in KIIs/FGDs recognized the significant role that the sub-partners played in all the districts. Civil servants said they were not well set up to reach very remote locations and faced challenges “to reach the grassroots level.” This means that while information may be provided to women, it does not always mean they can act on it.

The government recognized the importance of working more closely with community leaders and CSOs to identify those most in need of services. This recognition among nearly half of the survey respondents that strongly agreed “community leaders play helpful roles to women’s increased access to information” is consistent with this thinking.

**Figure 4: Agreement with Various Statements Regarding Women’s Access to Information (A2I)**



Among survey respondents, 42 percent strongly agreed that the GOB formulated policies that increased access to information. Few were able to identify any policy that supported women’s RTI beyond support to the RTI Working Group. Local government and family support were not as strong to respondents—with 24 percent and 25 percent, respectively, strongly agreeing that these groups contributed to women’s increased access to information. Fieldwork findings revealed that support differed by area—especially concerning family support, with less family support in Satkhira than in Rajshahi or Khagrachari. Forty-three (43) percent of respondents strongly agreed and 41 percent somewhat agreed that youth’s access to

information increased. This was consistent with findings from government actors who were concerned that youth were too often acting on this knowledge, resulting in a huge demand in services.

### **Civil society actors**

*Sub-partners:* The four sub-partners have been central to the success of the project—with TCC’s guidance. All four sub-partners used a similar model to simultaneously address both the demand and supply side of RTI and specifically target marginalized women in their areas. They adapted their approaches to the unique needs of each context and then, based on their local knowledge of the environment, engaged with various partners such as CSOs, religious leaders, journalists, youth, and government actors.

The sub-partner informant for IDEA in Sylhet said that at first, it was difficult for women to participate because of how religiously conservative it is, but now he is amazed at the transformation in the women: *“For instance, in religiously conservative Sylhet there were changes in the attitude of the women and the service provider observed (this).”* He also said, *“The main successes of [the] AWRTI activity can be categorized as [the] following: a) at the community level by making women aware about their rights; b) at the service-provider level who now proactively performs their activities; and c) finally among the youth community who proactively engage in different social activities now. Also, government officials now accept youth easily to provide information.”*

In Khagrachari, the sub-partner informant highlighted how much its relationship with the government improved and how AWRTI helped promote the organization that was helping with the work. He also highlighted the elevation of other sub-partners and government actors as capacity and relationships are being built: *“We have been able to create great networking [at the] government level and community level. This activity also promoted our organization in all aspects. We also have good communication with [the Upazila Nirbahi Officer] UNO of our upazila and deputy commissioner of our district. They come to our awareness campaigns and play an active role.”*

*CSOs:* The main activities of the CSOs across the four districts centered on awareness-raising of RTI through their programs. They all expressed high praise for the sub-partners, highlighted the importance and relevance of the program for marginalized women in their communities, reported increased engagement of women with RTI, and noted better capacity and relationships with government actors. Most CSOs in KILs and FGDs have been trained and have trained others on RTI. More than half made RTI a cross-cutting issue or further incorporated RTI into their programming.

One CSO member said that the government is now understanding the problems people are facing, finding good ways to solve those problems, and making advances for the people, society, and eventually the country. In Rajshahi, one CSO member commented, *“People need information for their development. And for the development, they need government services—and that would be possible if they have the proper information, which is what we are providing. For example, what is the eligibility for different allowances? What types of allowances are available? Which allowance they will get for their families? How to get those allowances? etc.”*

In Sylhet, CSO members talked about how focusing on training women to be change-makers has been very effective, and there are many stories of success. The CSO members highlighted that women, even conservative women, were very participatory in the training, more so than the men.

There was also evidence that CSOs ensured programs could reach people who speak languages other than Bengali and made all the union-level benefits known to people, especially in rural areas. In Khagrachari, CSOs organized street shows and dramas, mostly working in rural areas to raise awareness.

As highlighted in Table 10, CSOs in each of the districts found creative ways to make RTI a cross-cutting issue and fully integrate it into their programs.

**Table 10: Examples of How RTI Was Made a Cross-Cutting Issue by CSOs**

Examples of Making RTI a Cross-Cutting Issue	District
Incorporating information rights policy in the organization	Sylhet
Making RTI part of the training within their organization to benefit all their beneficiaries	Rajshahi
Ensuring RTI is incorporated into programs focused on domestic violence	Satkhira
Incorporating RTI at all meetings with staff and beneficiaries	Khagrachari

One CSO in Sylhet proposed to IDEA that it conduct a joint program for youth and women. This also involved the private sector, which helped young people secure jobs with companies. This experience also led the CSO to make RTI a mandatory part of all training it provides. Another CSO in Sylhet created an information rights policy that directs how it provides information on RTI to others.

In Satkhira, CSOs are helping individuals apply for education and training opportunities and increasing domestic violence services to make sure that people know about them. Another CSO member in Satkhira said its focus was on talking to women’s families so they would be more supportive of the women getting educated and accessing available training.

In Rajshahi, CSOs are trained by the sub-partner every three months, and once they learn about RTI they conduct RTI training in grassroots communities. One CSO member from Rajshahi said that once its members were trained, they in turn trained all the beneficiaries at the ward level in how to submit a request and the different forms needed. This CSO also hosted online programs.

*Religious leaders:* Although there was no specific focus on religious leaders as part of the results framework, they were included in activities in all four districts. All three religious leaders interviewed remarked the training was very useful and they felt confident about what they had learned. The religious leaders all spoke about how they created awareness of RTI in their work, such as during the Jumma and Khutbah prayers or making statements in the mosque about women’s rights, women’s empowerment, child marriage, domestic violence, and extremism. One imam said it was the first time he had been exposed to RTI. Another imam stated he had also discussed different ways to disseminate the information with other imams. The religious leader from Satkhira said he also spoke directly to women about RTI so that they were also able to benefit from the information.

One CSO leader from Khagrachari highlighted the importance of engaging community leaders and religious leaders, *“Engaging community leaders and religious leaders helped them ... to work smoothly among women and their families. Because it is the community, or the social and religious taboo[s] [that] generate barriers for women. Engaging them has helped to address the issue of the right to information.”*

*Journalists:* All the journalists interviewed had prior knowledge of the RTI Act, given that much of their work relies on access to information. They were especially grateful to learn about the types of information they were able to gain access to and the types they cannot.

*“Journalists are also assisting in circulating the RTI Act among the masses by circulating our own perspectives and publications. Journalists are always involved with the RTI. Journalism with the RTI Act is a great thing that we have learned with the project with Agrogoti. It is a new thing that has been learned from the project.”* Journalist, Satkhira

Some journalists used RTI as part of their job for information gathering. They would push government actors in instances when they either do not provide the information requested or falsely claim that certain information is off-limits. Journalists also shared how they have drafted articles and carried out research on behalf of AWRTI and would be interested in being involved in future similar projects. They feel that they can also play a role in helping the government publicize information. The inclusion of journalists further expanded the focus on the type of information that could be useful for addressing corruption or seeking information about social issues.



One journalist highlighted this difference in trying to understand the extent of child marriage: “The education officer of this zila told me that only 500 early marriages happened during COVID[-19]. The total educational institutions in this upazila—including schools, colleges, [and] madrasa—are 600. And according to different research [studies], 10 to 50 students from each institution are not returning to education as they got married. If we calculate the minimum number, which is 10, then there will be at least 6,000 students who got married. So, how is it possible that there are only 500 early marriage cases? We are not getting the correct information.”

Youth: The capacity-building of youth is done through workshops and on-the-job training. In Satkhira, the sub-partner worked with Dalit youth. The sub-partner found it helpful to address problems as issues arose online. ACD in Satkhira created nine groups of female youth with which to conduct COVID-19 awareness-raising. These groups were encouraged to visit communities and conduct social mapping of vulnerable women. The mapping helped youth groups and leaders target the women most in need. Government actors also noted their concern for the increase in demand for services—especially as youth engagement has meant increased numbers of applications for services. At least two government officials highlighted their concern that demand will surpass supply, especially for the youth services of the respondents.

In other communities in Satkhira, youth have benefited themselves by applying for services—and have set up information hubs that are helping to support marginalized women in their communities, especially in making requests online. One CSO member said, “There should be additional activities like district-level working areas, connecting the students and youth in the project as they are the future of our country. They will in [the] future join in the government departments.”

Another CSO member from Rajshahi talked about how he mentored youth, saying, “In my area, there is a youth club. I informed them about information rights and suggested [they] make some information corners like agricultural information [and] youth development information ... in their club. The club now has an agricultural information corner. TUS also motivated me to develop an information corner. I have developed [an] information corner as well as [a] child safeguard corner in my office.”

### Women, including marginalized women

Women in the FGDs across all districts talked about their willingness and ability to visit government offices, ask for help in filling out information requests (or fill them out themselves), ask questions of government staff, and leave their homes. Women also reported feeling more courageous, self-assured, and supported by their husbands or other family members.

FGDs with women, including marginalized women, expressed a deep appreciation for the sub-partners. One woman where ACD is working stated, “We have achieved something that we never thought was possible. We are independent now, [thanks to] the love and support that we gained through ACD and their staff.”

The sub-partners were consulting with MOWCA, Agriculture, and Social Services, and the women talked about either receiving related benefits, training, or services from these institutions (Table 11).

**Table 11: Examples of the Range of Support and Benefits Sought and Provided**

Benefits	Training	Services	Other
Widow, maternity allowances, old-age card, disability, freedom fighter, pregnancy	Handprint batik training, tailoring, beautification, Ansar, parlor services, animal husbandry training, poultry farming	Domestic violence service, maternity, getting a loan, seeking help from police, COVID-19 vaccinations	How to apply for a birth certificate, information about how to prevent child marriage, dealing with over-payment

Some women learned about job opportunities, how to vote, and how to run for a political position. The information that women, including marginalized women, received helped them to appeal if their request

is ignored. One woman from Satkhira said, *“I asked for my disability allowance and filled out the form. The government officer ignored my request. I told him that I was going to appeal the case and report him. The next day, I got my allowance.”* After another woman from Sylhet attended a courtyard meeting, she helped her relative get back the excess fees she had paid to a vocational school. Another woman helped her sister get a job as a teacher with the knowledge she gained at a courtyard meeting. Another helped her community by making sure the local clinic doctor kept his services free as mandated by the government.

While steps have been taken regarding policy, there is still much more work to be done to raise these issues at the policy level. For example, women from Sylhet reported local leadership is still not supportive of them. Also, women from Khagrachari said that, in general, the local male leadership is not responsive to the local needs of the community, so people are really on their own.

Women in Khagrachari were able to address cases of low-level corruption from individuals that they and their relatives faced. In one case, a woman shared how she got money back from a headmaster after the teachers demanded extra money. When the headmaster did not listen to her plea, she got the UNO involved and the money was returned.

Another talked about how once she explained to her husband that she now knew how to file a complaint against him for beating her, he became scared and stopped—and now both her husband and son support her. In Rajshahi, women shared how they learned about the role of the police and that they could call on them to prevent sexual harassment, as it is a problem women face in the community due to drug dealing in the area. Women from Khagrachari also spoke about how appreciative they were to be part of a training that took place in the Deputy Commissioner’s office.

Women gave examples of other outcomes from these activities such as helping others, including family members, get their benefits—and there is a growing awareness that if women are helped, so are their families. One woman from Satkhira shared, *“The best thing that we have achieved is the removal of [the] old class discrimination that we have been facing throughout our lives. We are now very close to each other, we mix, talk to each other, take care of each other, we invite and participate in each other’s functions. Now we do not have any class discrimination, which is really an achievement and success.”*

The president of Nari Mukti Kendra was a trainee of ACD, a group funded by Norway, and after receiving training, she was elected as a woman member of the Union Council in Sylhet. Finally, she established her organization called “Nari Mukti Kendra.” These accounts demonstrate that in the areas where AWRTI is working, it has been successful in improving access to information for marginalized women in Bangladesh.

## **Conclusions**

Overall ET findings suggest that government officials at all levels believe AWRTI has been successful in achieving its objectives. The sub-partners revealed a high level of satisfaction with AWRTI. There was a uniform agreement that AWRTI’s objectives were achieved in each of the respective districts. While there were uniform achievements across all the districts, different geographic areas do face different challenges. Overall, it was found that most of the actors agreed with the conclusions in Table 12.

**Table 12: Overall Conclusions About AWRTI**

Conclusions
Marginalized women have increased access to information.
Marginalized women are seeking out information, appealing when they do not get it, and are enjoying the benefits and gaining confidence.
Youth clubs and associations have been developed and trained, and their attitude has changed—which is demonstrated through their training and engagement with the community.
Government service providers have engaged in training, served as trainers, developed a better attitude about their work, and are proactively performing their duties.
Government service providers accept the sub-partners and their partners, including youth.
CSOs have been trained and are networking with each other, conducting their training, and making RTI part of their programs.
Journalists and religious leaders have been trained and are also spreading awareness of RTI.
The sub-partners are well known and respected by all actors.
All the actors working together has been critical to AWRTI reaching its objectives.

Challenges remain at the local government and community levels, and there are barriers such as language, poverty, geography, and patriarchal attitudes that interfere with reaching marginalized women. Largely these have been dealt with on a case-to-case basis by the sub-partners, CSOs, and Tottho Bondhus.

It is also evident that even without an intentional focus for those trained (such as religious leaders, journalists, and CSOs) to further spread what they learned about RTI, they are sharing information in their networks. However, this is currently not being tracked.

In the next phase of the project, it will be important for AWRTI to capture how various actors have achieved results with various groups—through information-sharing sessions—to add to the lessons learned throughout the project. These lessons could then be turned into ToT where those targeted not only learn about RTI and how to implement it, but also create strategies relevant to their networks. Incentives could also be provided to those interested in sharing with others.

Given journalists’ keen interest and experience in exercising their RTI, they are in a strategic position to play a role in AWRTI. Their ability to publicize information to a larger audience is key. Through newspaper, radio, or TV, they can publicize information about RTI—including good news stories and items about current challenges, especially the remaining barriers faced by marginalized women. This could be measured by the number of stories written or shared.

CSOs also benefit greatly from their interaction and relationship with AWRTI’s sub-partners. By making access to information a cross-cutting issue, they have been able to reach a wide array of people. Also, there are leaders among the CSOs that already have a good foundation of RTI skills and knowledge that could be further mentored, and their organizations given more scope to conduct awareness-raising activities on RTI.

It is important to note that one concern raised was AWRTI needs to make sure it is complementing and enhancing the work of the government, and not crossing over and replacing government's responsibilities.

### **3.4 EQ 4: SUSTAINABILITY – HOW MUCH PROGRESS HAS THE IMPLEMENTER MADE IN ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY OF AWRTI ACTIVITIES BEYOND USAID SUPPORT?**

#### **Findings**

The evaluation findings suggest the strategies AWRTI incorporated from the beginning will help to ensure

long-term sustainability beyond USAID support. AWRTI is strategically aligned with both the supply and demand sides of the implementation of RTI and has built relationships and strengthened relevant government structures at all levels.

The trainings built the capacity to address gaps and can be replicated. The skills and knowledge imparted to government staff will remain with them. Most stated that they are now doing their jobs better as a result of the RTI training they received, especially Tottho Apas and government civil servants such as designated officers working in the government institutions that cater to women—especially marginalized women. The main threat to this is that government staff are frequently transferred.

*“To sustain the RTI Act, we need to circulate the information in a large area. The RTI Act will be publicized at the grassroots level and in village areas through courtyard meetings, prospectuses, posters, placards, local satellites, TV ads, dramas, etc.”* Sub-partner ACD

The choice and support of sub-partners in each of the districts has also been widely recognized as a critical factor for sustainability. The ET found that government and CSAs respected TCC and the sub-partners. The sub-partners, especially TUS and IDEA, are likely to attract more funding for RTI work given the length of time they have been working in RTI.

More than half of the CSO members interviewed in KIIs and FGDs talked about how they have been incorporating RTI into their work. Journalists interviewed have been writing news stories about RTI and focusing on it in radio and TV programs. Religious leaders highlighted how they incorporated information about RTI into their services and the Jumma prayer. Targeting women directly has also been important. Women said that now that they have the information, they will use it—and the information will continue to spread through their networks.

There was also evidence of support for AWRTI by government actors in leadership positions. In one example, the Deputy Commissioner in Khagrachari stated during a radio program that he thought every upazila should consider the model used by TUS—and that this work should be conducted in every union. There were other examples of initiatives such as citizen charters being introduced in government offices, demonstrating public commitment from service providers. Interviews with a sub-partner highlighted how AWRTI was contributing to the country’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and is motivation for the government to continue to support it and programs like it. These included a focus on SDG 5 – Gender equality; SDG 10 – Reduced Inequality; and SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions.<sup>41</sup>

**Table 13: Overview of AWRTI Sustainability Successes and Threats**

<b>Successes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● An effective and relevant project.</li> <li>● Alignment and strengthening of relevant government structures.</li> <li>● Building capacity of government and CSOs, including the sub-partners.</li> <li>● Identifying and filling gaps.</li> <li>● Targeted multipliers with evidence that CSOs are integrating it into programming.</li> <li>● Youth are aligning and can continue to engage online.</li> <li>● Government leadership has recognized the program.</li> </ul>
<b>Threats</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Remedies are case-by-case, no policy-level changes for marginalized women.</li> <li>● Government officers frequently transfer.</li> <li>● Patriarchal attitudes of the community may restrain women’s access to RTI.</li> <li>● The need for the demand and supply sides to operate symbiotically.</li> </ul>

*Threats to sustainability.* Feedback from CSOs and the sub-partners highlighted that the transfer of

<sup>41</sup> Partners’ sustainability plans (provided by TCC).

government officials was problematic because of the importance of relationship-building—especially between the government, CSOs, and women. On the other hand, government staff that are transferred could bring what they have learned to a new location. However, because the success of the implementation of RTI depends on the demand and supply sides working symbiotically, even if a government official is trained, they still need demand from the public to perform the work. Therefore, there is still a need for awareness-raising activities among women such as courtyard meetings and booth camps to ensure that the demand for the services continues.

Almost all of the feedback indicated the project should continue—and that if it reached a larger number of people, there would be a greater likelihood that it could be sustained. It was also recognized by all stakeholders that there are more communities of marginalized women who have not yet benefited. Government actors especially recognized how ill-equipped they are to reach marginalized communities.

## Conclusions

AWRTI is a highly relevant and effective project. TCC took steps to ensure its sustainability by aligning itself with government structures and strengthening RTI institutions. AWRTI developed an effective model that accounts for both the demand and supply sides needed to implement RTI effectively. AWRTI had a positive impact in the areas where it has been carried out. It may continue in these areas even without additional funding. However, the geographical area covered by AWRTI is very limited, which will make it difficult to grow and benefit more people. Interviewees felt strongly that funding should continue to reach new areas.

Funding should continue for RTI, making the focus on marginalized women and sustainability central features of funding provisions. AWRTI's success in advocating for women to be represented on the RTI Working Group demonstrates more policy development is needed. Government must be supported to fulfill both the demand and supply sides of RTI—using creative approaches to further digitize RTI services in Bangladesh. CSOs should be supported to continue to raise awareness using strategies with the widest possible reach to the most marginalized communities.

# 4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

## 4.1 USAID

Provide increased financial support for RTI with a continued focus on marginalized women, making continued support conditional on achieving sustainable results.

### **IR 1: The legal and social environment is more enabling of women's access to information.**

- Encourage and support further efforts to integrate gender mainstreaming of RTI at the policy level—including requiring gender sensitivity training as part of all RTI training for civil servants and local government representatives at the national, district, upazila, and union levels.
- Encourage and support efforts at the policy level to address existing barriers to RTI for marginalized women, *i.e.*, geographical, socioeconomic, and language barriers.
- Encourage and support efforts to increase government action on the demand side of RTI by engaging the Ministry of Information and increasing public awareness through TV, radio, and awareness days.
- Further mainstream RTI by encouraging the Ministry of Education (MOE) to incorporate gender sensitivity and RTI in education curricula at all levels.
- Continue strengthening the RTI Working Group so it plays a monitoring role in the implementation of the 2022–2028 strategic plan for implementing RTI.

- Encourage further reforms such as advocating for a women’s corner in all government agencies to further mainstream women’s rights issues.

**IR 2: National and target local governments more effectively and equitably provide information to women in target districts.**

- Further the supply side of RTI by mainstreaming RTI training for government and local government representatives.
- Advocate for policy to overcome the barriers that marginalize women and impede their access to information.

**IR 3: CSAs more effectively and equitably provide information to women in target districts.**

- Develop a user-friendly “good practices” guide that covers both the demand and supply sides—drawn from the existing ToT RTI curriculum and cost-effective practices.
- Develop a training strategy that utilizes the “good practices” guide to conduct ToT to support marginalized women’s needs across the country. Ensure incentives are provided to designated officers, Tottho Apa, and CSAs to encourage adoption and roll-out.
- Engage with relevant government agencies and CSOs to develop a draft policy aimed at addressing all barriers that marginalized women face accessing their RTI needs.

**Other**

- Follow up on the Cabinet Division’s efforts to convene all the donors and United Nations (UN) agencies such as the World Bank and the United Kingdom’s Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) to gain a deeper understanding of current RTI programming efforts and potential areas for USAID intervention.

**4.2 THE CARTER CENTER**

**IR 1: The legal and social environment is more enabling of women’s access to information.**

- Continue to strengthen the RTI Working Group to participate in the development of the next strategic plan for implementing the RTI Act 2009 in Bangladesh (due to be developed starting in 2022) to ensure the barriers marginalized women face are highlighted and appropriate strategies are proposed and addressed in the plan.
- Continue to strengthen the RTI Working Group so that it plays a monitoring role in implementing strategic plan 2022–2028 for the implementation of RTI.
- Strengthen sub-partners, CSOs, and other organizations to monitor the implementation of strategic plan 2022–2028 at the district, upazila, and union levels—and ensure information is used to adapt and manage programming.

**IR 2: National and target local governments more effectively and equitably provide information to women in target districts.**

- Further support the government in training both public servants and locally elected officials using an RTI ToT gender-sensitive module.
- Develop and push for the inclusion of a gender component in all RTI training modules targeting government civil servants at the national, district, upazila, and union levels—initially targeting government agencies that can expand it to other government agencies in the long term.

**IR 3: CSOs and information liaisons in target districts advance women’s use of the right of access of information.**

- Building on programming lessons learned, set up a “brainstorming and lessons learned” workshop with sub-partners and select CSOs aimed at creating user-friendly lessons learned for policy development on strategies to improve marginalized women’s access to information. This includes identifying the most effective strategies.
- Develop a user-friendly “good practices” guide drawn from the existing ToT RTI curriculum, gender-sensitive training, and existing cost-effective practices such as courtyard meetings and booth camps.
- Create a plan to roll out a user-friendly “good practices” guide in all areas where there are marginalized women—starting with the current four districts and moving throughout the country.
- Once ToT are conducted, provide incentives to all CSAs (CSOs, journalists, religious leaders) for future roll-out, and report back to maximize the coverage area.
- Ensure that good practices are effectively captured and distributed so that others can learn from them, e.g., tools such as courtyard meetings, booth camps, and the creation of RTI cells.
- Continue to build the skills of the sub-partners, e.g., building their capacity to conduct both online and offline work. Train the marginalized women to use Union Digital Centers by incorporating this into the duties conducted by the Tottho Bondhus—and ensure that it is part of the ToT for CSOs, journalists, and religious leaders.
- Strengthen CSAs by developing an advocacy strategy that incorporates how they can push to make RTI a campaign issue in the local, district, and national elections.

# ANNEXES



## **ANNEX I: DESK REVIEW**

BRAC Institute of Governance and Development/The Carter Center. Advancing Women's Rights of Access to Information in Bangladesh, Baseline Survey, June 2017.

The Carter Center. Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh, Annual Reports. October 1, 2016–September 30, 2017.

The Carter Center. Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh, Annual Reports. October 1, 2017–September 30, 2018.

The Carter Center. Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh, Annual Reports. October 1, 2018–September 30, 2019.

The Carter Center. Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh, Annual Reports. October 1, 2019–September 30, 2020.

The Carter Center. Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh, Annual Reports. October 1, 2019–September 30, 2020 (revised).

The Carter Center. Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh, Y1 Q1.

The Carter Center. Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh, Y2 Q1.

The Carter Center. Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh, Y2 Q3.

The Carter Center. Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh, Y3 Q1.

The Carter Center. Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh, Y4 Q1.

The Carter Center. Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh, Y4 Q2.

The Carter Center. Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh, Y4 Q3.

The Carter Center. Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh, Y5 Q1.

The Carter Center. Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh, Y5 Q2.

The Carter Center. Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh, Y5 Q2 (revised).

The Carter Center. Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh, Program Description.

The Carter Center Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh (AWRTI) Program Description, The Carter Center Extension.

The Carter Center Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh (AWRTI) Program Description, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plan, Final II.

The Carter Center Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh (AWRTI) Program Description, MEL Plan, Cost Extension.

The Carter Center Advancing Women's Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh (AWRTI) Program Description, Approved MEL Plan Cost Extension.

The Carter Center/MJF's Global Access to Information Program: Women and the Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh, May 2016.

The Carter Center Access to Information Legislation Implementation Assessment Tool Pilot Findings in Select Agencies: Bangladesh, November 2014.

The Carter Center Assessment on COVID-19, 2020.

Hasan, Sadik. “Rural Women’s Access to ICTs in ‘Digital Bangladesh’: Rationale and Challenges.” *Public Affairs and Governance*, Vol, 8, No. 2, August 2020, pp. 206–232.

Information Commission. *Connecting Government to Citizens Implementing Right to Information Act, 2009*, in *Bangladesh Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, 2014.

Management Resources Development Institute (MRDI). *Right to Access Information Survey*, 2019.

MRDI. *How the Bangladeshi Media Use the RTI Act for Free and Qualitative Reporting Assessment Report*.

MRDI. *Magic Happens When You Carry the RTI Torch*, September 2019.

USAID/Bangladesh Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS), December 2020–2025.

## ANNEX 2: LIST OF TRAININGS, 2017–2020

Location	Partners	Training	Length	Groups Targeted
<b>2017</b>				
Sylhet, Khagrachari	TUS IDEA	Inception meeting/workshops		District-level government and CSOs
Dhaka	MRDI	RTI orientation includes how to file an RTI complaint		Formal sector women
Khagrachari Sylhet	IDEA TUS	Capacity-building		Mid-level CSO participants
<b>2018</b>				
Dhaka	TCC	RTI Intensives		Government
Sylhet, Khagrachari	TUS, IDEA	Awareness meetings/training		District-level community members
Dhaka	MRDI BILS <sup>42</sup>	RTI orientation		Formal sector women
Sylhet, Khagrachari	TUS, IDEA	Awareness-raising workshops		Local organizations
Dhaka	MRDI	Awareness-raising workshops		12 NGOs
Sylhet, Khagrachari, Dhaka	TUS, IDEA MRDI	Capacity-building workshops		NGOs and CSOs
Sylhet, Khagrachari	MJF	ToT		CSOs and district government actors
<b>2019</b>				
Dhaka	TCC, MJF	Experience sharing workshop		Donors, national government and CSOs
Sylhet	Information Commission, DC of Sylhet	Awareness-raising		UNOs from 13 upazilas
Dhaka	MRDI	RTI boot camps	2 days	Women from Dhaka, Khagrachari
Dhaka	MJF	RTI ToT		CSOs
Sylhet, Khagrachari	MTF	RTI refreshers	1 day	District-level RTI Working Group
Dhaka	TCC	RTI intensives		National-level government officials

<sup>42</sup> Bangladesh Institute for Labor Studies

Location	Partners	Training	Length	Groups Targeted
<b>2020</b>				
Sylhet, Khagrachari	TCC	RTI intensives	2 days	District-level government officials
Sylhet	TUS	Capacity development training		Local union Parishad bodies
Sylhet, Khagrachari, Dhaka	TCC	Gender sensitization meetings/workshops		RTI Working Group Local government officials
Sylhet, Khagrachari	TUS, IDEA	Awareness-raising events		District-level information officers and union parishad
Dhaka	TCC	Gender-sensitive training		High-level government officials
Sylhet, Khagrachari	TUS, IDEA	Capacity-building		Key CSOs, youth groups, schools, and teacher groups
Dhaka	MRDI	ToT		2 CSOs
Dhaka	TCC	Workshop to consider the most marginalized women		Government and civil society
Dhaka	TCC and CD	Gender sensitization workshop		Secretaries and assistant secretaries
Sylhet, Khagrachari	TUS, IDEA	RTI awareness workshops RTI intensive (virtual)		LGIs and community leaders (local level)
Satkhira	AS	Introductory discussions		Union chairperson and local community in three unions of two upazilas
Khagrachari, Sylhet, Rajshahi, Satkhira	TCC Action Aid	Capacity-building		Community and youth leaders
Sylhet	TUS	RTI		Youth leaders

## ANNEX 3: KII AND FGD PARTICIPANT LISTS

**Table I: Overall Key Informant Interview Evaluation Participants**

No	M/F <sup>43</sup>	Type/Organization	Name	Location
1	M	IDEA	Nazmul Haque	Sylhet
2	M	Information officer	Ujjal Shil	Sylhet
3	M	CSO leader	Koyes Ahmad	Sylhet
4	M	Religious Leader	Abdul Basit	Sylhet
5	M	CSO leader	Md Asaduzzaman Sayem	Sylhet
6	M	Journalist	Khaled Ahmed	Sylhet
7	M	Public servant	Ali Hossain	Sylhet
8	M	Information officer	Atiqur Rahman Shah	Rajshahi
9	M	Cabinet Division	Muhammad Asadul Haque	Dhaka
10	F	DAC Leadership Department of Women Affairs	Ms. Rasheda Parvin	Rajshahi
11	M	Religious Leader	Kazi Ekramullah Faruki	Satkhira
12	M	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs	Md. Lokman Hossain,	Dhaka
13	M	Information Commission	Asadul Haque	Dhaka
14	F	TCC	Laura Neuman	USA
15	F	TCC COP	Sumana Sultana Mahmud	Dhaka
16	M	TCC MEL Staff	Shahroz Anam	Dhaka
17	F	TCC	Rukshana Afroj	Dhaka
18	M	BRAC	Dr. Wahid Abdallah	Dhaka
19	M	MRDI	Hasibur Rahman Mukur	Dhaka
20	M	MJF	Shaheen Anam,	Dhaka
21	M	Dnet	Md. Forhad Uddin	Dhaka
22	M	TUS	Ripan Chakma	Khargachari
23	M	AS	Abus Sabur Biswas	Satkhira
24	M	ACD	Salima Sarwar	Rajshahi
25	M	UNO	Pankaj Chandra Debnath	Rajshahi
26	M	Information Officer	Md Atiqur Rahman Shah	Rajshahi
27	M	Journalist	GM Murtaza	Rajshahi
28	F	CSO leader	Ms. Rasheda Parvin	Rajshahi
29	M	LGI public servant	Mostak Ali	Rajshahi
30	M	Information officer	Md. Mozzamal Haque	Satkhira

<sup>43</sup> Nine women and 30 men were interviewed.

No	M/F <sup>43</sup>	Type/Organization	Name	Location
31	F	CSO leader	Rubia Khatun	Satkhira
32	M	LGI public servant	SM Euanul Islam	Satkhira
33	F	UNO	Ms. Fatema Tui- Johra	Satkhira
34	N	LGI public servant	Mostsfizur Rahmana Uzzal	Khargachari
35	F	Journalist	Ms. Ching Me Pru Ekushev	Khargachari
36	F	CSO leader	Ms. Sufiya Khatun	Khargachari
37	M	Religious Leader	Sabbir Mahmud Imam	Khargachari
38	M	Information officer	Bappi Chakraborty	Khargachari
39	M	Deputy Commissioner	Protap Chandra Biwas	Khargachari

**Table 2: Focus Group Discussion Participants in Four Districts<sup>44</sup>**

FGD Type	Name/Description
<b>Sylhet</b>	
Civil Servants	UNO Upazila Youth Development Upazila Agriculture Officer Upazila Primary Education Officer Upazila Information Service Officer
CSOs	Gorango Patro ATM Badrul Islam Khalilur, Rahman Gulam Mustafa, Chayan Chakrabarty
Women	Koli Akter Sumi Begum Lovely Begum Shipa Akter Ishita Das
Community Leaders	Alhajj Shahid Ahmed Shirina Akhter Amina Begum Abul Kashem Khaled Mazudul Mostak

<sup>44</sup>\*Thirty-four (34) women and 66 men were interviewed.

FGD Type	Name/Description
RTI Working Group	UNO Upazila Women Affairs Officer Upazila Youth Development Officer Upazila Secondary Education Officer Upazila Agriculture Officer
<b>Khagrachari</b>	
Women	Alo Rani Chakma Noita Tripura Monjurika Chakma Ashiya Begum Guri Mala Tirpura
CSOs	Suman Taluder Danessor Tripura Layas Dewan Bishan Roy Gitika Tripura
RTI Working Group	Upazila Youth Officer Upazila Youth Development Officer District Officer Tottho Apa Upazila Livestock Officer
Community Leaders Khagrachari	Suchoma Chakmam Nishi Tripura Susmita Sen Tripura Ronik Tripura Karbari Jaya Tripura
Civil Servants Khagrachari	Jawahar Laa Chakma Priyokanti Chakma Triratan Chakma Adin Chakma Antara Chakma
<b>Satkhira</b>	
CSOs	Farida Akter Beauty Anzumnara Shahanaz Pervin Shekh Hedayetul Gour Podo Das

FGD Type	Name/Description
RTI Working Group	Khandakar Rabiul Islam Md. Abdullah Al Mamun GM Bablur Rahman Mirana Aktar Tottho Kendra Abdul Kalam Azad
Community Leaders	Babulur Rahman Md Shariful Islam Md. Rahmatullah Monirul Islam Sheik Abdullah
Civil Servants	Md. Zahidur Rahmsn SK Shahidur Rahman Sanjib Kumar Das Md. Abdus Salim Mst Hira Khatun
Women	Ostomi Malo Shefali Bibi Shipra Roy Sharifa Khatun Shipra Rany Firoz Ahmed
<b>Rajshahi</b>	
Civil Servants	Dr. Barnabus Hasdak Md. Sadikuzzaman Mst. Mousumi Khatun Hossain Khan Abul Khayer Dr. Bella Hossain
Community Leaders	Susoma Rani Santona Topo Projitaa Rani Bijili Kumari Mosammat Bilkish Ara
RTI Working Group	Md. Rasheduzzaman Rafiza Tabassum Sharim Shapla Kamruzzaman Bakul Ashiqur Rahman



FGD Type	Name/Description
CSOs	Nazmun Nahar Sumi Sabitri Hembrom Shreemoti Krishna Debi Md. Towfiqul Islam Bishal
Women	Mukti Rani Sumita Robidas Sukla Robidas Shree Lima Rani Das Lucky Rani Das

## ANNEX 4: KII INTERVIEW GUIDES AND FGD GUIDE

### KII Guide for USAID Bangladesh

#### Introduction

USAID has funded TCC to implement this project and has monitored the project closely and been involved in the activities especially at the national level. It is crucial to gain the insight of this critical stakeholder.

**Effectiveness:** To what extent has AWRTI been successful in achieving activity objectives?

- What has been your role in ensuring the project stayed on track?
- What were some of the most notable unintended consequences?
- In your view what were the main factors that led to the achievement of objectives?
- How did your office ensure that youth were integrated into the implementation?

**Relevance:** To what extent are the activity's objectives still relevant to the current development circumstances in Bangladesh?

- What is your assessment as to how responsive the activity has been to changing needs within the policy environment and seizing opportunities for impact? What has been your role in ensuring that?
- What evidence do you have that the activity's policy analysis to policy actors and stakeholders? Are the benefits reaching them and if yes, how? If not, why not?
- How do policy actors and stakeholders use the activity's policies analysis and recommendations? How do policy actors and stakeholders assess the utility of the activity's work?
- Which strategies (training, campaigns, info ladies, or partnering with NGOs and government) have been the most effective to ensure relevance to the context?

**Client Satisfaction:** To what degree do representatives of the GOB, civil society (NGOs), and community perceive AWRTI's success in achieving its objectives?

- How do you see the government engaging in the work? What evidence do you see concerning the government's satisfaction with AWRTI and what role have they played in ensuring the achievement of objectives?

**Sustainability:** How much progress has the implementer made in ensuring sustainability of AWRTI activities beyond USAID support?

- What evidence have you seen that this will have an impact beyond your support? What has been put in place to ensure that there is some level of sustainability to the interventions.

## KII Guide for the TCC

### Introduction

TCC is the implementing partner and has conducted this project in other countries. They will be able to answer content questions and it will also be important to ask their opinion about the project and also comparisons and lessons learned from other countries.

**Effectiveness:** To what extent has AWRTI been successful in achieving activity objectives?

- Which of the intended results of the project has occurred as planned?
- Which ones have not occurred and what was the reason they have not?
- How have you had to course correct?
- What have been some of the unintended consequences both positive and negative?

**Relevance:** To what extent are the activity's objectives still relevant to the current development circumstances in Bangladesh?

- How have you responded to the changing needs in the policy environment? Can you give an example of how AWRTI adjusted to a change in policy and what the impact of that was?
- How was your policy analysis shared with different actors and how would you assess the benefit it has had in reaching them?
- What type of feedback have you received from policy actors and how does their feedback into your program?
- Which strategies (training, campaigns, info ladies, or partnering with NGOs and government) have been the most effective to ensure relevance to the context?

**Client Satisfaction:** To what degree do representatives of the GOB, civil society (NGOs), and community perceive AWRTI has been successful in achieving its objectives?

- What aspects of the overall project did you feel were most effective in ensuring the objectives of the overall project were achieved?
- Which targets do you feel have benefited most from the program—that have had the most impact?
- How do you feel the main stakeholders perceived the success of the achievement of objectives?

**Sustainability:** How much progress has the implementer made in ensuring sustainability of AWRTI activities beyond USAID support?

- What strategies did you use to ensure sustainability? What strategies do you feel have been most effective and why? What else will you do before the end of the project to further ensure that the project is sustainable?
- **What other things do you wish you had done in retrospect?**
- **What were the main challenges of the project and how address these?**

## KII Guide for (NGO) Partners

### Introduction

In the AWRTI TCC has worked through partners in each of the districts highlighted in Annex 2. In some instances, partners have been provided a subgrant and then conduct the various activities in the districts. TCC has partnered with existing groups that are conducting related programs. The questions may differ slightly between partners and will need to be further contextualized.

Can you give a background of your work on this project?

**Effectiveness:** To what extent has AWRTI been successful in achieving activity objectives?

- Which of the intended results of the project have occurred as planned? Which ones have not occurred and what was the reason they have not? What have been some of the unintended consequences?
- How has youth been integrated into the implementation of the AWRTI?
- What have been the main successes of the AWRTI? What have been the challenges that have made it difficult to see the project through as planned?
- How have the challenges been addressed?

**Relevance:** To what extent are the activity's objectives still relevant to the current development circumstances in Bangladesh?

- How well has AWRTI changed to adapt to the changing policy environment?
- What are some examples as to how the AWRTI has had to adapt to the changing policy environment?
- Which strategies (training, campaigns, info ladies, or partnering with NGOs and government) have been the most effective to ensure relevance to the context?

**Client Satisfaction:** To what degree do representatives of the GOB, civil society (NGOs), and community perceive AWRTI has been successful in achieving its objectives?

- How do you think national government actors such as the Information Commission and the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs feel about the AWRTI activity? What about district- and local-level government actors? What is your opinion about the most effective way to reach these groups? What about women at the local level especially very marginalized women and youth?

**Sustainability:** How much progress has the implementer made in ensuring sustainability of AWRTI activities beyond USAID support?

- How do you think the approaches that AWRTI has used will ensure sustainability of the program?
- Which approaches should be further supported, and which ones do you think are not contributing to sustainability? Are there any actors that TCC should have engaged to ensure sustainability? What can they do now until they close the program to further enhance sustainability?

## KII Guide for National and District Government Actors

### Introduction

TCC has engaged the Cabinet Department, Information Commission, and the Ministry of Women and Children and they serve as key partners on the project given the key role, they all play on the issue of RTI Act and its implementation and ensuring that women, youth, and all marginalized groups have as much access to information, and it helps them meet their government developmental goals. District-level government partners have also been engaged.

**Effectiveness:** To what extent has AWRTI been successful in achieving activity objectives?

- Which strategies have been most effective in ensuring the success of the activity objectives in your opinion?
- What have been the least effective and how has that been communicated to TCC?
- What steps have been taken to ensure the effective and achieving objectives of the project?

**Relevance:** To what extent are the activity's objectives still relevant to the current development circumstances in Bangladesh?

- How is the AWRTI activity aligned with government policy and programs?
- How did this come about and what strategies have been used to ensure that AWRTI has remained relevant to the development context in Bangladesh?
- Which strategies (training, campaigns, info ladies, or partnering with NGOs and government) have been the most effective to ensure relevance to the context?

**Client Satisfaction:** To what degree do representatives of the GOB, civil society (NGOs), and community perceive AWRTI has been successful in achieving its objectives?

- How have you been supported to achieve the objectives of the AWRTI activity?
- What more could be done for greater success?
- Which type of activities has been the most client-focused, training, meetings, other?
- What have been the challenges and how have they been addressed? For instance, the RTI stakeholder groups or the National-level Multi-Stakeholder Committees – what role have they played? How have the national and district levels worked together to ensure sustainability and how did the AWRTI contribute to that?

**Sustainability:** How much progress has the implementer made in ensuring the sustainability of AWRTI activities beyond USAID support?

- What steps did TCC take early on to ensure long-term sustainability in the program? Which choice of partners has made it clear that this work will be sustainable? Which partners have made less sense? What about activities – which ones will help to ensure sustainability and which ones are less effective in that aspect?
- What role are you playing in that and what else could you recommend could be done to ensure further sustainability?

## KII Guide for Community and Religious Leaders

### Introduction

TCC has attempted to engage an array of stakeholders for this project, including community and religious leaders who play an important influential role. Community and religious leaders have been part of the RWI Working Group at the district level. Community and religious leaders have a great role in both facilitating greater access to information for women and at the same time blocking access—it is important to further understand these aspects which may differ by district and individual.

**Effectiveness:** To what extent has AWRTI been successful in achieving activity objectives?

- How have TCC and their partners engaged community and religious leaders to improve women's access to information? Of the strategies used, what do you feel have been most effective? For instance, how has the work of the RTI Working group that you are a member of contributed to that role? In what kinds of training have you taken part? What did you learn and how has this increased your ability to help support women's access to information? What other strategies are you aware of, and what did you feel about them?
- How have you been asked for feedback, and, if you have not, what kind of feedback do you have for TCC and its partners on this activity?

**Relevance:** To what extent are the activity's objectives still relevant to the current development circumstances in Bangladesh?

- How do you feel that the policy and the program of the government have changed related to implementing the RTI Law at the national level since 2016 when this project started? What about at the community level? What are some examples of policies that have changed or added or been revitalized? What role do you feel the AWRTI had in influencing these?
- Which strategies (training, campaigns, info ladies, or partnering with NGOs and government) have been the most effective to ensure relevance to the context.

**Client Satisfaction:** To what degree do representatives of the GOB, civil society (NGOs), and community perceive AWRTI has been successful in achieving its objectives?

- How have you been supported to achieve the objectives of the AWRTI activity?
- Which type of activities has been the most client-focused, training, meetings, other?
- What role have you and other community members played to support women's access to information—how have you been supported or encouraged to work with women and youth directly? What impact did this have and is there anything more that AWRTI should do?

**Sustainability:** How much progress has the implementer made in ensuring the sustainability of AWRTI activities beyond USAID support?

- How and when did the TCC and partners first engage with you and other members of the community on this AWRTI project? What is your view of their timing and approach in terms of how it will affect long-term sustainability in the program? What about their choice of partners – do you feel this choice made clear that this work will be sustainable?
- What about activities – which ones will help to ensure sustainability and which ones are less effective in that aspect?
- What role are you playing in that and what else could you recommend that could be done to ensure further sustainability?

## EVALUATION GUIDELINES FOR FGDs

<b>Identifier Code:</b>	<b>The topic for the FGD</b>
<b>Moderator Name:</b>	()
<b>Note Taker:</b>	
<b>Sex of Respondents: (SEE BELOW)</b>	
<b>Age of Respondent (if appropriate): (SEE BELOW)</b>	
<b>Division</b>	
<b>District:</b>	
<b>Upazila:</b>	
<b>Union:</b>	

Respondent #:	1	2	3	4	5
Sex of respondent:					
Eighteen or above? (Y/N)					

### Illustrative FGD/SGD Guide Questions

<p><b>Facilitator Guide:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Make sure all participants have signed their names and understand and agree the discussion will be recorded and transcribed.</li> <li>2. The discussion is confidential, no one outside the ET will have access to the information and individual names of participants are not identified in the transcript.</li> <li>3. <b>Explain the objective of this FGD:</b> The discussion is part of a larger study commissioned by USAID in Bangladesh to learn the results of AWRTI activities, particularly with regards to their efforts to strengthen partners in Bangladesh. The ET is visiting several districts and talking to different people who have interacted with this project. We want to learn your opinions, contributions, and recommendations. The overall purpose of this study is to understand what has worked the best and what have been the main challenges, whether intended goals have been reached and what have been some of the unintended consequences.</li> <li>4. <b>Some rules of engagement:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyone has the same right to participate; all of your opinions are valuable.</li> <li>• We want all of you to participate, please allow everyone to express their point of view.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
---

- We do not have the answers and we do not expect you to answer in any specific way, please be as honest as possible in your responses.
- There are no wrong or right answers; all answers are good answers.
- You do not need to agree with others; everyone can express their own opinions.
- Only one person talks each time; we need to be able to hear the others.

### **General Questions**

1. What is your overall impression of the AWRTI/TCC activity?
2. What do you think are the main objectives of the AWRTI/TCC activity? (If need by prompt them by stating the key objectives found in table)

### **Content Questions**

3. What has been your involvement in the AWRTI/TCC activities?
4. What have you learned participating in the AWRTI/TCC activities?
5. How have you been able to contribute to increasing access to women's right to information concretely?
6. How will you use what you learned in the future?
7. What do you consider to be the most valuable and most effective about the AWRTI/TCC activity?
8. How has COVID-19 impacted the AWRTI/TCC activities and what was done to mitigate this?
9. How do you feel the AWRTI activity has helped families support women with greater access to the information?
10. What are some examples of how AWRTI has helped the government to support women's access to the information? Are there any specific areas?
11. What are some examples of how AWRTI has helped local leadership support women to access information?
12. How has AWRTI integrated youth into the program?

### **Concluding Question**

13. What is the most prominent issue that we discussed today?

Thank you for participating. This has been a rewarding discussion and your opinions will be a valuable asset to our assessment of the AWRTI program. We hope you have found the discussion interesting too.

Thank you.



## ANNEX 5: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### **Cabinet Division:**

**UNO:** An Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) is the chief executive officer of an **upazila** (subdistrict) and a mid-level officer of the Bangladesh Civil Service (Administration cadre), known as Bangladesh Administrative Service. The position is appointed by the Cabinet Division.

**Designated Officer:** Officer in charge of providing information throughout government offices at the upazila and union levels. All their information-related activities are extra responsibilities, and they are not provided any extra incentives.

**Right to Information Act 2009:** In 2009, Bangladesh enacted the Right to Information Act, 2009, for ensuring the free flow of information to citizens to establish good governance.

**Information Commission:** Its role is to oversee, recommend and coordinate implementation efforts by various government ministries of the Right to Information Act, 2009. The main functions are educating and influencing (we promote good practice and give information and advice), resolving problems (we resolve eligible complaints from people who think their rights have been breached), and enforcing (we use legal sanctions against those who ignore or refuse to accept their obligations).

**Marginalized women:** A broad term based on ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, and location-based marginalization. This includes Dalit and other women who are from marginalized groups but could also be women who are illiterate, widowed, live in remote areas, and/or are discriminated against based on religion.

**RTI Boot Camp:** An extensive training conducted by MRDI—targeting government actors and CSOs on all aspects of the RTI Act.

**Booth Camp:** Government representatives sitting at information booths such as officials from the Social Service department, Women’s Affairs, Education, Agriculture—where the UNO, women and community members can come to ask questions and submit requests.

**Tottho Apa** The Tottho Apa program is an initiative by the Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs that started in 2018 and employs young women as information ambassadors who provide communications technology, health and wellness information, and basic primary health services to women who might otherwise lack access.

**Tottho Bondhu:** An information woman hired by The Carter Center to work in each of the districts. Her main role is to support The Carter Center’s efforts in establishing a vibrant access to the information regime in Bangladesh by providing assistance to interested requesters and support for women seeking public information. Activities of the Tottho Bondhus will include working in target districts and communities to promote the right of access to information for women by assisting with requests, information sharing, and awareness raising.

**RTI Online Tracking System (RTIOTS):** An online system created by Dnet—now under the auspices of the Information Commission, which allows users to submit information requests online and the local government to respond electronically.

**Information Officer or Liaison:** A member of the Information Commission who operates at the district level.

**RTI Working Group:** Created in 2015 to help with the implementation of the RTI Act, 2009.

**RTI Women’s Club:** A woman-only space comprised of 21 members, with five members serving on a leadership committee. They play a role at the community level—informing members about the 2009 RTI Act, human rights, and available government services.

**RTI Cell:** A term used by the sub-partner AS in Satkhira. These cells operate at different levels and include both men and women at the union, upazila, and district levels. These cells include a range of actors—Dalit and other marginalized women, journalists, grassroots people, and union-level secretaries—to conduct advocacy and learn how to submit requests, including online requests. The district-level cells include the participation of the sub-partner.

**RTI Forum:** A coalition of CSO activists and capable individuals.