

## **Exploratory Study on the Capabilities and Prospects of Involving Union Parishads in Child Survival Development and Protection**

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### **a) Researchers' Identity**

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### **b) Objectives**

This study aimed at finding out information on the following aspects;

- i. Socio-Economic characteristics of union parishad chairmen and members;
- ii. Level of awareness of union parishad members and chairmen about the developmental function of UP with respect to child survival development and protection;
- iii. Whether union parishad as lowest tier of the local government institutions have capacities in terms of financial, manpower and logistics to perform the development function of CSD & P;
- iv. Whether union parishad members and chairmen have required training and motivation to perform the above mentioned functions; and
- v. How the role of UP could be strengthened for performing the child survival development and protection related activities and functions in ways better than the present.

### **c) Executive summary**

This study consists of 5 sections. Section I deals with socio economic characteristics of respondents. It is found that 90% of respondents belong to

age group 21-50 years, 100% of respondents are found literate, 64% of respondents live on agriculture and 95% of respondents have land ranging from 0.50 acre upto 7.50 acres.

Section II deals with level of awareness of Union Parishad Chairmen and members about Child Survival, Development and Protection. Their opinions covering a wide range of issues about children's educational right, child labour, child health care and nutrition, child diseases and different programmes for child survival, Development and Protection were sought to know their level of awareness. It is found that maximum number of respondents (74.36%) know Extended Programme on Immunization (EPI) for the protection of children from six fatal diseases. Another 46.72% respondents have knowledge about the existence of family Welfare Centre located at Union level. Only 17.95% and 10.26% of respondents have knowledge on child care centre and shishu Academy respectively.

Moreover, the respondents were interviewed to check their level of knowledge on child labour. Most of them (82.05%) expressed their total ignorance about the existence of child labour laws in Bangladesh. Respondents' opinions were also sought to highlight some of the measures to be helpful in controlling the child diseases in their unions. Maximum respondents replied that by providing safe drinking water, water sealed latrine, nutritious food, vaccinating child and increasing mother's awareness about child care would be helpful to control most of the child diseases prevailed in rural areas.

Section III deals with the capacity of Union Parishad in terms of financial, manpower and logistics to perform the developmental function of Child Survival, Development and Protection, Union Parishad earns income from many sources e.g. tax collection, trade license fee, transport like rickshaw/bicycle license fee, the government contribution, lease of Union Parishad owned pond and other properties, rent of shops owned by union Parishad, lease of khard (enclosure) and ferry ghat.

A close examination over the budget of 3 UPs for a period of three years divulges that the government contributes a sizable amount to Union Parishad. Moreover, amount of actual tax collection, the major source of Union Parishad's income, is found negligible which varies from 14.50% to 35.55% of proposed tax amount. The UPs income is spent on different heads like honorarium of chairman & members, salary of village police (chaukidar & dafader) salary of secretary, commission for tax collection and entertainment cost. By analysing the actual heads of expenditure of Union Parishad budget it is found that more than 80% of budgeted amount is spent on non-

development activities such as payment of chairman & members honorarium, salary of secretary & village police, office expenses and entertainment cost and the rest amount is spent for development purposes including health, education and sanitation.

The chairmen and members of UP were asked to priorities the Union Parishad's functions. The priorities of the functions according to them, are as follows: Development of road communications (87.18%), conflict resolution through village courts (53.85%), development of the quality of education and the educational institutions (33.33), arrangements for pure drinking water (23.08%), fixation of tax and tax collection (15.38%), tree plantation (12.82%), awareness building on family planning (15.38%), disaster management (10.26%), maintenance of the law and order situation (5.13%), and excavation of ponds (2.56%).

Process of Union Parishad's decision making in Ups monthly meeting was observed. It was found that the respective chairmen initiated the discussion and members were found to take active participation in discussions. After threadbare discussions the decisions were taken unanimously. In case of differences of opinions, chairman played a leading role to arrive at consensus over the issue.

Section IV deals with training and motivation of union parishad chairmen and members in performing Child Survival, Development and Protection smoothly. It is found that no chairmen and members of the study areas have got any training and motivation to perform the function of CSD and P. The respondents expressed that training would be useful to better perform this task of CSD and p. They suggested some topics to be covered in the training course e.g. primary health care, child nutrition.

Section V deals with role of union parishads in strengthening CSD and Programme. Most of the respondents (61.54%) feel that proper training to the parents would be helpful to achieve this objective. Furthermore, 48.72% of the respondents expressed that by adherence to the government order circulated time to time, Union Parishad could enhance its role in streamlining the activities submed under CSD and P.

Finally, this study gives some observations and recommendations. It is observed that the Union Parishad chairmen and members are aware of some of the issues related to the child survival, development and protection. But with the existing limited sources of income, the UPs can not play any viable role in advancing a vital programme like CSD & P. Increased amount of the government contribution and generous help from other donor agencies would enable them to make a meaningful contribution to the activities like CSD & P.

#### **d) Observations & Recommendations**

1. During data collection, it was observed that the Union Parishad (UP) chairmen & members are aware of child survival, development and protection (CSD &P) to some extent. They have some ideas on EPI, safe drinking water and compulsory primary education. They feel that each child has a right to receive education, safe drinking water can eradicate water borne diseases and EPI has established a remarkable role to control six fatal diseases as well. Apart from these, they have not many ideas about the laws and conventions about child labour. They did not show much concern about the fact that 5% of children age 5-9 and 25% of children age 10-14 are in the labour force, often exploited and are denied their right to education. They do not know that a committee for promotion of children's right and welfare has been established with the government and NGO participation.
2. The UP chairmen & members had not received any orientation training course on child development and so their horizon of knowledge is limited. It was also observed that they are eager to receive intensive training on CSD & P. After receiving training, it will be easier for them to formulate and implement the project on CSD & P. Therefore, before introducing any programme project, training is very essential for making the program/project a success.
3. The UP chairmen and members feel that children are the future citizen of a country. Country's welfare depends on them. But the existing financial capabilities of the UPs could not support any additional activities like CSD & P. Simultaneously; they expressed their views that the fund from the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh or any other donor agencies like UNICEF, UNDP (those who are related with children's welfare) will enable them to run the activities related to CSD & P. In addition to that, they also expressed that provision for honorium for them would be helpful for better implementation of CSD & P.
4. During the discussion, it was observed that most of the time, the UP chairmen and members were engaged in solving the disputes in village court. Apart from this, they were found less interested to do any other activities like CSD and tree plantation.
5. The Up chairmen and members were not aware of the fact that the period from 29 September to 5 October, 1992 was declared as the first National Children's Rights week. Even they had not known that

Bangladesh was a signatory and was one of the first 22 countries to ratify. Therefore, it would be better to make them aware of all the above mentioned things before introducing any program/project related to CSD & P.

6. The UP chairmen and members understand the basic needs of the children only in terms of material needs without which children can not even survive i.e. food, clothing, shelter and education. Besides these, they should know that in times of hazards like flood, fire and cyclone, the children must be protected from dangers. Sometimes, the children need affection and social acceptance also.

The UP chairmen and members feel that some recreational facilities like children's park and library would help to facilitate to develop the children's inner qualities. But at sometime, they are in dilemma whether the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh will be able to provide those facilities or not in each ward of the Union. It is true that for creating those facilities, huge amount of money will be required. Therefore, it is suggested, instead of establishing recreational facilities separately, compulsory Primary Education with recreational facilities linkages should be implemented properly. In school compound, there should be a play ground with necessary sports and games facilities and well equipped library. These might give more access to the children in recreation and will fulfill the objectives to a large extent.

