



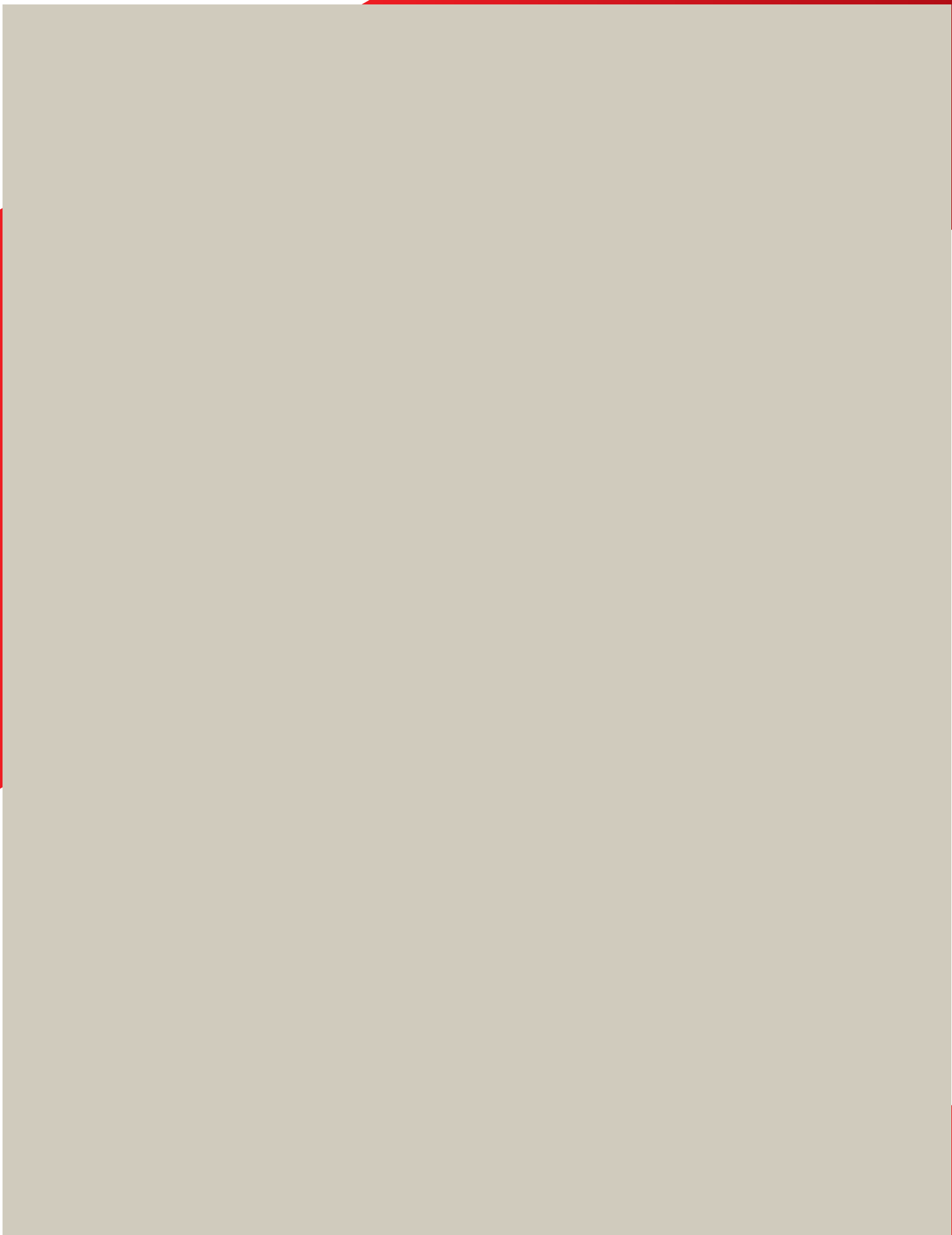
CHILDREN VOICE IN ENSURING GOOD GOVERNANCE





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CHILD PARTICIPATION IMPROVING ACCOUNTABILITY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT



“I have learnt what the rights is and how to talk about rights. Then I talked in the pre-budget and open budget session of Union Parishad (UP). On behalf of our forum, I have urged to increase the allocation for education in the pre-budget and open budget discussion. And the chairman declared to increase the budget for education immediately” said Rabeya , 14 years old.

She added” I did not know who are the chairman, member and secretary of the Union Parishad (UP). But now I go to union parishad when need any help from them. I also help other children to take support from UP in need,”

“All the child forum members are children, work together and share their problems and opinions like family. Previously, our family and

elders of our village never listened to us. Now we don't hesitate to talk to our parents and even with the chairman and the elders of our village” she added

Rabeya with her forum took different initiatives for the children. “One of my relatives got the support from union parishad through child forum. She almost stopped study as her family could not manage her tuition fees. I shared her problem in the forum and all the members agreed to talk to chairman on this. At the same time, she submitted her problems in the complaint box, then the UP enlisted her name for VGD support of 30 kg rice monthly.”

“I could have stopped my friend's marriage if I knew about child marriage before. Now I stop child marriage with the support of union chairman or member “remarked Rabeya. She has been working as president of ward child forum of vomra union under sathkhira district.

She has been disseminating the awareness message on child marriage and education. Rabeya stressed, “I have been working for other children and I will encourage all my friends relatives and neighbors to work together for development. Because I know when a child raise any issue it never counted but when all children share any problems together then then elders take it seriously.”

Child Friendly Local Governance has developed the confidence and awareness of children to contribute in the planning process of local development. With the information and awareness, children contribute in the development process relates to their lives

When children have the opportunity to express their views; can also participate in the development process led by the adult “We also monitor the service delivery system of government and raise the issue in ward meeting. Then we also follow up the issue regularly to ensure the immediate actions from UP officials. In most cases, chairman and secretary take the immediate actions for the gaps of services.

She has also encouraged the other girls to talk about their problems and use the complaint box in need. “In the beginning, my family discouraged me, but when appreciation from the neighbors in turn , made my acceptance in the family . I also participate in decisions that relates my life. ”

Rabeya says “My family and friend listen me as I have done some work for the children, I will continue my work to support the education and will continue raising awareness on drugs and child marriage to protect children.”

EMPOWERING CHILDREN MAKING PART OF DEVELOPMENT



“Child forum has given me the strength to raise awareness on education and child marriage” said Jesmin sultana, age 14.

She added “I was forced into marriage in 14 when I was student of grade seven. After marriage, I had to stop study and face all the challenges in life. I had no idea on how to stop my marriage but now I have learnt how to help other girls to stop their marriage. I also have stopped child marriage with the support of UP chairman and member”

“I returned to my family after one year as a divorced. Since then I started studying again and also engaging myself in different awareness raising activities of the community. I was interested in the child forum when I learnt that all the members are children and I can work for other children.”

“I always looked opportunity to help the children who stopped study for tuition fees. I did not know how to help and who to ask for support. Now I ask directly to UP chairman or member for any support.”

In every union there is complain box where children and adolescent can come up with their any problems collected in the box is mostly solved by the chairman and member and the village police also help to solve the problems. “Every month, with the presence of children, UP chairman open the box and take the immediate actions if there is any major problem” she explained.

The complaints are discussed in the meeting with the presence of the chairman, president of Standing committee for Welfare of women and children, village police, lawyer and children. All the complaints through complaint box are also compiled in the register book by the UP secretary. “Dowry, lack of tube well, road repair and child marriage are the common problems submitted as complaint are resolved. We also follow up in every meeting with UP officials as some problems need long time actions for solution”

After the proper actions are taken, community people are also aware of the process of children’s involvement in the local government actions. “When I was selected as president, only my parents know about my initiatives for children and community. But now my community people also know and come to me for any support especially for children.”

“Being a forum member, I have a good relationship with UP officials and they listen to me when I raise any issue. Only my identity of forum member has given me the space in UP office.” She added.

“I have experienced all the challenges in my life as married in early age but I don’t want anyone experience this problems, I want every children can go to school and no girl is forced to get married. With the parents, children also need awareness and information to talk about their problems and rights. I want to study to become a teacher to spread my learning among all” expressed her dream” expressed Jesmin

THE VOICE OF EMPOWERMENT BRINGS THE CHANGES IN COMMUNITY

Mozahid Hossain Sakib, 14 years old, have been leading the ward child forum of vomra union under Sathkhira district for around one year. “I go to school but I know some of my friends cannot continue study as their family cannot afford. Child forum brought me the opportunity to speak for all children” said Sakib.

“I have been working with this child forum to work for all the children. As a forum president, I can talk about other children’s need” he added, “I lead the child forum meeting and listen to all the member of our forum. Then the problems and needs are prioritized to discuss with UP officials.”

“We, as forum have stopped twenty child marriages in the last two years. Recently, I have stopped a marriage in my village. I knew the girl was very young than marriage age. I tried to convince her parents even reminding the legal actions. Then I informed the secretary of union parishad and he helped to stop the marriage “he added,

Sakib explained”We have a sharing meeting with union chairman every month where we share about our problems and our need. Besides, the chairman opens the complaint box with our presence. He takes the immediate actions if there any urgent issue. He added, we use the complaint box not only for problems but also to share our opinions. We participate in the pre-budget meeting and urge for the allocation in open budget meeting “

In the beginning, Sakib also faced challenges to work in a forum, but the involvement of UP officials with the forum convinced his family. “Now I am working for the all the children and for the development of our union. We, total fifty children are working together and the union chairman and member consider our opinions “he remarked. “I did not even know the UP officials and their responsibilities for children. Being involved in the child forum, I have learnt their responsibilities and the way to reach to them”

“We have developed good relationship with the local government officials. They listen to us anytime for any support. They have now better understanding about our problems and need.”

“In our union, red card is provided to the girls to support their education and stop child marriage. Now child marriage is reducing day by day in our union. Every union can take this initiatives to stop child marriage.”

“My dream is to see our union as model union for other union and then all other union chairman will listen to the children’s opinion like us. I will encourage the younger to work for the development. My aim is to make more leaders who will lead the children forum and the development. And I think every leader should make some good example to the new leader.” Sakib stressed.



RECONSTRUCTING DAMAGED ROADS ON THE BASIS OF CHILDREN'S COMPLAINTS

“School going children suffer the most due to the massive damage of roads here in Satkhira” said Ruqaiya Sultana, age 17. “The roads are so broken that we cannot go to school easily by these roads. Accidents are very common especially while we ride on bicycles to reach our school” she added.

Ruqaiya Sultana is also a member of the Child Forum of Breaking the Silence. She attends the monthly meetings of the forum regularly. “The expenses of transport had increased so much. This is becoming insufferable day by day. We should do something to solve the problem.” she placed the issue on a monthly meeting of the forum. Ruqaiya, the eleven class student, posted a report to the complain box of the Municipality. Upon receiving some complaints from children like Ruqaiya, the authority gave the problem a priority. “We will repair the most damaged roads of the ward no. 4 soon” the Mayor pledged. Within 15 days, the severely damaged roads were temporarily reconstructed.

“Now we all can move with ease on the roads. Time is less consumed, money is saved” Ruqaiya said. “Children are noticing the social problems. I am so proud of them. It is their credit that the roads are repaired now”.

“I will allot a priority budget next time for the construction of the roads permanently” he assured.



RECONSTRUCTION OF A PARK THROUGH DIALOGUE SESSION



“We have many schools, colleges, mosques and temples. But there is no park for our amusement” regretted a child in a Dialogue Session. In Satkhira, there is only one park named Shahid Abdur Razzaq Park. Previously damaged and left useless, the park was reconstructed after the children of the forum had moved forward.

“The only park in Satkhira became useless after many years of usage. With almost no ride in that playground, we lost our interest to go there” complains Hasi Parvin, a member of the child forum. Again, there was no other park in the district where children could go for amusement. So, the members of Child forum decided to take an initiative to report the problem to the Mayor through Dialogue Sessions. Hasi Parvin informed the Mayor about the poor and useless condition of the park. “Generally used by the adults, children get less priority while playing in that park” she added. The mayor pledged to make the park suitable for the children. After few days of the Dialogue Session, the reconstruction process had started. The Municipality intended to

construct the park ideally. Building seating arrangements around the trees and constructing swings and slides, the authority prioritized the choices of children over adults.

One child from the forum says, “We the members of the Children’s forum will always be dedicated to work for

other children and the locality. We are grateful to Breaking the Silence and Mayor Taskin Ahmed for staying with us and giving us the opportunity. They value our views and help us. That is why we have got a park for us today". "Our children are taking part through the children's forum. Their initiatives helped the whole locality get a park where every child is enjoying a good time". One of the proud guardians said.

REPAIRING OF A CULVERT ON THE BASIS OF CHILDREN'S COMPLAINTS

Sultanpur is a beautiful village in the ward no. 4, Satkhira, a district situated in the southern part of Bangladesh. But the roads are in a very miserable condition there. "We suffer a lot due to the damaged roads. We cannot move easily in daytime let alone at night" a child from the village complains.

Shurjomukhi" (Sunflower), a child forum works in Sultanpur. They arrange regular monthly meetings and discuss the contemporary local issues. Through the meeting they came to know about a broken culvert of the village. "The culvert leads to a local school. People suffer while crossing over it. Many accidents had occurred there including an infant's downfall into a drain". One of the members of the forum addressed. The members of the forum decided unanimously to take a step towards repairing the culvert. "We reported the problem to the complain box of the Municipality. The monthly meeting of the Municipality discusses all the complaints received. Our report was taken into account" she added.

The Mayor knowing the sufferings of people asked the local authority to take necessary actions and repair the culvert within a week. Upon the order from the mayor, the culvert was repaired. Now the villagers are enjoying smooth movement over the culvert.

"I used to face a lot of problem while walking to my college over the culvert". Mst. Rubaiya Khatun, a member of the Child forum said. said, "We could not go our schools and colleges on Rickshaw, but now our problems have been solved" Tania Parvin, another member of the forum agreed.

"Our children are learning to solve the problems of their locality by their own. We are thankful to them." One guardian of a "Child forum's" member said. "There was a lot of positive changes after the Children forum of Sultanpur had been formed. Now, even these young people are being capable of marking social problems and discussing them among themselves. They are also being able to find an effective solution to those problems" added a father of another member.

Kazi Firoz Hasan, the Councilor of the Ward no. 4 said, "We all are dedicated to help the Children's forum. The members will get help of every kind from us". Taskin ahmed Chishti, the Mayor of Satkhira Municipality said, "I enjoy working with children. I will always listen to their complaints and give them an empirical solution in order to working with them actively".



PREVENTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT THROUGH DIALOGUE SESSIONS

“While going to school, some boys used to tease us using indecent words and gestures. Some of my friends had even stopped going to school” said Jesmin Aktar (Tisha), age 15 years. She is one of the girls victimized to the harassment by some local wicked boys. “We go to school by rickshaws or vans. Few of us walk to school. Those wicked boys used to bully every woman irrespective of their age regularly” she added.

Jesmin Aktar (Tisha) is also a member of “Breaking the silence”s’ child forum. Noticing the aforementioned molestation, she made her mind to stand against the teasing. “We must do something against the issue” she emphasized and focused on the vexation in the regular meeting of “Breaking the Silence” in ward no. 4. All the members discussed on the problem and its solution.

Jesmin and few other children attended the meeting held by the Municipality and presented the problem to the Mayor. “I will take necessary steps against the boys. If needed, legal actions would be taken. From today, nobody will harass you while going to school” –the Mayor assured. Firoz Hasan, the councilor of Ward no. 4, was appointed by the Mayor with the responsibility to monitor the problem. Mr. Hasan visited the place and caught the wicked boys red-handed. He called the Police instantaneously and the boys fled as soon as they saw the police. After that event, no occurrence of harassment took place there.

“After complaining to the municipality meeting, special legal actions were taken. As a result, no such event of molestation took place later in the village Sultanpur, Chashapara. Now, the girls can go to the school safely” Jesmin said smilingly.

“Sexual harassment is major problem. I will maintain the law against the molestation strictly to protect the girls. I want to provide a society for everyone where we can move safely” said Kazi Firoz Hasan, Councilor of the Ward no. 4.

“We can move along the way safely today. We are grateful to “Breaking the Silence” for the co-operation as we were able to prevent eve teasing successfully” said the student of class 10.

“If the Local Government’s representatives lay a hand to the participation of children, much a change in the society is quite possible. That is how many like me would enjoy the freedom from sexual harassment of every kind” she added.

