

## Citizen Voice and Action Nobo Jatra Evaluation Summary

Empowered citizens, improved government accountability, better services, and system strengthening are among the results of a social accountability approach employed by World Vision in the USAID-funded Nobo Jatra program in Bangladesh, according to an independent evaluation. The evaluation breaks new ground for social accountability in its findings on impact on governance, institutional strengthening, and political accountability.

The evaluation found that the approach, Citizen Voice and Action (CVA), led to “remarkable” achievements and “inspired institutional actors to overcome inertia and find motivation to improve their job performance.” It found that the approach helped local institutional actors to organize and coordinate themselves to improve service delivery in more creative ways, which had a “trickle up” effect to higher levels of government. “The problem identified in Bangladesh was not simply one of resources, but rather inertia in providing them on the part of relevant actors ... **As a result of CVA, service provision is improving along many dimensions and indicators.**”

Strengthening effects of the approach were identified via “institutions, which are performing better from improving the work among institutional (agency) actors as well as from communities via social pressure exerted from the outside; and via accountability, which resulted from strengthening both old and new formal and informal mechanisms of accountability that make inertia harder while rewarding positive performance and action.”

Key evaluation findings include:

- As a direct result of citizen voice amplified at national level through the CVA approach, the Bangladesh national government agreed to support an extra 600 government multi-purpose volunteers to serve southwest Bangladesh under a national government pilot volunteer program for service delivery improvements.
- The project may have contributed indirectly to considerations of new government legislation for every upazila<sup>1</sup> to recruit a service delivery monitoring officer and district services coordinator.
- There are numerous examples of policy dialogue leading to changes in government policy, commitments, legislation, and budget allocation, including budgetary prioritization for water and sanitation in the southwest, known as the “Khulna Declaration 2019”, and actions that may have downstream and/or lasting effects, including important linkages with divisional and national-level stakeholders.
- 88% of community health clinics targeted were meeting government standards<sup>2</sup> after the CVA approach was introduced, compared to only 49% before the approach was employed.
- 55% of Union Agricultural Service Units were meeting government standards compared to 30% prior to the CVA approach.
- Citizen assessments of service delivery revealed generally “fair” or “poor” ratings across health, water and sanitation, and agriculture services. By 2020, important progress on developing, implementing, and following-up on action plans were achieved. For example, government officials responded to more than 51% of 1,325 citizen demands under the agreed service action plans for

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<sup>1</sup> The second administrative tier of local government in Bangladesh below the district and the division

<sup>2</sup> These clinics were meeting between 76-100% of the government standards

community health clinics and 734 demands for water and sanitation improvements, and 40% of 515 action items for government agricultural service units were addressed.

- Service delivery was inclusive irrespective of gender, disability, or caste, and women’s empowerment was accelerated.
- A globally unique citizen feedback cloud database<sup>3</sup> provided an “excellent” platform for aggregated data to help track government response to citizen demands and support national lobbying

### Summary of findings on accountability

#### **Finding #1: CVA helps promote formal institutional accountability at various levels of government and within service delivery.**

*“CVA helped to promote accountability within formal institutions at various levels of government, aided by matchmaking, coordination, and feedback across departments at the union parishad level; it also provided inspiration for union parishad officials and upazila and line departments to work more cohesively, for new forms of citizen-activated direct accountability for institutional actors (e.g., posting phone numbers and activating committees; results “trickling up” from the local to meso and national levels), and for some documented actions to improve policies, budgets, and coordination at the upazila, district, and national levels.”*

#### **Finding #2: CVA helps promote social accountability, or accountability that arises from “outside” of institutions.**

*“CVA was a pathway to improving institutional performance and accountability even from outside of institutions via social accountability; it also allowed pathways to work with/within institutions that provide support to institutional actors (e.g., WATSAN committee) at local, meso, and national levels.”*

#### **Finding #3: CVA helps promote formal political accountability.**

*“Political pressure can still matter as activated through social accountability by convincing officials when and how they benefit from CVA. Moreover, the results of social accountability that “trickle up” from the local level to meso and national actors can contribute importantly to strengthening formal lines of institutional accountability for actors that are “nested” in the service delivery process, some of whom are subject to elections and some of whom are not, when citizens exert social accountability at one level and it influences actions at another. Overall government officials, including people’s representatives, have gradually grown more positive in responding to citizen’s demands. CVA has resulted in a positive attitude among office bearers about their roles and responsibilities and obligations to citizens.”*

### Testimony from government officials

An upazila government official in Kaligonj in Satkhira stated that the “CVA process has reduced the gap between citizens and their representatives. Elected representatives listen to citizens now very carefully. Working with the CVA process has made people courageous and informative; that in turn has led them to have

<sup>3</sup> Covering citizen activities in more than 15 countries

## Nobo Jatra New Beginning

Nobo Jatra (New Beginning) is a seven-year (2015-2022) USAID-funded program led by World Vision, in partnership with the World Food Program (WFP) and Winrock International as sub grantees. Nobo Jatra is implemented in close partnership with the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and three local partner NGOs. The goal is to “improve gender equitable food security, nutrition, and resilience of vulnerable communities” in Koyra, Dacope, Kaliganj, and Shyamnagar sub districts in southwest Bangladesh. Nobo Jatra targets 856,116 direct participants with multi sectoral interventions in water, sanitation, and hygiene, maternal and child health and nutrition, gender, agriculture and alternative livelihoods, disaster risk reduction, and good governance and social accountability.

*face-to-face interactions with their representatives about things that the Upazila Chairperson controls and have a significant influence on their lives.”*

Upazila-based officials are now serious about monitoring the performance of local service providers, with many officials now visiting local (private) service providers more regularly. A Sub-assistant Agricultural Officer from South Sreepur Union, Kaligong said, *“I was in the field once. Suddenly the Upazila Agricultural Officer called me and wanted to know my location. Being informed, UAO told me to stay there and that he is coming. Such things were rare in the past.”*

### Further results highlighting government and service provider responsiveness

- Community members reported to the evaluation team that they were now more likely to access upazila-level officials of the health department or visit the office of the Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer (UHFPO) to lodge any complaints against their local community health services.
- Unit officials now sit at the mandated time in the Union offices for farmers to receive advice and services, and those officials are working more closely to reach out to provide information, services, advice, and support directly to farming households at the community level.
- Improved government monitoring of (private) local service providers with respect to proper seed and fertilizer supply and pricing has improved outcomes for farmers, and officials are now more willing to address any attempts at selling these inputs at inflated prices.
- Community clinic staff are attending the clinic six days/week versus only three to four days previously, and performing key tasks such children's growth monitoring; clinic infrastructure and medicines have significantly improved.
- A community member stated *“The most important influences of CVA on service providers includes an increase in their commitment and sincerity toward their duties and the reduction of their absenteeism.”*
- Upazila officials reported that they appreciated the degree to which CVA helped to improve their own monitoring tools, along with the oversight and accountability of officials within their purview.
- Upazila officials expressed a desire to have an equivalent CVA-type process institutionalized at the upazila level.
- A community clinic staff member noted a “change in mindset” of Union Council members since they attended higher level government events facilitated through CVA.

At the same time, the evaluation highlighted that the CVA approach still encountered push back from some within government, including comments from a health official who refused to provide any assistance to citizen-led initiatives and expressed cynicism about the motivation of elected officials until election time. It also highlighted many instances where government officials had little knowledge of social accountability.

*“Despite the success of CVA, then, it has not permeated too deeply into the workings of relevant line departments at the national level, even though World Vision’s reputation is well-regarded and its leadership well-known across these departments,” the evaluation found.*

This is a summary of the findings of the “Evaluation Results of Citizen Voice and Action, Nobo Jatra Program, World Vision, Bangladesh (funded by USAID),” by Associate Professor of Political Science James Long, University of Washington, U.S. and Professor of Public Administration, Pranab Panday, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh.

World Vision is a Christian humanitarian organization dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice.