

# Localizing the SDGs in Bangladesh: An Innovative Community-led Approach

*The Hunger Project, June 2017*

## **Executive Summary:**

The Hunger Project (THP) has developed a systematic methodology for supporting rural communities to achieve the SDGs. This paper describes the methodology, using the experience of the Betaga Union Parishad as an illustrative example, and identifies policy recommendations appropriate to taking this approach to national scale.

## **Introduction:**

During the period of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Bangladesh achieved “remarkable progresses in the areas of poverty alleviation, ensuring food security, primary school enrolment, gender parity in primary and secondary level education, lowering the infant and under-five mortality rate and maternal mortality ratio, improving immunization coverage; and reducing the incidence of communicable diseases” (UNDP, 2015). Such achievements are largely attributable to the resilience and creativity of the Bangladeshi people in finding innovative and low cost solutions and empowering individual “agency,” especially of women (Mahmud, Asadullah & Savoia, 2013).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are more ambitious and will be more challenging to achieve. In addition, Bangladesh faces many daunting challenges, including climate change, automation, corruption, governance failures, institutional weaknesses, confrontational politics and growing violence which threaten its future progress. Thus, for achieving SDGs, institutions will have to function, communities will have to work together, peace and justice will have to prevail, governance will have to improve and environmental sustainability will have to be ensured.

## **Why “localize” the SDGs?**

Although primary accountability for the SDGs belongs to nations, the SDGs explicitly call for action by local authorities. At least 12 of the 17 SDGs - all excepting 9, 12, 13, 14 and 17 - require integrated strategies at the community level to overcome the interlinked challenges of poverty, ill-health, social ills, poor governance and environmental destruction. Fortunately, Bangladesh’s constitution wisely placed key responsibilities for social and economic development, including “the preparation and implementation of plans relating to public services and economic development” at the level closest to the people,” with the local government bodies, particularly the Union Parishad (UP), the body at the doorstep of the people (Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 1971, Article 59(2)(C)).

This constitutional mandate makes it imperative that Bangladesh localize the SDGs – that is, it must equip the UPs with the skills and resources to analyze their local situation, set priorities for each of the relevant SDGs, and track and report their progress.

The Local Government (UP) Act of 2009 strengthens local government by incorporating global best practices for direct participation by active citizens in planning and social accountability, through ward shava for participatory planning, citizen charter, open budget meetings and annual reporting.

**SDG 16 – the goal that makes all goals possible** – explicitly calls for “peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions *at all levels*” (which includes the community level). Target 16.7 is to “ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.” Goal 16 is therefore the crown-jewel of the SDGs and the achievement of other goals depends on it.

SDG Target 16.7 *requires* citizen voice in decision making, which for most citizens can only effectively happen at the UP and village levels. (Coonrod, 2016).

## **Achieving SDGs in light of SDG 16**

The Hunger Project-Bangladesh (THP), which played a role in pioneering the reforms incorporated in the 2009 UP Act, has set itself the task of working in partnership with local government to develop a package of community mobilization and capacity-building interventions known as the “SDG Union Strategy” to demonstrate how fully implementing the Act can achieve the SDGs. THP has been demonstrating the working of this innovative model in 185 Unions, 61 of which are supported by BRAC, as a low-cost and sustainable means of achieving SDGs.

The SDG Union Strategy calls for a partnership between: (1) the people, (2) their elected representatives at the local level, (3) a civil society created from the ground up, and (4) the government functionaries responsible for delivering services to the grassroots. These stakeholders are brought together by a shared vision to achieve SDGs at the Union level.

**Figure 1: The Community-Led SDG Union Model**



**Role of the people.** People in SDG Unions, including women and youth, are awakened and mobilized to make them active as citizens and take action to achieve SDGs. Mobilization of people creates “social capital,” which can make up for lack of “financial capital,” and can be used for solving many social problems through social movements and social resistance. Community members carry out various campaigns to combat social ills such as child marriage, violence against women, substance abuse, and environmental degradation. Using the Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology, the poorest of the poor are also mobilized to become “barefoot researchers” to identify the causes of their poverty, form “self-help groups” and take other action necessary to end their own hunger and poverty. Mobilization of the poor is designed to ensure that no one is left behind, which is an inspiring aspiration of SDGG.

**Role of the UP representatives.** UP representatives, receiving both statutory and transformational training, provide catalytic leadership not only to mobilize people, but also to ensure that the services people are entitled to actually reach them. UPs belonging to the SDG Unions sign an MoU to make the achievement of SDGS their priority, make the entire UP body functional, make standing committees effective and ensure social justice. The UP works in partnership with the citizens to hold Ward Shavas, Open Budget Meetings and prepare Five-Year Plans.

**Role of the local civil society.** Civil society is built up at the Union level, and consists of approximately 150 trained volunteers, including **Animators, Women Leaders, Youth Leaders, PAR facilitators, champions for good governance** and **Peace Ambassadors**. The members of the civil society on the one hand act as watchdog over the UPs and at the same time work in

partnership with them. They also empower and mobilize the community members to ensure inclusivity and arrange skills training to help them become authors of their own future.

**Role of the government functionaries.** Local level government functionaries work with the community members to give them *access* to the available government services, make those services *affordable* and deliver those with *accountability* so that an “enabling environment” is created for people to succeed (THP, 1994).

These four stakeholders, working together, constitute a **Community-led Development Approach** to achieve the SDGs (Coonrod, 2016). A recent study by four professors of Columbia, Princeton and Cambridge Universities, published in the **Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA**, found that “community trust,” created through this approach in our working area, positively affect the poor’s economic decision making and thereby their poverty (Jachimowicz, Chafik, Munrat, Prabhu, & Weber, 2017). In addition to achieving better lives, one unique contribution of this “whole society” approach is **peace** at the local level since people working together transcend their differences and diminish conflicts (Majumdar, 2014).

## **Process of creating an SDG Union**

The work of creating an SDG Union begins through **transforming the mindset**. For the citizens of Bangladesh who live in conditions of poverty, meaningful participation in decision-making seems like an impossible dream. For government functionaries operating within highly centralized, top-down ministries, the concept of direct accountability to citizens seems like an impractical nuisance. However, countries that have successfully implemented bottom-up planning and social accountability have found that it must begin with a profound shift in mindset of both functionaries and residents, from “benefactor/beneficiary” to “public servant/active citizen.” To achieve this, the SDG Union Strategy begins with a “Vision, Commitment and Action” workshop and the training of approximately 150 grassroots volunteer animators and other volunteers in each Union committed and skilled in facilitating bottom-up development.

**Village Development Committees – Building Civil Society from the Bottom Up.** Exercising citizen voice is a collective process; active citizens from each segment of society (women, youth, the ultra-poor) must form community-based self-help groups to make their voices heard, and must work together to put forward a concise set of shared priorities. In addition to the body of Animators, the SDG Union Strategy trains Women Leaders, Youth Leaders, champions of good governance and girl’s rights, and PAR facilitators who create groups among the ultra-poor. The leaders of each of these village groups meet together as a Village Development Committee (VDC) to coordinate activities.

**Transforming Gender Relations.** The SDG principle of “No One Left Behind” has special meaning in rural Bangladesh, where adolescent girls and women often are not permitted to participate in public life. Trained Women Leaders from the village therefore organize “court yard” meetings where all family members can participate and discuss sensitive issues, such as halting domestic violence including child marriage, keeping girls in school, good nutrition and other human rights.

**Active Partnership with Local Government.** UP representatives and functionaries participate in a five-day training that both transforms their mindset and provides them with statutory information, especially on implementing the bottom-up reforms of the 2009 UP Act. Based on this new approach, the UP:

- Works in partnership with the VDCs to mobilize participation in Ward Shava for generating awareness of service standards under the **Citizen Charter**, and setting local priorities.
- Makes Standing Committees Functional by including trained volunteers and other interested citizens.
- Develops and publishes a 5-year plan based on ward shava input.
- Launches mass action campaigns to achieve goals in the plan.
- Reports annually through Open Budget Meetings and on progress on the plan.

**Sustaining Peace and Social Harmony.** The recent rise in violence, often exploiting religious and ethnic differences in hopes of partisan gains, is one of the greatest threats to progress on all the SDGs, and is central to SDG 16. For this reason, the SDG Union Strategy has begun creating Peace Facilitator Groups and training local Peace Ambassadors who can analyze the local situation and carry out actions that promote peace and social harmony. The Peace Ambassadors and other volunteers lead **Citizenship and Social Harmony** workshops to promote civic rights and responsibilities and peace at the local level. In 10 Upazilas, this process has resulted in the three major parties signing a **Code of Conduct** for peaceful resolution of any differences, collective action to halt violent extremism and promote pluralism to address identity-based prejudice.

## **Betaga Union: An Illustration of SDG Union in the Making**

The Hunger Project has put into practice its innovative Community-led SDG Union model in 185 Unions, one of which is Betaga Union of Fakirhat Upazila of Bagerhat district. Betaga Union has 12 villages and population of 16,280, of which 8,120 are female and 8,160 are male. The literacy rate of the Union is 83%. The Union has four high schools and nine primary schools. Source of income of 56% of the people of the Union are from agriculture, followed by 18% from business, 4% from government service, 6% from non-government service, 7% from fisheries and poultry and 9% from daily labour.

The Union Parishad is an elected body of 13 individuals – elected for a five year term –headed by the Chairman. Swapan Das is the Chairman and he was elected five times in a row, which is very rare in Bangladesh. He has a Bachelor of Science degree and he was qualified to be a government bureaucrat but opted instead to engage in public service. He was picked as best Chairmen three times nationally and 13 times in the district and received many awards for his outstanding public service.

In 2003, Swapan Das took the 5-day Animators training of THP in Dhaka, which helped him take a stand to end hunger and poverty of his Union. In the following year, he had an opportunity to go to West Bengal and Kerala to see the workings of Gram Panchayat there with a group of other Chairmen and Members trained by THP. After returning from India, he organized an Animators training in his Union, offered by THP, to create a group of volunteers in order to put into practice the ideas of Gram Shava – the village assembly – to promote inclusive decision making and mobilize the people of the Union.

In 2010, THP launched its MDG Union Strategy, aimed at forging a partnership between the people, the UP representatives, a local civil society and government functionaries to make concentrated and integrated efforts beginning in an initial set of 110 Unions, including Betaga to help achieve the MDGs. Swapan Das signed a MoU with THP, in which he, on behalf of his Parishad, expressed commitment to work toward achieving MDGs, and THP committed to assist in this process without providing any financial resources.

As part of this effort, a group of volunteers were trained in Betaga. At present, Betaga Union has 253 Animators, of which 129 are female and 124 male, and 36 Women Leaders. The Union also has 177 Youth Leaders, of which 55 are female and 122 are male and 18 Girl Child Advocacy Group members. Betaga also has a committee of respected citizens championing good and effective governance. THP trained a total over 500 volunteers, some of whom already moved out of the area, and they constitute the civil society at the local level. These volunteers help organize the Ward Shavas and Open Budget Meetings to ensure the transparency and accountability of the Union Parishad. They also work closely with the elected representatives in mobilizing the people and carry out campaigns on various social issues.

**UP Chairman Mr. Swapan Das says:** “I am an Animator, trained by The Hunger Project – an organization committed to end hunger and poverty by unleashing the human spirit. In Betaga Union there are many other animators and volunteers who work with the UP body to achieve SDGs. I have learned from THP, particularly from its Country Director the concept of “social capital,” which comes from the mobilized efforts of the people, the importance of participatory decision making and to think outside the box to become successful.”

The volunteers mobilized other community members, especially women to form self-help groups. There are now nine such groups with collective savings of Tk. 3,07,522, which they use to loan out to each other. They also meet regularly to identify the actions they need to take to improve their lives and also deal with the issues, such as violence against women, child marriage, dowry and other social ills.

The volunteers, coming from all 12 villages, formed 12 Village Development Committees comprised of 245 member, of which 143 are male and 92 female. THP has no staff in Betaga Union other than a paid volunteer overseeing two UPs. The paid volunteers’ job is to keep other volunteers active and keep track of their work.

As part of their activism, the volunteers in the last 5 months (January – May 2017), for example, engaged in the following activities:

- Conducted 12 **Citizenship and Social Harmony** workshops;
- Held nine **Vision, Commitment and Action (VCA)** workshops with more than five hundred participants;
- Held 12 village development planning workshops with Village Development Committees;
- Youth Ending Hunger members organized 'safe school campaign program for girls,' in which 637 students participated;
- A PAR workshop was conducted with 17 women facilitators;
- Campaigns organized to ensure birth registration of 112 female and 45 male citizens;
- Courtyard meetings were held on nutrition and health issues with 133 female and 14 male participants;
- Organized 18 campaigns in schools for the prevention of dropouts from school where 185 female and 53 men students took part;
- Twelve meetings were held with 107 participants to create awareness regarding vaccination of pregnant mothers;
- Seventeen meetings were held on safe sanitation where 166 female and 48 male took part;
- Twenty five meetings were held on prevention of child marriage where 278 female and 103 male were present;
- In addition, the Ward Shava, Union Development Planning Meeting, Union Development Co-ordination Committee Meeting, pre-budget meeting and Open Budget Meeting were held during this period, in which the volunteers were involved.

In addition to THP volunteers, other government and non-government organizations, such as CSS, JJS, BRAC are active in Betaga. The World Bank funded LGSP project and other government departments provide very useful support to the Union Parishad and the people of the Union.

In Bangladesh, Union Parishads are usually Chairman-centred institutions, with the other twelve members usually playing very minor roles. Betaga is an exception where all the members of the UP body are active and function as a collective body. All the UP representatives received a Special Animators training from THP and they also work closely with other THP trained volunteers who form the civil society from the ground up.

In Bangladesh, Union Parishads have 13 Standing Committees (ST), the effectiveness of which are essential for improving the lives of the people. However, in reality such Committees are usually formed in name only. In Betaga, THP volunteers and interested community members with relevant experiences were inducted into the STs to ensure their effectiveness. STs in Betaga not

only make recommendations to the UP body for decisions, but also monitor the functioning of schools, health clinics and other important activities within the Unions. In addition to the existing 13 STs, the Betaga Union Parishad formed another ST designed to cater to the special needs of the persons with disabilities. The activism, dedication and effectiveness of its STs makes Betaga different from other UPs in Bangladesh.

**Animators Training Inspired Krishna Das to Create Self-help Group.** Krishna Das, a housewife, participated in the 1,784<sup>th</sup> Animator Training held in 2011 in Betaga UP. Through the training, her mindset changed. She developed the commitment and confidence to take action improve her own conditions and conditions of the people around her. Her dream was to have her son become an agriculture engineer, but it seemed an impossible dream as they were not well off.

Krishna formed her self-help group, named Samata Nari Unnayan Samity, in June 2012 with 20 other women, and to date they have saved Tk. 51,000, which they now give out as loans to their members. Several women have already taken loans with very low interest rates. They started initiatives such as sewing, dairy, and poultry farming. They have become a formidable group aspiring to initiate big income generating projects.

In the last few years, Krishna started vegetable gardening, poultry, and fisheries projects to increase her income. Her son was recently admitted to Patuakhali Agricultural University. She has found a way to pay for her child's education. This has inspired the members of the self-help group to be united and take action as a collective.

The Union Parishad celebrates **Betaga Day** every year with much fanfare. It is intended to celebrate the successes of the people of Betaga and prizes are given to those who make important contributions in various fields. Every Standing Committee and Organic Betaga Project set up stalls in the day of the celebration to display their work. The day features sports, cultural events and other fun activities.

## SDG Related Achievements of Betaga Union

SDG Goals	Activities and Outcomes
 <p>1 NO POVERTY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Betaga has no industrial employment as such. However, there are many self-employment activities in the Union. Some of the self-employment activities are generated by the skills training that THP volunteers had organized. At present 18% of the people of Betaga eke out their living from petty businesses. Savings catalyzed by self-help groups are used to finance self-employment activities.</li> <li>● Betaga is ahead of other Unions of Bagerhat in poultry farming. It has 94 layer farms, 64 broiler farms and 28 duck farms. Total number of poultry and ducks in the Union are estimated to be 1,54,278 (Betaga Union Parishad Budget 2015-16). At present 300 families are involved in poultry production in the Union. A Poultry Farmers' Cooperative assist and regulate their activities. Everyday 70,000 eggs are sold from the Union to other areas.</li> <li>● Fish farming is widespread in the Betaga. There are 785 ponds in the Union which produce approximately 70.64 tons of fish per year. In addition, Betaga has 924 shrimp farms and number of canals producing fish. The total fish production in the Union during 2015-16 was 1,050 tons. A total of 778 individuals are involved fish farming. Everyday fish farmers of Betaga send over two tons fish to other areas for sale.</li> <li>● Dairy and cow rearing and goat farming are important sources of income for the people of Betaga. There are 13 registered dairy farms and 23 registered goat farms in the Union. The total number of cows in Betaga are approximately 3,784. The total amount of milk produced is 3000 litre milk everyday.</li> <li>● Using the government sponsored employment generation scheme for the poor, 272 poor workers were employed in the past year for the construction of new roads, reconstruction of old roads, paved roadside development and drainage construction.</li> </ul>
 <p>2 ZERO HUNGER</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● No one goes to bed hungry in Betaga. Although there has not been any measurement of hidden hunger, no visible sign of malnutrition exists in the Union. Betaga is a food surplus Union, producing 3,117 tons and consuming 2,456 tons per year. It produces protein much more than its own needs.</li> <li>● Betaga Union Parishad selected 925 families for receiving support under the social safety net schemes last year. From the selected persons, 355 persons (of whom 188 are women) received monthly 300 taka each as old-age pension, 221 divorced women/widows received monthly 300 taka each as allowance, 276 women received monthly 30 kg wheat/rice under the <b>Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF)</b> program, 1,300 families get 10 kg rice each twice a year. In 2015-16, Union Parishad handed over 1,15,16,878 taka to 1166 persons under the government supported safety net scheme.</li> <li>● Last year Union Parishad returned 60 tons of rice received under VGF because enough qualified people were not found in the Union.</li> </ul>

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

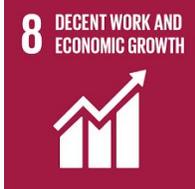


- Betaga has three community clinics. Although the physical facilities of the clinics are not very good and the medicines available are very limited, they function in a transparent manner and provide useful services to the community. THP trained volunteers are involved helping the clinics provide services to the people. Union Parishad ensures financial contributions for clinics especially for safe delivery for mothers.
- Members of the Standing Committee monitor conditions of sanitation and safe drinking water, mother-child health and breast feeding conditions in the community. Members of SCs also monitor the functioning of various health centers. The THP volunteers motivate the families to use birth control measures.
- UP organizes free medical and eye camps every year to treat impoverished patients.
- Schools arranges sports and and other competitions routinely. Cultural activities are a regular phenomenon in the Union.
- A Mandap for congregation was set up for the Hindu community and dedicated to the memory of martyrs of our war of liberation.
- 23 youth leaders of Betaga Union, supported by other volunteers, formed 2013 Muktodhara Society to carry out campaigns on water, sanitation and hygiene related issues. They have been saving 50 Taka each per month, having saved 4,870 Taka so far. The Muktodhara Society supports the poor and serious students with these savings.

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



- Education, especially improving the quality of education has been highest priority of the Betaga Union Parishad. As part of this effort, the Union Parishad supported the construction of three schools (two secondary and one junior high) with resources received under various government schemes and its own resources, and another junior high school is now under construction.
- The literacy rate of Betaga Union is 83%, which is much higher than the national average. THP trained youth volunteers carry out adult literacy classes in the Union.
- The Education Standing Committee has been playing critical role for improving the quality of the education in the Union. Since 2011 it has been monitoring logistics support to schools, functioning of the school management committees, ensuring the hiring of qualified teachers, reducing the dropout rate and ensuring that schools are safe for girls.
- On the recommendation of the Standing Committee, Betaga Union Parishad initiated **Betaga Union Higher Education Support and Extension Project** to help poor and meritorious students with scholarships. The UP, under the leadership of Mr. Swapan Das raised **Tk. 47,11,420** for this purpose. The local educated and wealthy members of the community donate funds to support this cause.
- Under this scheme, 15 students pursuing higher education in various institutions

	<p>received as scholarship Tk. 43,000 per month in 2012; 23 students received Tk. 49,500 in 2013; 29 students received Tk. 59,500 taka in 2014; 29 students received Tk. 63,000 in 2015; and 29 students received Tk. 73,000 in 2016. In 2014, the Standing Committee started giving scholarships to Junior and Secondary School students who score A+ marks.</p>
 <p>5 GENDER EQUALITY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Union Parishad has taken a special initiative named <b>Konnaa Bortica</b> to encourage girls to be enrolled in schools and stay in school, prevent child marriage, and prevent violence and abuse of girls and women. Families who have one or more daughters but no sons are covered under this program. The girls are given education support until age 18 and their families are given support under various social safety net schemes.</li> <li>• Last year the Union Parishad carried out a survey and found that 5 beneficiaries of VGF were involved in child marriage, and their food assistance was cancelled to set an example for the community.</li> <li>• THP trained volunteers and the relevant ST not only carry our campaigns against child marriage, but also take the help of authorities to stop such marriage. They also work with marriage registrars for this purpose.</li> </ul>
 <p>6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Union Parishad has created a fund of <b>Tk. 23,00,000</b> to ensure access to safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation for the community people. Again, this money was raised from the wealthy individuals who have roots in Betaga.</li> <li>• All the people of Betaga have access to safe drinking water. As part of it initiative to ensure safe water, Union Parishad supplied piped water to 400 families.</li> <li>• Every family in Betaga has access to sanitary latrines. The UP, with the help of HYSAWA fund, set up 30 community latrines along with the supply of safe water. It has also created a rolling fund of <b>Tk. 11,00,000</b>, which it has been loaning out without interest to the community members to upgrade their sanitary latrines.</li> </ul>
 <p>7 ENERGÍA ASEQUIBLE Y NO CONTAMINANTE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At present, 52 families and business houses use solar energy. Union Parishad is involved in the making it happen.</li> <li>• All the households have access to electricity provided by the Palli Biddut Samity.</li> </ul>
 <p>8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Betaga Union Parishad has been encouraging income generation from non-agricultural sources, especially using modern digital technology. The Betaga Union Digital Centre (UDC) is quite active not only to creating income from non-traditional sources for a group of young entrepreneurs, but also provide many useful services to the citizens using internet. According to the UP, from July 2015 through June 2016, the earning from the UDC was Tk. 1,79,426.</li> </ul>

 <p>9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With the help of Annual Development Program (ADP) grants, other government grants, support from the LGSP project and Zila Parishad (district level elected body), Bataga Union Parishad has developed the necessary infrastructure and carried out development work throughout the whole Union. Part of these resources were received in the form of rice and wheat. The total amount spent on development work during the 2015-16 (until May) was Tk. 1,11,33,721.</li> <li>• Religious institutions of both Muslim and Hindu communities received support from the UP for infrastructure development.</li> </ul>
 <p>15 LIFE ON LAND</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The UP has taken participatory social forestry initiatives since 1998-99. This is designed to protect the environment, preventing soil erosion and also create income for the Parishad. As a result of this initiative, the whole Union has become green. The UP has so far planted 60,000 trees and last year earned about Tk. 6,00,000 from the sale of the pruned branches.</li> <li>• <b>Organic Betaga</b> is a unique initiative of the Union Parishad. Under this initiative farmers are producing organic food and vegetables in nearly 60 acres of land using vermiculture and other non-chemical fertilizers with support from the Upazila Agriculture Extension Department. The Department is also taking initiative to set up separate market for these products.</li> <li>• The Department is also helping the individual farmers throughout the Union to produce products without pesticides. The Union level agriculture functionaries visit the farmers regularly. There are 13 Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and a number of Integrated Crop Management (ICM) clubs, with 25 to 50 members, who receive regular training for producing safe food. THP trained volunteers have been helping in this effort.</li> <li>• People with influence used to cultivate Bagda shrimp in the land of the farmers using salt water, which would destroy the cultivable land. They were driven out by the collective efforts of the farmers. Now farmers themselves produce different types of fish using sustainable process.</li> <li>• The UP has invested Tk. 2,00,000 to support the farmers to produce 100% organic, safe, healthy, pesticide-free fruits and vegetables for customers. It has also invested money to import new varieties of saplings such as for producing coconut.</li> </ul>
 <p>16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Union Parishad, under the leadership of Swapan Das, played the catalytic role in the progress of Betaga Union. It not only worked as a team but also worked in a transparent and accountable manner. In fact, good governance has been an important priority of the Parishad. Regular Ward Shava and Open Budget Meetings have been the means through which transparency and accountability have been practiced in the Union. Inclusive decision making has been the hallmark of the Betaga Union. THP trained volunteers played important role for the implementation of SDG 16 in the Union. People's participation was ensured through the activism and effectiveness of 14 Standing Committees, which also includes people from opposition political parties.</li> <li>• Betaga Union Parishad, with assistance of its 14 STs, delivered the services that</li> </ul>

	<p>citizens are entitled to from the Union. People receive the services irrespective of caste, creed and religion, which ensures social justice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● All births and marriages are regularly registered in Betaga Union.</li> <li>● There is no sectarian or political violence in Betaga. In fact, peace and harmony prevail in Betaga. There is also no political interference from the ruling party over the activities of the UP.</li> <li>● The holding tax collected by UP is assessed in participatory manner. In this process, the defeated candidates who contested elections and against the Chairmen and Members and local civil society members are involved. They assess the tax in consultation with the property owners. The tax collection of the Union is 100% every year.</li> <li>● The Village Court is functional in Betaga and ensures justice.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Betaga Union has internet service. The internet service is used in the Union Digital Centre, which is actively providing very useful services to the citizens.</li> <li>● Every family of Betaga has at least one mobile phone.</li> </ul>

## An Inspiring Example to Follow

Although we are into the second year of SDG era, Betaga Union Parishad already achieved some of the SDGs and on its way into achieving others. This has been possible by the gender-focused community-led development initiative created through the partnership of the people of the Union, their elected representatives, a group of volunteers acting as civil society from the ground up and the government functionaries responsible for empowering the citizens with services they deserve to have. The transformative leadership of the Union Parishad and particularly its Chairman has made the successes of Betaga a reality.

The achievements of the Betaga Union owe much to a functional, active and transparent Union Parishad and effective Standing Committees. It is also largely due to the integrated approach, society-wide mobilization and campaigns carried out jointly by the UP and a group of THP trained volunteers acting as ground level civil society. The assistance of various government functionaries made critical contributions in this endeavor. The creation of an SDG Union is not a money centered or staff-driven initiative, the constitutionally mandated body, namely the Union Parishad, took ownership of it and the entire community is involved in it. It is a low cost venture which likely will be sustained. No one is also likely to be left behind in the process of creation of SDG Union. Since in this initiative, people of all color, creed, religion and political persuasion work together for better collective future, it is likely to mitigate conflict and promote peace and harmony among the people.

## Towards a National Program to Leave No Citizen's Voice Behind

The MDGs were designed to get us halfway to a world free from hunger and poverty. The SDGs aspire to finish the job. This makes it necessary to transform promising gender-focused community-led development approaches such as the SDG Union Strategy into full national programs. Since the process of achieving the 2030 goals will take many years, we recommend that Bangladesh **take urgent steps** to bring gender-focused community-led development to all unions by 2020. This is consistent with the recommendations of the well known study by Jachimowicz, Chafik, Munrat, Prabhu, & Weber (2017) that the policy to end poverty “should move beyond a sole focus on the low-income individual and instead provide additional emphasis on the low income community.” Bangladesh’s broad collection of NGOs possess the skilled facilitators and trainers needed for such a community-based approach. Other countries, such as South Korea, Afghanistan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Kenya and Brazil have already done this to great effect, and Bangladesh can do the same.

**Policy Recommendations:** To enable Unions to fully implement their constitutional responsibilities in key sectors required to achieve the SDGs, we recommend the following:

1. Further devolution of public resources, ensuring UPs manage at least 20%. Currently, only 18% of public resources are devolved across all sub-national levels.
2. Devolution of all the government functionaries who work at the Union level and additional personnel to work with Standing Committees.
3. High-level mandates for line ministry personnel to embrace the concept of active citizen participation in the activities of Union Parishads, including training in gender-focused, community-led development.
4. International support for strategic planning at the district level between District level government officials and NGOs for campaigns to mobilize active citizenry and Ward Shava participation in every Union.

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