

SOCIAL SAFETY NETS AND THE EXTREME POOR: LEARNING FROM A PARTICIPATORY PRO-POOR GOVERNANCE APPROACH

BRIEFING PAPER

October 2011¹

Care Bangladesh

For the detailed report visit: www.shiree.org.

OVERVIEW

CARE Bangladesh started the implementation of the Social and Economic Transformation of the Ultra Poor (SETU) project in March 2009 with the support of SHIREE, funded by DFID, in the northwest region of Bangladesh. The project aims to sustainably lift 80,000 people from extreme poverty in the selected Unions of Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat, Gaibandha and Rangpur. Through solidarity building and empowering the poor and marginalised communities, the project is working to collectively address the underlying causes of extreme poverty (seen by the project as economic, social and political exclusion). SETU is facilitating collective local actions to engage extremely poor men and women, so that they can participate in and benefit from improved access to markets and dignified economic opportunities.

¹ This is based on Care's working paper number 2, written by Saifuddin Ahmed and SM Abdul Bari (contact: saifuddin.ahmed@bd.care.org)

The paper has been peer reviewed by colleagues in either the Chars Livelihood Programme (CLP), the UNDP Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction (UPPR) and BRAC's Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction – Targeting the Ultra Poor (CFPR-TUP) programmes – all part of the DFID/UKAID extreme poverty portfolio in Bangladesh.

This research aimed to share SETU's approach to addressing extreme poverty with a wide audience of practitioners, policy makers and academics. It is part of series of research projects concerned with 'Protecting Gains' made by the extremely poor through a variety of SHIREE-funded projects. SETU's participatory inclusive governance approach has broadened and deepened citizens' influence in the decisions that affect their lives, seeing this as a right (and hence an end in itself), and also as a key strategy for "graduating" people out of conditions of extreme poverty and chronic vulnerability. Through this research, we have examined the effects of an inclusive governance approach on extremely poor people's access to Government social safety nets and the impacts that these have on their livelihoods.



The study was conducted in two SETU facilitated unions and looked at the project's work to promote pro-poor inclusive governance at the local level. The study documented changes in how decisions are made in the UP councils and if and how extremely poor citizens can influence the decision making process when they are federated. The study also discovered that active citizenship of the poorest, often women, has led to a more equitable distribution of public resources. The paper ends with recommendations for preventing leakages in the governance of safety nets by building the capacity of local government, as well as allocating more decentralised resources. Overall, the creation of this working paper is intended to work towards fulfilling our lasting commitment to finding durable ways of tackling the underlying causes of poverty, vulnerability and injustice.

KEY FINDINGS

Through in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with a variety of actors including (local government, beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries), the SETU project is concluded to have:

- Promoted pro-poor governance at the local level.
- Created a shift in the political culture of Union Parishads (Ups).
- Improved the targeting of safety net resources towards the extreme poor. E.g. There is evidence that **UP's are now using lists of extremely poor** households, prepared by the Natural Leaders (key community people working on behalf of the extreme poor) and Para Unnayan Committees (PUCs) through SETU.
- Increased employment opportunities for the extreme poor.
- Improved budget allocations towards SETU communities through 'open budget planning' sessions.

CONCLUSIONS

'Lack of good governance' has already been identified as one of the underlying causes of poverty, and SETU's 'participatory inclusive governance' approach to governance is based on a belief that work on governance is critical in making an impact to reducing poverty. The SETU approach opens up more livelihood options for the extremely poor, as well as supporting the substantive participation of the extremely poor in decision making which affects them. It also demonstrates the important role that empowered local actors - particularly local Government and marginalised citizens - have in ensuring secure and productive livelihoods for the poorest. From the outset, the SETU approach requires strong and quality facilitation. It is essential to invest in

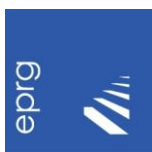
building capabilities, including skills and knowledge, and to develop locally responsive and adaptive social protection and livelihood strategies. The SETU approach takes advantage of local economic drivers, while also addressing social disparities and ensuring accountability in service delivery.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Preventing leakages of safety nets:** Empowering the marginalised to be more effective in preventing leakages around SSN distribution to protect the expected goal.
- 2. More resource allocation for local government:** The planning and strategies of local governments should be reinforced with sufficient budgetary allocations for a better response to local issues. Moreover, local governments should have control over the allocated resources to manage these more efficiently.
- 3. Building local capacity:** Better targeting for SSNs and social protection requires building the capacity of local actors (administrative, service providers and community agencies) to develop locally responsive and adaptive social protection including SSNs.
- 4. Building development programmes in indigenous practices:** Development programmes should be built on indigenous practices, local knowledge, skills and opportunities to have an increased impact to reducing extreme poverty and social discrimination.

shiree

House 5, Road 10, Baridhara, Dhaka-1212,
Bangladesh
October 2011



The Extreme Poverty Research Group (EPRG)

develops and disseminates knowledge about the nature of extreme poverty and the effectiveness of measures to address it. It initiates and oversees research and brings together a mix of thinkers and practitioners to actively feed knowledge into practice through interventions taking place in real time. It is an evolving forum for the shiree family to both design and share research findings.

The data used in this publication comes from the Economic Empowerment of the Poorest Programme (www.shiree.org), an initiative established by the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) to help 1 million people lift themselves out of extreme poverty. The views expressed here are entirely those of the author(s).