Learning Project on
Local Governance Assessment

dlgn
Decentralization and Local Governance Network

# Local Governance Assessments – Case Study Sharique - Bangladesh

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# 1. Local Governance Self Assessment, Bangladesh

## *1.1. Introduction and background*

The Local Governance Self-Assessment (LGSA) tool has been developed by Intercooperation and Care Bangladesh in the frame of the SDC financed “Sharique” local governance support project, working since 2006 in the regions of Sunamganj and Rajshahi in Bangladesh. The main project goal is to improve well-being and economic, social and political participation of the poor and poorest people and especially women by improving local governance. The approach is to empower poor and marginalized segments of the society to claim their rights and entitlements from local government, and to benefit from responsive and inclusive services from the local governments.

The LGSA has five purposes:

1. Awareness raising and education of citizens and local government officials on the functioning and tasks of local governments with special reference to their practices related to transparency, downward accountability, pro-poor service delivery and the inclusion of women;
2. Awareness raising and education of citizens and local government officials on their mutual rights and responsibilities;
3. Participatory identification of gaps and needs and monitoring of progress related to local governance; followed by joint elaboration of priorities and actions in a so called “Union Parishad Governance Improvement Plan (GIP)”;
4. Promotion of dialogue among the rural citizens and their local governments;
5. Create a basis to define project support activities and contribution to the project monitoring system (baseline, indicators, regular progress monitoring).

The tool was particularly developed for rural areas facing extreme poverty and social exclusion, and with an average low level of formal education. The tool was designed and applied for the lowest government level, the Union Parishad (UP, 4501 UPs in total in Bangladesh, which have limited competences and resources, their average annual own budget is only 30’000 US$). Each Union is sub-divided into 9 Wards, administrative units at village(s) level. Civil society is mainly organized along traditional structures (male dominated local leaders), as well as community based organisations (CBOs) and local/regional NGOs, which are mostly linked to development programmes.

## *1.2. Application of the tool*

<u>When and where was the tool applied?</u>

The LGSA has been introduced with the support of the Sharique project in 128 UPs with the involvement of 2400 CBOs and the direct participation of about 90’000 citizens. Special emphasis was put on the participation and involvement of marginalized groups (women, poor people, ethnic minorities). The LGSA were first conducted in 2007 and since then has been constantly further developed and repeated on a bi-annual basis.

<u>Methodology</u>

Two types of LGSA were introduced:

1. “Community LGSA” (Ward level with an average of 3000 inhabitants)

Community LGSAs were organized as public meetings in the village squares, gathering around 40 persons from different sections of the civil society (CBOs, local business people, youth, traditional leaders, farmers, “ordinary citizens”) with a particular involvement of extremely poor people.

Special emphasis was also laid on adequate women participation. UP members participated as observers.

The meeting is facilitated by 1 or 2 representatives of an NGO trained by the project, supported by 4-5 trained community volunteers, mostly from local CBOs. The community LGSA is organized around 19 questions; 7 about citizen's duties/functioning for good local governance and 12 about the functioning of the UP. The community LGSA aims at getting a comprehensive perception of the community and ends with the participatory elaboration of priority issues to be addressed. A community LGSA meeting takes 3-4 hours and is conducted in several locations in one ward.

Women participating in a LSGA exercise. (Photo: Sharique)

2. "Union Parishad (UP) LGSA" (average 25-30'000 inhabitants)

The UP LGSAs were conducted in the UP premises with the participation of approx. 35 persons; the UP officials (13 elected UP council members including the UP chairperson, UP secretary), local government committees (made up of UP council members and citizens), selected representatives from government line departments (e.g. health, education, agriculture), representatives from community organizations, the private sector and traditional leaders. Adequate representation of marginalized groups (in particular women and extremely poor people) was promoted and ensured.

The meeting is chaired by the UP chairperson and is facilitated by 1-2 trained NGO representatives, supported by 3-4 community volunteers. The UP LGSA is organized around 28 questions; 24 about the UP functioning and performance (as main focus, also for the improvement plan) and 4 about citizens' participation. The last part of the UP LGSA is dedicated to the elaboration of a UP governance improvement plan (GIP), which is submitted for official approval to the UP council. A UP LGSA takes 4-5 hours.

Both types of the LGSA follow 5 main steps:

1. *Introduction and agreement on the objectives and rules* by the UP chairman/community leader, supported by the facilitators and community volunteers;
2. *Identification and understanding of main local governance actors and their roles:* through facilitators' inputs and a plenary discussion using pictures, venn diagram etc (mainly for awareness creation and education);
3. *Facilitated self-assessment along the LGSA key questions*: The participants are divided into groups. This provides the possibility to establish separate groups for women or other

participants, who might not feel at ease to speak up and express their opinion in the plenary. Each group responds to the LGSA questions (UP 28, Community 19), based on a rating system (4 options for community LGSA, 5 options for the UP LGSA). Once all questions are addressed, the group re-discusses the scoring and decides on a maximum of six issues that they would like to see improved;

4. *Agreement on six priorities for improvements*: The main findings and priorities of all groups are shared in the plenary, followed by the definition of the six main priorities to be addressed for improvement. This step normally provoked most debates and discussion.
5. *Elaboration of action plan*:
    a. In the UP LGSA, a draft UP governance improvement plan (GIP) is elaborated, listing the priorities, actions, responsible persons/groups, need for external support (if any), budget, timeframe and comments. This GIP is submitted to the UP council for official approval.
    b. In the community LGSA, the group designates the responsible persons (mostly CBO leaders) to forward priorities to their organization for incorporation in their annual plan and/or to transmit the issues related to the local government tasks and performance to the respective UP.

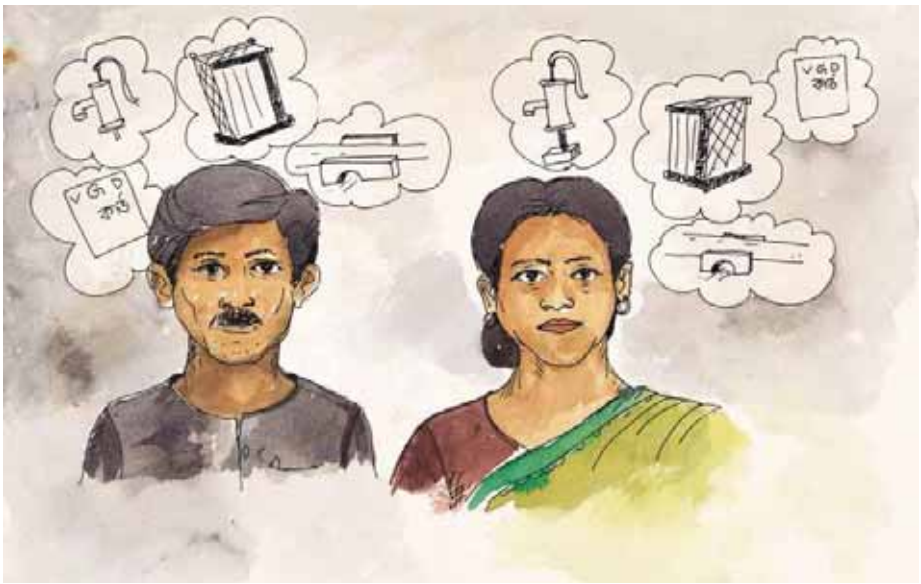


Illustration of potential different budget priorities. (Illustration: Sharique)

Resources and duration

As the LGSA is conducted as a public meeting, the main resource is the time and contribution of the participants during a half-day LGSA meeting. The primary resources are the inputs and opinions of the LGSA participants, complemented by some data mostly made available at the UP offices. Preliminary discussions by the project and/or partner NGO with the UP chairman/representatives are needed to ensure their ownership and commitment.

The project was involved in the tool elaboration, testing, adaptation, training of partner NGOs and facilitation of LGSA meetings. The facilitation was mainly done through local partner NGOs with the support of community facilitators (2 project/NGO facilitators and 3-5 community facilitators investing 1 working day per LGSA). Additional material (papers, pens, posters, questionnaire, printed guidelines) was supplied by the project with an average cost of 7 US$ per LGSA.

Outputs and results

The immediate result of the UP LGSA was the UP Governance Improvement Plans (GIP), which were officially approved by the UP councils and integrated in their annual plan of operation and annual budget. The community LGSA resulted in identified priorities, either integrated in local CBO action plans and/or transmitted to the UP officials for implementation (mostly through the respective UP representative from the concerned Ward).

In addition, each UP got the compiled result of the assessment (including scoring), which has been used for UP monitoring on an annual basis. The same is valid for the community LGSA on Ward level.

An important educational result of both LGSA is the increased understanding and awareness on the rights and duties of citizens and UPs around local governance.

The results of the LGSA were also used by the project for planning its activities and elaboration of manuals and handbooks (e.g. training manual for UP planning, training manuals on roles and responsibilities, tax revenue training manual). The assessment was also closely linked to the project monitoring system, providing a comprehensive baseline and systematic progress indicators related to the status of local governance in the project area.

The LGSA also provided the main information for a Sharique report on "the state of local governance in Rajshahi and Sunamganj", which was broadly disseminated to raise awareness among higher level government and donors.

## 1.3. Lessons learned

What can the tool be used for?

The main purpose of the LGSA is to assess the status of local governance in rural areas at a grass roots level, and the elaboration of officially approved local governance action plans for improvement, with a specific pro poor and social inclusion focus. If regularly repeated it can be used as participatory monitoring tool for local governments.

Besides this "immediate" purpose, the tool served to raise awareness and educate citizens and local government officials on their tasks, rights and responsibilities. In this concrete case, citizens have started to better understand the local government's roles and responsibilities; they got more active and took concrete steps to get involved in local governance issues (higher participation in citizens meetings, committees…). The tool also served to raise knowledge and awareness of the local government officials on their roles and functions as well as on the needs and priorities of the citizens.

The LGSA also served as basis to launch new processes like more participatory planning processes, open budget sharing, participatory tax assessment and improved office management (opening hours, record keeping).

As the LGSA can easily be replicated in broad area, it can also be used for benchmarking among the local governments (in Bangladesh, the tool is currently being replicated by an EC funded project aiming at reaching 250,000 citizens). However, benchmarking has certain limitations: as the results are based on a self assessment, results are more subjective and cannot always be used as fact-based comparison of the local governance situation in different Unions.

The LGSA can also serve for demand oriented project and programme planning. It is a useful tool for projects starting to engage in local governance. Results can be used as baseline information on the status of local governance. The identified main gaps and priorities can help projects and/or donors to define support programmes and activities. In addition, it can easily be linked to a project monitoring system and provide important inputs for country strategy monitoring, if it is broadly applied.

Which elements of local governance are (or are not) considered? Where is the focus?

The LGSA addresses the status of local governance primarily at the lowest local government and community level, framed around the legally defined rights and responsibilities of the demand

(citizens) and supply (local government) side of governance. Its focus is on the daily governance-related problems of people in rural areas, with special consideration of social inclusion questions. Eleven out of 28 questions address the issue of participation/benefits of excluded groups such as women, poor people and minorities.

As the LGSA mostly relies on qualitative sources of information gathered in half a day meeting, the tool does not result in an in depth analysis on the local governance situation of a specific location. The tool has limitations in terms of completeness of the information and data. It gives an overview of the general situation identifying the main gaps and problems, whereas hard facts (e.g. number of households served with specific services, budget and expenditure details) are not directly addressed.

The LGSA is also not intended to capture power relations, although its inclusive set up provides an environment for addressing questions relating to the reduction of exploitive power relations. In this sense it rather can serve as entry point to start a dialogue among the local governance actors, to be complemented with other tools (power mapping, tax assessment, participatory budgeting etc).

As the number and nature of questions can be adapted, the tool is flexible and open to integrate context specific elements or contemporary issues (e.g. additional questions regarding disaster risk reduction were added in the flood-risk region of Sunamganj).

What conditions are required to apply the tool?

The tool has been designed for *rural areas with a low level of formal education* (literacy is not required from all participants). Extensive understanding on local governance is not needed, as the LGSA implies an education and awareness-raising component;

*Basic commitment of the local government leadership is required,* as the meeting requests their participation, contribution and commitment to integrate priorities in their work plans and budgets;

*Facilitation by external support*: Facilitators need to be trained on the tool and must have good knowledge on local governance and the respective institutional and legal framework. Although the tool is relatively simple and could easily be replicated by the partners without external support, certain facilitation (e.g. by community facilitators) is suggested, as the LGSA mainly builds on participants' inputs;

*The participants must be well selected,* to ensure representation of the most important local governance actors, with a special focus on the involvement of marginalized groups, as the tool particularly addresses social exclusion;

*The meetings must be well organized with good facilitation* to ensure a constructive and effective meeting, giving voice to marginalized groups (e.g. through separate group work). An appropriate timing and location should be organized to enable and encourage participation and the maximum availability of poor people, women and other marginalized groups.

*Resources required are modest*, as the LGSA mainly builds upon and relies on the inputs and feedbacks of the participants during the meeting (no need for extensive data collection).

*The LGSA can be organized in a flexible way*; questions can be adjusted to the specific situation and context. However, it is important to fix the main rules at the beginning of the meeting, having agreed them beforehand with the local government officials (setting, agenda, main results and commitment of their approval).

Replication and sustainability

Due to the user friendly and low cost methodology, the LGSA has high potential for replication and transferability. The questions and methodology can easily be adjusted to another context and/or to specific thematic focus areas or sectors. Under the lead of a national institution/coordination unit, the tool could be used for country-wide application for bench-marking and monitoring purpose. Good introduction and training of facilitators would however be required to ensure coherence in application.

### 1.4. Additional information

Contact for more information: info@intercooperation-bd.org (Tirtha Sikder, Deputy National Coordinator; Jens Engeli, International Advisor)

http://www.intercooperation-bd.org/PDF/sharique%20doc%20-%20local%20governance%20self-assessment%20(english).pdf : LGSA guidelines for facilitators

www.intercooperation-bd.org/publication.php: complementary tools and guidelines: Tax Revenues Training Manual, The State of Local Governance in Rajshahi and Sunamganj, Training Manual on up Roles and Responsibilities, Compendium of Laws Regarding Union Parishads (UPs), Flashcards - UP Gender Analysis, UP Gender Analysis 2009, UP Planning - Trainer's Manual, UP Planning Guideline

http://www.intercooperation-bd.org : information about Sharique

| Case study | Local Governance Self Assessment (LGSA), Bangladesh |
|---|---|
| **Developed by** | ▪ Intercooperation and Care Bangladesh in the frame of the SDC financed Sharique local governance programme in the Sunamganj and Rajshahi regions<br>▪ *2 types were conducted: a) Union Parishad (UP) LGSA and b) Community LGSA* |
| **Applied in** | ▪ 128 Union Parishads (lowest LG level, average 30'000 inhabitants), involvement of 2400 CBOs and direct participation of 90'000 citizens; conducted on a bi-annual basis |
| **Purpose / Utility of the Tool** | • Partners<br>▪ Awareness raising & education of citizens and LG on tasks, special reference to transparency, downward accountability, pro-poor service delivery and the inclusion of women and poor;<br>▪ Identification of LG gaps and needs and monitoring of progress<br>▪ Promotion of dialogue between citizens and local authorities in rural areas<br>▪ Elaboration of priorities in a "Union Parishad Governance Improvement Plan (GIP)"<br>• Project/SDC<br>▪ Baseline information on LG in a broad area<br>▪ Input for programme and/or projects planning, monitoring and evaluation |
| **Outputs and Reporting** | ▪ a) UP Governance Improvement Plans (GIP), officially approved by the UP councils and integrated in their annual plan of operation and annual budget<br>b) Identified priorities, integrated in local CBO action plans and/or transmitted to the UP<br>▪ Assessment results reports for each LGSA (incl. scoring) prepared by facilitator<br>▪ Results were used for the elaboration of manuals and handbooks (e.g. training manual for UP planning, training manuals on roles and responsibilities, tax revenue training manual)<br>▪ Results provided key information for a report on "the state of local governance in Rajshahi and Sunamganj", disseminated to raise awareness among government and donors |
| **Dimensions** | ▪ Status of local governance in rural areas, framed around the legally defined rights and responsibilities of the demand (citizens) and supply (local government) side<br>▪ Focus on the daily governance-related problems of people in rural areas, special consideration of *social inclusion questions* (gender, extreme poor, ethnic minorities)<br>▪ Not designed to capture power relations<br>▪ *Mostly relying on qualitative data and perception of participants, few hard facts* |
| **Methodology** | ▪ UP LGSA: half-day meetings of 35 participants (UP officials, local government committees selected line departments, CBOs, private sector and traditional leaders)<br>▪ Community LGSA: half-day public meetings of 40 participants from different sections of the civil society, UP officials as guests<br>▪ Organized around 24 (UP LGSA) / 29 (community LGSA) questions, facilitated by 1-2 trained NGO representatives, supported by 3-4 community volunteers<br>▪ 5 steps: 1. Introduction and agreement on the objectives and rules by the UP chairman/community leader; 2. Identification and understanding of main local governance actors and their roles; 3. Facilitated self-assessment along the LGSA key questions; 4. Agreement on six priorities for improvements; 5. Elaboration of action plan |
| **Inputs and time required** | ▪ Mainly opinions of the participants, complemented by data from UP offices<br>▪ Project: tool elaboration, testing/adaptation, training of NGO facilitators<br>▪ 1-2 facilitators 1 day per LGSA<br>▪ Material (papers, pens, posters etc), average cost of 7 US$ per LGSA |
| **Beneficiaries** | ▪ Local population (*education and awareness, transparency, voice*); local authorities (awareness, *dialogue with citizens*, *monitoring*, *accountability, GIP*); national authorities (*limited, only if it would be applied country wide*); donors/project (*baseline, planning, M&E*) |
| **Most appropriate use** | ▪ Assess the status of local governance in rural areas at a grass roots level, with a specific pro poor and social inclusion focus<br>▪ Awareness raising of citizens and local government officials on their rights and responsibilities |
| **Remarks** | ▪ Basic commitment of the local government leadership is required<br>▪ Meetings must be well organized with good facilitation |
| **Replication, Sustainability** | ▪ High replication potential (user-friendly, low cost, number/nature of questions adapted to context)<br>▪ National coordination for country wide application (benchmarking, monitoring, policy inputs) |
| **Further Info and contact** | info@intercooperation-bd.org (Tirtha Sikder, Jens Engeli)<br>Website: www.intercooperation-bd.org/publication.php, |