Annual Report 2020-2021

RIB, a leading Nongovernment organization in Bangladesh, has been creatively utilizing the methods and means of PAR along with RTI to improve capacity of the marginalized, vulnerable and religious minorities since last two decades in Bangladesh. Over the period of time, this organization has developed a strong, credibility among its target groups, beneficiaries and stakeholders, in cluding the communities with whom the activities of this project had been implemented. Its long-standing presence in the community and contribution to the capacity building and empowerment of these community enhanced the credibility of the organization. RIB's participatory methods engage both research(in generating knowledge of people's needs and strategies through Participatory Action Research or *Gonogobeshona)* and developmental outcomes (in enabling access to services either through self- management skills or through advocacy of their fundamental rights).

Seven Research projects were accomplished during the reporting period. These are 1. Building capacities of local communities to mitigate problems created by their discrimination in mainstream societies: ethnic communities, dalits and marginalized women in Rajshahi and Jessore; 2. Advancing Accountability and Transparency through Right to Information; 3. Recovery, Extension and Evaluation of a Kajoli ECL centres for and setting up of a Kajoli Foundation; 4. Agro ecology from below: Pedagogy and Participatory Action (2021); 5. Promotion of Social Partnership for Empowerment of marginalized communities in 6 districts and at national level in Bangladesh (PROSPECT); 6. Research on Statelessness among Urdu Speaking Community in Bangladesh; 7. Implementation of a EWER system to counter gendered violence in Rohingya and Host community in the Cox's Bazar region. The development partners are MISEREOR, National Endowment for Democracy (NED), PORTICUS, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS), NETZ Bangladesh, UNHCR, The University Of Queensland.

Project No. 1 : Building Capacities of Local Communities to Mitigate Problems Created by their Discrimination in Mainstream Societies: Ethnic Communities, Dalits and Marginalized Women in Rajshahi and Jessore.
Duration : February 2021 to January 2022 Development Partner : MISEREOR

The objectives of the project was to build the capacity of the two indigenous groups (Santal and Oraon), two religious minority communities (Dalits) and the marginalized women of all groups and communities through Participatory Action Research (PAR) and enable them to exercise their rights using the Right to Information Act (RTI). In order to achieve this objective, RIB had implemented a range of activities that included group formation comprising the members of the above-mentioned communities, organized regular monthly meetings, held trainings on RTI and PAR, arranged community obilization activities, regular dialogues and advocacy with the local elities and representatives of administration. RIB has commissioned an evaluation study to understand the effectiveness and credibility of the activities of this project among the target groups and their ability in exercising the techniques of PAR and the procedure of RTI Act to exercise and promote their rights.

The two specific objective of the project were:
An evidence-based strategy to help marginalized populations access justice has been developed.
At least 12 of the 36 newly formed advocacy groups us this strategy for policy dialogue and access to government programs through the Right to Information Act.

Target Groups and Stakeholders

Total of 42 groups had been formed (21 groups in Rajshahi and 21 in Jessore). Each group had 15 members and the project directly reached 645 beneficiaries. In addition, the project had influenced 5805 beneficiaries indirectly through its initiatives that included family members and the community people in the study area. About 50% of members of these groups were female. The stakeholders of this project included local governmentofficials, local politicians, and administrators, members of civil society, community-based organizations, and government institutions.

Workshop/ training- PAR

Rajshahi, August 29-31, 2021

A three-day workshop on Participatory Action Research (PAR) was held on the meeting room of Adivasi Somaj Binirman O Unnayan Sanghtha, Kakonhat, Godagari, Rajshahi, on August 29-31, 2021. 42 members of 21 PAR groups (14 female and 7 male groups) attended the program. Each PAR group sent 2 members. The workshop was facilitated by Md. Matiur Rahman, Babul Chandra Sutradhar and Munna Das. The major topics discussed in the workshop were:

Day-1

- Basics of PAR
- Collective initiatives- why and how?
- Poverty- financial and psychological
- Social problems and related concepts
- Process of problem identification
- Steps to solve problems

Day-2

- Rights as a citizen
- Social role of an individual
- Role of an animator and facilitator
- PAR praxis
- Probable results of PAR
- Demo

Day-3

- Revision of the discussion of previous days
- Visiting villages of PAR groups to share experience of workshop to all members
- Closing

Jashore, September 5-7, 2021

The workshop mentioned above on Participatory Action Research (PAR) was held on the auditorium of Shaheed Mashiur Rahman Law College, Jashore, on September 5-7, 2021, with same duration and structure.

General discussion: In the workshops both in Rajshahi and Jashore, the participants were asked to Identify the problems in their daily life; some of these are as follows:

- Limited entrance to Social Safety Net programs

- Lack of information on services providing organs
- Lack of knowledge on citizen's right
- Lack of education
- Lack of expertise to do something better
- Lack of graveyard both in Muslim and Hindu villages
- Male- female discrimination in wage distribution
- Early marriage
- Dowry
- Landlessness
- Lack of roads
- Lack of pure drinking water
- Lack of medical services
- Unhygienic toilet and sanitation system

Workshop/ training-RTI
Rajshahi, 29-30 September, 2021

The workshop on Right To Information with PAR group members in Godagari, Rajshahi was held in the meeting room of Kakonhat Pourasava Office, Kakonhat, on September 29-30, 2021. 42 PAR group members of three Unions (Rishikul, Gogram and Deopara) of Godagari Upazilla participated the program.

It was a two-day workshop which was facilitated by Md. Matiur Rahman, Babul Chandra Sutradhar and Munna Das.

The 1st day of the program was contained some theoretical issues of RTI Act, 2009; like,

- Information- what and why
- RTI practice- what, why, where and how
- Fields of RTI practice
- Process and steps of RTI application
- Limitations of RTI Act
- Rights and duties of a good citizen
- Sharing some experience

The 2nd day of the program begun with revision of the discussion of the previous day. The vital time of the day was expended to practice filling up RTI application properly.

Jashore, 5-6 October, 2021

The duration, structure, number of participants, discussion etc. were same to the workshop held in Rajshahi. It was held in the auditorium of Jashore Sadar Upazilla on 5-6 October, 2021. It was facilitated by Ms. Ruhi Naz and Babul Chandra Sutradhar.

In the workshop, some responsible persons encouraged the participants to practice RTI to enjoy their rights; they also suggested them how fight against various difficulties like poverty, landlessness and how to make effective linkage with services providing organs.

RTI campaign

The program RTI campaigns were divided into two social groups; one is local social activists-organization and individual and the other is college students. We have organized two campaigns program with social activists in Rajshahi and Jashore and same with college students.

Some findings:

In the four RTI campaign programs, we found some messages from the participants. These are:

- Almost all participants of social activist groups were familiar with RTI Act, 2009. Some of them personally practiced the Act. Some were benefited with information received.
- In student groups, a small number of participants were familiar with RTI Act, 2009. None of them practiced the Act personally.
- The representatives from the organization in social activist groups have no organizational initiative in practicing RTI Act.
- The guests attended the programs inspired the participants to practice RTI fearlessly.
- They also cited that RTI practice is not only to get something, but also a responsibility to perform as aware citizen.
- Students were more interested to the Act but they were in fear of Designate Officers and their submissive persons; because they are more powerful in respective areas. We provided them examples how people of marginal communities were benefited by this without fear.
  We also provided information to them how the convicted DO's got punishment from the Commission. We suggested them to inform local newspapers/ medias, if any threats come.
- Some wise guests shared that the exchange of information has been seen even in the infancy of civilization.
- The programs would be able to contribute spreading RTI Act in general people of the country.

Appilication Submitted using RTI Act

The members of PAR groups had regularly organized monthly meetings, identified the list of problems, prioritized them, prepared application following the procedure of RTI act and submitted these to different government department and institutions and resolve their problems. After submission, these applications were being followed on a regular basis by the project team at the local level.

Level of RTI Application

Level	Jashore	Rajshahi	Total
Union	92	99	191
Upazila	82	123	205
District	56	64	120
Division	19	2	21
Department/ Ministry	9	-	9
Total	258	288	546

Exchange visit

Main Objectives:

- Capacity building
- Sharing experience
- Trip to be pleasant
- Searching some elements to strengthen PAR and RTI process
- Show some instance directly
- To prove similarity of socio-economic condition

The 7 members of visiting team of Jashore to Rajshahi

The team visited the PAR groups of Rajshahi on 25-27 November, 2021. They attended 4 meetings of PAR groups with Oraon community (Gunigram and Udpur), Santal Community (Jiolmari and Jugidang), MWM- Hindu community (Ramdaspara, Mandiol) and MWM- Muslim community (Talai Kundolia). The team also visited the historical Gourangabari Narattom Sham, Premtoli on the way to Gunigram.

The 8 members of visiting team of Rajshahi to Jashore

The team visited the PAR groups of Jashore on 2-4 December, 2021. They attended 3 meetings of PAR groups with Kawra community in Fatepur and Narendrapur and Rishi Community in Churamonkathi. Except meeting, they visited all the villages of PAR groups.

The team also visited two historical places; one is the birth place of Great poet Michael Madhusudan Datta and the other is the floating bridge of Jhampa Baor, which was made by the villagers themselves.

Impacts of learning visit:

- Familiarity with different social and cultural perspectives
- Building up self-confidence
- Awareness on collective initiatives
- Awareness on the power of organized people
- The virulence and feature of backwardness are almost same although there are a lot of difference between the Adivasi and Dalit people.
- Seen directly the floating bridge of Jhampa Baor,a remarkable instance of villagers initiatives
- Cordial connection and communication between the members of two areas. They share various techniques of PAR and RTI
- All members of PAR groups inspired when the visiting team shared experience
- They now understood- PAR is power
- The members are trying to diminish social discrimination among them. Through PAR meetings, they gradually come to understand that there are no basic difference among the communities except social identity

Project No. 2 : Advancing Accountability and Transparency through the Right to Information
Duration : August 2021 to July 2023 (3rd Phase) Development Partner : National Endowment for Democracy (NED)

General Objectives of the project :

a. To build a culture of requesting information from the government about services and expenditure to encourage good governance
b. To advance accountability and transparency through the application and implementation of right to information mechanisms.

Specific objectives :

a. To enhance citizens participation by increased interaction with public officials- Mobilize/create RTI activists from among well-known social activists who would be capacitated to make greater use of the RTI Act 2009 themselves and also to engage in enabling others to make RTI requests

to various public authorities which improves interaction between both sides henceforth contribute in monitoring government's work by citizens.

b. To promote open governance –An effective implementation through promotion of law is our objective, we will use action research to identify the impediments under the law and to remove them through action to follow so that opportunities are created for public officials to interact with the people and become more people –friendly and law-abiding hence overall governance system will increase.
c. To assess Bangladesh performance on RTI- In order to assess annual performance of Bangladesh on RTI, UNESCO guidelines in data collection will be followed which will provide a good basis for advocacy work and compile a report for improved advocacy mechanisms on RTI.
d. To evaluate by external evaluator, the extent of systemic change reflected following earlier intervention-Under the proposed project an assessment on the impact of the law how it has been used following RIB's two immediate interventions to see whether systemic changes have started to take place. E.g: it has been seen that a local authority was forced to reduce price on water supply in the light of RTI filed in this regard by local people.
e. To ensure proper interpretation of the law by initiating cases in High Court for appropriate directives on proper application of the law as it appears, from even a cursory look at the practice, that Section 7 is mindlessly used by public officials to deny the requested information.

Activities of the Project :

a. Monthly meeting of group members (RTI Acitivities)

During the reporting period total 42 monthly meetings were conducted by the RTI activists and stakeholders. During the said reporting period group members were expected to conduct total 48 meetings but, in some places, the desired number of meetings could not be held for factors Ramzan (annual fasting of Muslim community, Eid holidays, as during festivals time getting all group members in one place to hold meetings become challenging. However in the 44 meetings those were conducted, through participatory process discussions concerning pertinent issues or problems in the relevant working districts are highlighted and how RTI can be used to resolve such identified issues or problems. Normally these monthly meetings are regularly attended by one of the project staff from RIB and all RTI activists from each working districts take part in these meetings. In such meetings, discussions generally surrounds (a) further deepening of understanding on Right to Information Act 2009 and how the law is being implemented in the country including the right process to submit RTI (b) what are the pertinent issues in that particular district against which RTI applications can be submitted to address the issue in order to bring systemic change by improving governance and transparency culture (c) what were the outcomes of submitted RTI applications, learning and experiences of RTI activists in submitting these requests as well challenges that they face are documented. This monthly exercise has proven to be very effected and result driven exercise which motivates RTI activists a great deal.

b. Meeting and strategic discussion

During reporting period, few meetings were held between project staffs of Dhaka office and all RTI moderators and few activists from 6 working districts, to discuss on project strategy and improve skill on framing of RTI issues and questions. These meetings help in understanding the issue of a particular working districts and along with RTI activists, project staffs frame various RTI questions which are subsequently submitted by the group members to various authorities in their districts. Additionally,

project staffs on a regular basis scan through newspapers reporting to look for issues that affects nationally and these issues are later on transformed into RTI questions for submission.

c. Process documentation on RTI

To track RTI applications including appeal and complaints and to record life cycle of each RTI, a particular structured format has been developed by the project team which is updated every month. The template has been developed in such a way that it gives detail information of RTI requests, appeal and complaints submitted by activists in each district as well as a particular segment has been kept in the template to record experiences of group members and findings under the project. This will be a good source for tracking and follow up on RTI applications and during reporting period a total of 636 RTI requests have been submitted by Activists.

d. Coordination and follow up meetings

An in-person coordination meeting was organized in Dhaka with participations from RTI moderators and Activists from all working districts. The purpose to organize such meeting is to share knowledge and experience of district moderators and activists. They discuss on methodology and strategy they adopt as well as they share their learnings and success stories which motive every RTI activists who are part of the current project. The most effective part of such meetings is that if there is a challenge in making RTI requests regarding a particular issue in a working district then group members from other districts take responsibility to submit RTI requests on that issue from their districts which is a good strategy to negate risks factor and at the same time the purpose of making RTI is also served. In such cases there is not only inter district interaction between group members of this project but there is inter district interaction between service providers of one district with the people from other districts.

e. RTI dialogue meeting :

A dialogue meeting was organized in Moulvibazar district with government officers and civil society on local issues and use of Right to Information to establish meaningful participation of citizens in the affairs of the country. The meeting was opened with a welcome speech by the consultant in charge of Moulvibazar district, followed by the discussion of concept paper. As concept paper was already circulated among the various participants of the meeting, therefore there was a summary discussion concerning the objective of RTI law in Bangladesh. Later, a discussion was initiated as to what the use of RTI law can bring for the people of Bangladesh as well as how it can serve as a mechanism to improve interaction between government and its citizens. Some of the contemporary issues those are existing in Moulvibazar district were taken for discussion between members of civil society and government officers who were present during the meeting. Excerpts of few RTI issues those were discussed are given below:

- No proper water resource management or better transport system exist in Moulvibazar and local government does not pay any heed to the matter nor take any initiatives to ease out people sufferings.

- No proper and sufficient number of schools for the children and citizens have to extra money to get health service from government hospitals.

- Budget allocation for sub-district and accounts of actual expenditure are not shared with people.

- Tea workers dilapidated living condition and lack of attention by local government offices or union parishad.

f. Courtyard (Awareness raising) meeting

To raise awareness on RTI law and to promote its use among citizens, village meetings were held in bogura where people of all ages from village attended these meetings and facilitators at length discussed on why it is very important for the people to use RTI law, as it is the only tool which enables citizens to monitor government activities. Post conducting such meetings then umber of RTI applications from that region has increased.

g. Strategic discussion on UNESCO guideline

UNESCO has formed a template to assess the status of RTI law in countries especially in alignment with implementation of SDG Goals 16. From the project staffs, RTI moderators and stakeholders a core team of 18 members have been formed who will undertake an exercise of 6 months to submit RTI applications following UNESCO guidelines and towards the end of 6 months an advocacy report with findings will be prepared to share with government authorities for further interventions.

Impact of RTI intervention (Case studies)

a. <u>RTI request compels authorities to complete construction of road lying idle for a long time:</u>

One RTI activist from Saidpur of Nilphamari district decided to take up the issue of an underconstruction road which was lying idle for a long time after local authorities invited tender and contract was awarded for the construction. But construction company nor local authority took it seriously to finish construction work within short time hence cause huge discomfort to the local people and good number of accidents took place as well. RTI activists Ruhul Alam through his RTI application to local Mayor demanded information that even after completion of tender process and after some initial work for the road construction why the work has yet not been completed and by when the work will be completed. Interestingly after receiving this application from Ruhul Alam and from other activists, local Mayor dealt the issue with emergency and within very short time the road construction work has started and it is now towards completion stage. Such RTI applications help government become more accountable.

<u>b. RTI application helped in speeding up monitoring and inspection visits by Consumer Rights Protection Authority:</u>

Dinajpur is a big district with 13 sub-districts, therefore local administration is huge at the same time mismanagement is also widespread. Consumer Rights Protection Authority an authority established under the said law has never made any monitoring or inspection visits anywhere in Nawabgonj Upazila of Dinajpur district. One RTI activist Matiar Rahman submitted an RTI application to Consumer Rights Protection Authority seeking information on during 2021-2022 how many monitoring and inspection visits to Nawabgonj Upazila were undertaken by the authority and during such visits what and how much penalties were imposed. After receiving this application, the concerned authority replied that due to shortage of manpower they could not make any inspection visit however it was seen that within next 6 months after the above RTI application was submitted, the concerned authority made 2 inspection visits to Nawabgonj Upazila of Dinajpur district.

<u>c. Citizen's intervention through RTI led to reveal corruption and mismanagement in a State owned Bank:</u>

Two activists from Dinajpur district Shemoli Rani and Ripon made RTI applications to Sonali Bank, Fulbari Branch seeking information that in 2021 to fight against pandemic crisis how many farmers

received stimulus packages announced by the government. Receiving no response on their applications, two RTI activists submitted appeal and then filed complaints with Information Commission. Information Commission, after hearing passed an order directing designated officer to provide information as demanded, also to upload that information on their website. Following this, the higher designated officer from Sonali Bank, Fulbari branch made a phone call to oneo f RTI activist Abdullah Akhtaruzzaman who is local teacher, the Bank manager told him that he has obtained information that Akhtaruzzaman and his group of RTI acitvists Fulbari Upazila are making such RTI applications, to this Akhtaruzzaman replied "if you are transparent then whats harm in giving information". The bank manager admitted of corruption that took place concerning stimulus package but at the same time assured him that they will be careful in the future.

Some positive outcome:

- There is scaling in the nature of RTI applications and further deepening of process. People have become more aware and no longer focus RTI requests on their personal need, rather local or national issues are taking priority.
- During the reporting period we have noticed that due to RTI interventions some of the offices have started establishing transparency or accountability culture, this can be corroborated through the case studies collected from working districts.

Constrains and Challenges :

1) Still there are large number of public authorities, government officials and elected representative who have negative mindset who discourage use of RTI and due to such mentality sometimes the RTI activists are being harassed and insulted.

2) Very whimsically Designated officers use provision of exclusion under section 7 of RTI Act even for those cases where it doesn't apply. Such practices linger the process and at the end RTI users get discouraged.

3) We see that in some cases in order to avoid giving information, designated officers try to create pressure upon the applicant by local influential people for withdrawal of RTI requests. Also it was noticed that government offices feel more comfortable in giving information orally.

4) There is lack of awareness regarding RTI law among general people, the poor do not feel encouraged to file RTI for backlash and the middle class or educated people believe more in getting the work done through money or connections

5) As the work under current research project comprehend voluntary engagement of people whose knowledge and skills will be developed through this intervention but still some people feel less interest to be part of this initiatives as they believe that there is no materials gain. Such notion led to constant change in the group members.

Project No. 3 : Recovery, Extension and Evaluation of Kajoli ECL Centres for and setting up of a Kajoli Foundation
Duration : September 2021 to February 2023 Development Partner : PORTICUS

Project main goals are (1) Recovery of existing Kajoli centers affected by the pandemic. (2) To conceive and set up a Kajoli Foundation based on endowments (3) To evaluate the model (as it is now) to generate evidence on what is working and what conditions need to be met for the model to work optimally, areas for improvement etc. (4) Upgrade RIB safeguarding principles.

Kajoli Early learning model is based on three pillars: 1. Joyful learning by children 2. Teachers without advanced degrees are able to impart knowledge effectively especially English 3. Community participation is ensured as community pays teachers for their services as well arrange mid-day meal for the children.

From the target population number of students stand as 1870, this number is the direct number of students who are enrolled in the kajoli learning centre from 4 working districts namely Nilphamari, Dinajpur, Naogaon and Panchagarh. This estimation has been arrived checking with the register maintain by the teachers. When students are enrolled teachers make entry for each student in their registered.

The calculation on the number of guardians 3740 reached through this grant was easy and part of mathematical calculation because for each student his/her both parents have been counted.

The calculation of number of families 2975 reached through this grant was made by deriving information on families and population data from Union Parishad offices in the working districts as well as feedbacks from the teachers. We were informed by the Kajoli teachers and local community members that as the Kajoli centres are situated in para (ward) of a Union and in each para there are approximately 35 families reside so that's how we have estimated the number of families reached.

Activity 1: Recovery of current centres

a. Recovery of centres- During the project period we were able to recover 85 centres out of 100 as planned during project planning phase. These 85 centres are basically the ones which were run down or temporarily closed during pandemic crisis following continuation of widespread lockdown in the country. Some of the centres which were considered under recovery are the ones situated in the same working areas like other but did have run for a brief period by the teachers who migrated to other places and closed down but during recovery phase local people proposed to start them again The reason that 15 centres coud not be recovered because in some cases the trained teachers have been married off or taken jobs somewhere and there were no replacements or offcer came from the community, so they were not interested to restart (especially the ons who secured jobs) nor the community people were not interested to continue as covid has financially crippled a particular section of lowest tier of society and they cannot afford to pay teachers anymore. As mitigation measures from RIB we tried to do advocacy with local representatives as well as parents of these 15 centres which could not be recovered but unfortunately nothing worked.

b. TOT for Teachers – During the project TOT has been provided to 85 teachers in 4 batches. For these trainings, expert trainers who have years long experiences of running and teaching in Kajoli model centres have been engaged. During these trainings, new learning materials which had been developed by the Consultant were introduced to the teachers who found the new learning materials quite interesting and observed that it has easy adaptability especially english curriculum.

c. Develop and publish Learning Materials- During the reporting period, Consultant under the project reviewed existing Kajoli Learning Materials and as the basic structure of Kajoli Model lie on quality method of joyful learning, hence the focus was more on to revise and develop learning materials in such a way that imparting of knowledge becomes easy and enjoyable by the teachers, at the same time students finds the learning process joyous so that in a palyful manner they grasp the basic idea of the subjects they are studying. The learning materials are still in develope > testing > revise process.

Activity 2 : Preparing for Kajoli Foundation

As community people and local CBOs/NGOs will also be the stakeholder/partner in the Kajoli Foundation, therefore a primary discussion about setting up of a Foundation and how it will contribute towards sustainability of Kajoli Model has been initiated through meetings in the working areas. Dialogue meeting with partners and registration process for Kajoli Foundation are yet to take place.

Implementing Safeguarding Policy

knowledge building exercise and reviewing of RIB's existing policies on safeguarding has already been started by a Consultant engaged through Porticus. In the current quarter a training on safegurding principle will be organised by RIB, once Consultant finalises the draft template.

Outcomes :

1. Teachers' social acceptability and dignity increases. 80% teachers during monitoring visits have claimed that villagers, other primary teachers and parents treat them with respect and dignity because they impart knowledge to their children, even their position in their own households though they are not highly educated.

(2) Mothers can easily compare the quality of education being provided in government school with that of Kajoli Centres learning methodology and they have faith in the sustainability of Kajoli model because they believe that as kajoli students learn through joyful techniques hence they learn fast and not feel burden of study which help them easily demonstrate their learnings. 60% mothers during visits claimed that they are in favour of kajoli model teaching methodology as they believe that their children learn many things.

Project No. 4 : Agro-ecology from Below: Pedagogy and Participatory Action (2021)
Duration : January to December 2021 Development Partner : Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS)

Purpose of the Project : To promote ecological principles in Bangladesh as an alternative approach to agriculture production.

Target groups : Small Farmers, women farmers, youths and students, members of peasant organisations concerned government authorities, GO/NGOs, political actors, and left actors and activists and academics working in the field of agriculture.

Geographical Area: Nilphamari, Bogura (earlier name Bogra), Satkhira and Dhaka

Activity 1: Conduct at least 81 meetings on regular basis with at least 9 Participatory Action Research (PAR) groups (9 meetings per group) to promote agro-ecological methods and to sensitise them about the agrarian, ecological and public health issues. In addition, photo and video documentation of at least 20 farmers highlighting their experience on agro-ecology for further dissemination. The groups' members are extending their agro-ecological activities. They are concentrating on marketing of agroecological crops and foods and to establish farmers' organization in their villages. Besides, the video documentation of the farmers' agroecological working experiences has been prepared and uploaded on RIB's YouTube channel for broader dissemination.

Activity 2: Undertake at least 3 promotional activities in the project areas with school and college students (like discussion sessions, essay writing or debate events etc.) to spread the principles of agro-ecology. In addition, conducting an action research with school students on farming in the project areas. The students and teachers of the school have been sensitized on environmental and agro-ecological issues. Some of them started agro-ecology in limited basis and shown interest to work in these issues. The agroecology plot helped the students, teachers and guardians to learn agroecology practically.

Activity 3: Organise at least 3 agro-ecology fairs at union level to display and disseminate the agro-biodiversity, seeds, local foods/medicine/products and agro-ecological methods. In addition, audio-video documentation of these fairs and a folk-art performance of a cultural group to promote agro-ecology. Local leaders, government and NGO officials promised to extend their help to the farmers. Besides, the visitor farmers and consumers become sensitized on agroecological issues. Some farmers shown their interest to join PAR groups and learn agroecology. The response from different actors inspired farmers to enhance their agro-ecological activities. A video documentation of this fair is prepared and uploaded on RIB's YouTube channel.

Activity 4: Production of at least 4 video-lectures on agro-ecology for educational purposes which can be used during farmer trainings. A Consultant (Videographer) was hired through interview and the topics and relevant Resource Persons were selected by the project staffs to prepare the video lectures. The Project staffs and videographer visited Resource Persons' place to conduct video shoot. After that, the video footages were being edited and four video lectures were prepared.

Topic 1 : Agroecology: Relevance and Application
Topic 2 : Pest Management of Agricultural Crops
Topic 3 : Farmer's Organization in Bangladesh: Past, Present, and Future
Topic 4 : The Necessity for weeds, forest, and medicinal plants to protect ecology

Activity 5: Organise at least 9 local schools as well as knowledge sharing workshops on agro-ecology with PAR group members as well as non-PAR group farmers and local youths to improve their understanding on agro-ecology and various other agrarian challenges. The participants learned the covered topics and recapped their previous learning, during the local schools. Their experiences and knowledge were shared with the non-project farmers and other professionals during Knowledge Sharing Workshops. The participants become sensitized on agro-ecological issues and shown their interest to work on these issues (to cultivate local varieties, prepare organic and microbial fertilizers etc.). Further follow-up is required in this regard. At Nilphamari, the youth participants of Joychondi village started activities to save ecology. Primarily they set forty pots in different trees for birds.

Activity 6: Organise at least 2 schools and at least 3 group-meetings with women on issues related gender and agriculture. For training and facilitation of women on gender and agriculture, the first & 2nd Women's School on Gender and Agriculture was organized at Eque Heritage Hotel & Resorts in Nilphamari. Women farmers were chosen from three project areas based on their prompt and passion in leadership, womanhood, and agroecology. Participants from Nilphamari, Bogura and atkhira, as well as the research assistants from three project areas, attended the school. The school's total number of residential participants was 25. During the school days, they stayed at the location and learnt and shared their experiences and expertise with one another during formal sessions and free time.

Videography on women's school

Through specific arrangements, video filming of some of the activities of the Women's School is made so that gender and agroecology training for women farmers can be reserved and disseminated in the future. This includes certain parts of the school session, as well as Kamrun Nahar Ira's hands-on training on income-generating activities for women PAR group members in Sorkar Para, Nilphamari on November 16, 2021. Dr. Meghna Guhathakurta, Executive Director of the RIB, was also a resource person in the school program. Her lecture was videotaped and given to the research assistants in the three areas so that they could show it in their local school and other programs.

The link to the YouTube video on Women's School on Gender and Agriculture is : https://youtu.be/uR7PlZrOsbc

Activity 7: Compile, print and disseminate at least 1 **manual on agro-ecology** in Bangla language to provide the farmers an easy access of all the relevant information on agro-ecology in one place.

Activity 8: Conduct at least 3 local dialogue meetings with local government authorities, government organisations, non-government organisations, political actors, media, left actors, students, consumers and non-farm community to draw their attention towards and generate broader favourable opinion on agro-ecology, alternative farming and small and marginal farmers. The participants become aware about the agricultural, ecological and social challenges and informed about the agro-ecological activities of PAR group farmers. Political parties invited the project farmers to discuss the results of their activities with party members and associate farmers.

Activity 9: Conduct at least 1 dialogue on government actors, policy makers, and civil society organisations to generate broader favourable opinion issues of climate change, agriculture, alternatives and small and marginal farmers. Dialogue on Agriculture & Climate Crisis was held 12 December 2021; Azimur Rahman Conference Hall, The Daily Star, Dhaka. The Dialogue created a connection among the actors between agriculture and climate crisis. The project farmers shared their working experience and sufferings. The actors engaged in promoting sustainable agriculture shared their working experiences, introduced with each other and placed their agenda in front of the key actors of agriculture. The discussion helped the politicians and policy makers to understand the sufferings of the farmers and climate victims, international politics and alternatives. As the key persons of the field of agriculture and economics were present in the event, it is expected that the sustainable issues will be incorporate in the curricula. A news report was published in the country's top English newspaper.

Success Stories

1. Organic Agro-Marketing Corner

The members of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) groups have devised a plan for establishing an organic agro-marketing corner at Fulbari market, Sariakandi, Bogura. This market is very popular as people from different areas come to do business. The decision to set a corner to sell the crops produced by following agroecology was made after the project coordinator and director of Research Initiatives, Bangladesh (RIB), Suraiya Begum, recommended to the Upazila Chairman and farmers to launch the effort to build an organic agro-marketing corner at the Agro-ecology fair on February 27, 2020. The Upazila Chairman had expressed his full support for the corner and requested the Union Parishad Chairman to take steps. However, due to a coronavirus outbreak, this attempt was discontinued.
Later, on November 9, 2020, at the exchange visit program, the farmers of three villages attempted to discuss this topic. Later, they fixed a meeting with Union Parishad Chairman. He nominated a union parishad member (UP) and a Sub-assistant Agricultural Officer (SAAO) to proceed the initiative. In the discussion, Ansar Ali –farmer, Noyapara- said,

> "We, the PAR members, are growing crops organically. We could understand the fallbacks of agro-chemicals. In order to let the people get organic crops, we have taken the attempt of opening an organic agro-marketing corner in our local market. We know that, we can sense a high demand of organic crops out there. They are unable to meet this demand due to lack of an organic agro-marketing corner. We are here to appeal to the chairman to allow a corner for us to sell organic crops."

Md Shamsul Hoque, a PAR member from Baluartair, said,

> "We all here know that only organic crops are safe and nutritious for our health. This initiative will keep the disease curve downtrend, and we can live a healthy life."

The UP member Sazu Pramanik encouraged the initiative by saying,

> "This is going to be undoubtedly, a groundbreaking initiative for this area. If you can maintain the demand-supply chain, this organic corner will be a sustainable solution for many diseases caused by agro-chemicals. If you can execute the initiative, the UP chairman along with the Upazila Agriculture Officer, will inaugurate the corner."

The Upazila Sub Assistant Agriculture Officer Mohammad Ali said,

> "The world has a crying demand for two very essential things – safe food and safe environment – which are at risk for the acts of humans. Here, you are initiating to solve the first worldwide crisis at least in this village. I believe that every people here will welcome the initiative."

It was decided at the meeting that the farmers along with the SAAO would visit the market on 23 December 2020. As per the discussion the representatives from three villages, Lal Mohammad and Mister Ali from Majhbari, Shamsul Hoque from Baluartair, and Ansar Ali, Mojid Uddin and Sanaul Islam visited the local market with the SAAO. Besides they got approval from concerned authorities.

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Photo: Farmers' meeting at the office of the UP Chairman

However, the farmers couldn't execute the initiative due to the third wave of the coronavirus infection, but continued their discussions in the PAR meetings and informal gatherings. The farmers first displayed their organic agro-marketing corner at the Agroecology Fair held on 18 October 2021, where the Upazila Agriculture Officer, Upazila Agriculture Extension Officer, Sub-assistant Agriculture Officer, Union Parishad member was present. The Upazila Agriculture Officer and the Upazila Agriculture Extension Officer promised to provide their support to open the organic agro-marketing corner. But they told to ensure the authenticity of the crops. On 03 December 2021, representatives from the three villages met the UP member once again and confirmed the place for the organic agro-marketing corner. Upazila Agriculture Officer also gave permission to use their logo in the banner or signboards of the corner. During the Local Dialogue Meeting organized by RIB on 27 December 2021, the farmers and SAAO declared the date of the inauguration of the corner and requested the participants to buy crops for promoting agroecology.

Finally the designated farmers organized the inaugural program and the organic corner has been launched on 09 January 2022. Discussion and rally were the part of the inaugural program attended by SAAO, UP member, other actors and local businessperson and consumers. So far the response is good. Initially, crops and foods will be sold on Sunday and Thursday, the weekly hat-days (market-day) of this market. Besides farmers will share their knowledge, experience and other inputs in this place.








Photo: Discussion by Sub-assistant Agriculture Officer and Union Parishad Member during the inaugural of the corner







Photo: Organic agro-marketing center

2. An Increased Tendency of non-PAR farmers in Cultivating Local Varieties Rice

The participatory Action Research (PAR) groups' members in Noyapara, Sariakandi, Bogura have been cultivating the local varieties of rice from 2017 and attempting to encourage non-PAR farmers to cultivate local rice. Especially, Md Ansar Ali prepared an exclusive plot for rain-fed rice season where he cultivate nine types of local varieties since 2015. He used to invite other farmers to exhibit his plot. Besides, the PAR members displayed the local varieties of rice seeds at the annual Agroecology fairs held at Sariakandi, Bogura, where other farmers saw the varieties and got encouraged to cultivate them in their own plots. Earlier most of the non-project were not familiar with those varieties. This year following non-PAR farmers cultivated local varieties as the PAR farmers shared seeds with them:

SL No	Name of Farmer	Size of Land (in decimal)	Variety of Rice	Expense per Bigha (33 decimal)	Production per Bigha (33 decimal)	Market Price (per 40 kilogram)
1.	Md Injil	15	Ritu Paijam	3000	480 kg	1100
2.	Md Tuku	33	Ritu Paijam	3000	480 kg	1100
3.	Md Abdur Rahman	33	Ritu Paijam	3000	480 kg	1100
4.	Md Dulal	20	Ritu Paijam	3000	480 kg	1100
5.	Md Rana	20	Ritu Paijam	3000	480 kg	1100
6.	Md Bhikku	05	Ritu Paijam	3000	480 kg	1100
7.	Md Jahidul	05	Kalo Kadshabhod	3000	320 kg	1200

Among the local varieties cultivated by the PAR farmers, Ritu Paijam was attracted by the non-PAR farmers due to its quality. In 2021, around 125 decimals of lands were under local rice cultivation by non-PAR farmers at Noyapara village, which was 15 decimals in 2020. This continuous increase of interest of the non-PAR members in cultivating local variety of rice is truly encouraging for the PAR members.

3. Cultivating Local Varieties of Rice

The PAR members and non-PAR members have been cultivating local varieties of rice for last five years in the three project village: Sorkarpara, Joychondi and Berakuthi in Nilphamari. They collected the seeds, preserved, distributed to other farmers and cultivated. They increased the number of varieties to check location specific viability. They are also including non-PAR members in this cultivation and trying to spread agroecology in the area. For cultivating the local varieties, they prepared and used composts and bio-fertilizers. Since the first plough to harvest they didn't use industrial input. When faced difficulty, they took suggestion from the Sub assistant Agriculture Officer and the experienced farmers. Though almost every farmers have been cultivating local rice, following farmers mentioned bellow prepared exhibition plot which got attention from the non-PAR farmers.

Name of the farmer	Village	Name of the local variety	Season	Size of land
Md Nur Islam	Joychondi, Nilphamari	Sada Boro	Boro Season	8 Decimals
		Sonali Paijam	Amon Season	8 Decimal
Horendra Nath Rai	Berakuthi, Nilphamari	Dudh Kolom Chini Shankar	Boro Season	7.5 Decimal
Shefali Begum	Sorkarpara, Nilphamari	Sonali Paijam	Amon Season	15 Decimal

The farmers also continuing mixed cropping of local variety of vegetables and other crops. They learned the multiple cropping from the various capacity building activities facilitated by RIB, and manual book. Every year, they increase the size of land to practice multiple cropping than the last year. Following farmers plots were attracted by the non-PAR farmers last season.

Name of the farmer	Village	Name of the local variety	Size of land
Md Nuruzzaman Rahman	Joychondi, Nilphamari	Napa Shak, Bacho Shak, Coriander, Onion, Spinach, Radish, Chile, Gourd, and Eggplant	4 Decimal
Suroma Akter	Sorkarpara, Nilphamari	Spinach, Coriander, Bacho Shak, Gourd, Krishto Kalai, Napa Spinach, Red Spinach, Radish, Chile	20 Decimal

4. Amplifying the voice of Agroecology

Former Sonarai Union Parishad Chairman and President of the governing body of Shapla Girls High School, Ashwini Kumra Biswas, was invited and participated in various events, organized under RIB-RLS project. On 23rd September 2021, RIB organized an Agroecology Fair at Baruahat in Sonarai Union, Nilphamari, where he was invited as a special guest. He appreciated farmers' efforts and highlighted the importance of agroecology during his speech.

One week later, there was a promotional program on hybrid corn organized by a foreign seed company and Ashwini Kumra Biswas was invited as a locally important person. During his speech. He said,

> "I attended an Agroecology Fair, which took place a week ago. I was blown away by the local diversity of rice and vegetable seeds, and bio-fertilizers shown by the local farmers. They are conducting farming without using any chemical inputs. These activities are important both for human health and the environment. What are the impacts of the inputs which will require to produce hybrid crops? We have to be careful regarding this."

The program was attended by numbers of farmers and other professionals. They came to know about agroecology from his speech and should be sensitized regarding the chemical inputs. Like Ashini Kumar, many other actors are amplifying the voice of the project staffs and farmers regarding agroecology as a result of their participation in the project events.

Project No. 5 : Promotion of social partnership for empowerment of marginalised communities in 6 districts and at national level in Bangladesh (PROSPECT)
Duration : January 2020 to December 2022 Development Partner : NETZ Bangladesh , funded by BMZ

RIB with fund from BMZ and support from NETZ Bangladesh, in cooperation with 3 partner organisation is implementing a project in Bangladesh titled "Promotion of social partnership for empowerment of marginalised communities in 6 districts and at national level in Bangladesh (PROSPECT). The above-mentioned project aims to strengthen the human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and public authorities to protect and promote rights of marginalised communities in working districts and at national level in Bangladesh. Expected results of the project is that through the designed activities the capacitated HRDs at local to national level and at schools are visible and recognized as actors to protect and promote the rights of marginalized communities and engage in conflict sensitive democratic dialogue with public authorities for inclusive development. The planned activities of the project mainly targeted 12,500 HRDs at 378 civil society organisations at local and regional level and at 72 schools in 12 sub-districts of Panchagarh, Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Naogaon and Rajshahi Districts of Bangladesh. One national platform of HRDs is also connected with the local and regional HRDs to contribute in protecting and promoting the rights of marginalized communities through national level advocacy and policy influence.

2. OVERALL OBJECTIVE:

Human Rights Defenders and public authorities are strengthened to protect and promote rights of marginalised communities in 6 districts and on national level in Bangladesh.

Specific objective with outcome: 12,500 capacitated human rights defenders (HRDs) and 1,200 representatives of public authorities effectively cooperate to protect and promote the economic, social and cultural rights of women, religious minorities and indigenous peoples; they disseminate their experiences in wider civil society networks in South Asia.

3. PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND USE OF THE SURVEY

An important part of the above-mentioned project is to "Prepare the collection of data and analyse them along with information on the rights situation of marginalised groups and compile policy recommendation reports. The objectives in this regard are focused on 3 thematic areas:

On Minority rights: To have a comprehensive understanding on structural causes of deprivation of minority communities and reasons for their inadequate representation in various services under the control of government. To further look into their lack of access to operation of the state agencies of the law and order, welfare, education and health, public services, state contracts, credits, licenses, and the judiciary.

On Access to Social Safety Net Program- to undertake an analysis of social exclusion that will inform and pave the way for a policy brief for the implementation of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) with a view to incorporate social inclusion as well as to explore how far socially excluded groups are able to access social transfers and indicate the barriers.

On Status of Right to Information Act- to develop a comprehensive understanding on present status of RTI Act implementation as well as the impediments that slows down progress of the law. Report will further include areas of improvement for effective implementation of RTI law in Bangladesh and how the identified barriers can be mitigated.

The primary objective to conduct research on above mentioned 3 thematic areas are:

a) policy advocacy with recommendations made to the public authorities and law makers to bring a sustainable change.

b) operational i.e. findings and recommendations will be used for better project management and improvement, as well as additions or changes to existing project activities and their impact on communities can also be ascertained and proposed.

4. METHODOLOGY

• Document review: Existing documents (e.g. reports and review materials) related to the selected themes were reviewed at the beginning to understand the project objectives and activities.

• For field data collection, a semi-structured questionnaire was developed with consultations, inputs and revisions by RIB and NETZ Bangladesh.

• KII with Project Managers and Field Facilitators of 3 organisations namely DASCOH, MKP and Pollisree working in 6 districts

Field data collection and challenges:

• An orientation was organized for the enumerators on explaining the items of the questionnaire, sample distributions, and data collection techniques.

• Field data collection was facilitated by by DASCOH field staffs atTanore and Godagari Upazilas of Rajshahi district and at Patnitala and Nyamatpur Upazilas ofNaogaondistrct; by Pollisree field staffs at Parbatipur and Fulbari Upazilas of Dinajpur district, and Sadar and Gangachara Upazilas of Rangpur district; and by MKP at Sadar and Pirganj Upazilas of Thakugaon district, and Sadar and Atwari Upazilas of Panchagarh district.

• While collecting data at the field level, availability of the respondents (randomly targeted) was an issue, especially at Upazila and district levels, which affected the targeted distribution of sample among CSO based human rights defenders, young human rights defenders and school-based management committee representatives. However, target of sample size at district level was reached, and data collection stretched into adjacent and relevant Upazila areas.

Around one-seventh of the respoindnets admitted they face discrimiantions in terms of land rights, and practicing occupation by the minority groups. Around one-tenth of the respondnets said they are discriminated while trying to access government services incuding educational stipends. As regards land rights, forcible occupation, discriminatory inheritence system across gender, lack of justice, eviction, cheating etc. are mentioned. Almost one-fourth of the respondents said they are deprived of government services. Political influece, bribery etc. are named as few of the reasons behind discrikination. Around one-fourth the female respondnets said they underwent different forms of persecution in the locality, mostly by the neighoring people, influential groups, and family members. Many of the incidences took place over land issues, eve teasing, romancing, dowry, sexual harassment etc.

The following recommendations can be made to improve human rights situations, especially of minority groups, girls and women:

To Local Authorities

• Provide all information of services

• Provide opportunity of and access to income for women.

To Civil society and community

• Defend equal rights, dignity by ensuring measures to protect law and order in the society, and by establishing reporting on abuse, violence and torture
• Continue awareness raising, connecting UP, police and legal wings

• Provide legal assitance to the vulnerable groups, especially girls and women and their family.

• Stop dowry, child marriage, and violence.

• Raise awareness among the women, and men and society about equal rights, juctice, and dignity.

To Justice and Law enforcement Agencies

• Properly implmenet law and order by further activating legal systems to the benefits of the marginalzied gorups, and making the legal systems stand by the victimes of violence, harassment, and torture.

The program has generated awareness about the rights to information among the direct intervention groups, irrespective of gender, at community, Upazila and district levels. A large number of the interevention groups know why people would use RTI, and half of the repodents have filed at least one

RTI applications. Almost all of the applications are entertained with verbal replies. In case the applications are not entertained or rejected, the respondents hardly appeal or complain against those. In a few cases, the respondents who applied for information were threatended. The respondents have opinion that the people beyond the intervention groups, espeically the women of the minority/marginal communities, have difficulty in understandign the application form and subsequent processes. Finding the process of appeal or complaint difficult, feeling uneasy to hold government officials to account are major reasons of discouragement for the RTI applicants to pursue furhter with appeal or complaint.

The following recommendations can be made to advance the use and effects of RTI law:

• Continue the awareness campaigns on the purpose and use of RTI law among the wider communities at Union and Upazila levels across Bangladesh.

• Disseminate the good cases and good practices among community groups, and at organiational levels.

• Government and non-government organizations can organize seminar, training or workshops at different grassroots levels on the process of RTI applications and results so far gained.

Project No. 6 : Research on Statelessness among Urdu Speaking Community in Bangladesh
Duration : December 2020 to March 2021 Development Partner : UNHCR

In 2008, the Bangladesh High Court granted Bangladeshi citizenship to some 300,000 men, women and children from the Urdu-speaking community (also known as 'Bihari') in the country, which ended their statelessness status. Following this, UNHCR published the Note on the Nationality Status of the Urdu-speaking community in Bangladesh (2009), which considers that the Urdu-speaking community can no longer be viewed as stateless. Bangladesh was also featured in the UNHCR's Good Practices Paper-Action 1: Resolving Existing Major Situations of Statelessness (2015) and commended for its legal and policy reform in resolving the statelessness situation affecting the Urdu-speaking community in Bangladesh and the Government's prompt implementation of the High Court's decision and allocation of resources to ensure Urdu-speakers were registered in voter rolls and issued national identity (NID) cards in Bangladesh.

In 2014, UNHCR Bangladesh commissioned a study on the status of citizenship and rights of the Urdu-speaking community in Bangladesh noting reports of difficulties faced by the community in obtaining citizenship documentation despite the 2008 High Court decision. The 2014 study found that:

• Despite constitutional guarantees, Bangladesh did not have a specific legal framework for dealing with refugees or stateless persons. Despite the absence of such framework, it has been relatively successful in dealing with refugees and stateless persons, albeit in an ad hoc manner.

• Leaders from the Urdu-speaking community thought that between 70 to 80 percent of the camp dwelling population secured NID cards. Some community members were averse to embracing Bangladeshi identity because they primarily (i) feared it would undermine any prospective repatriation options to Pakistan; (ii) were concerned about deprivation from free access to various utilities such as power, housing, gas and water; and (iii) feared eviction.

• The real obstacle to overcome is to facilitate greater and unhindered access to citizenship rights. Citizenship rights of the Urdu-speaking community were by and large recognized—their births were being registered and most obtained NID cards without any major obstacles.

• Bureaucratic inertia created obstacles in the path of acquiring documentations for citizenship but it was the volatile political situation in Bangladesh that perpetually left open the possibility of exposing this community to languish in de facto statelessness until such time as measures are in place to safeguard them from political exploitation.

As the custodian of the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, UNHCR has a global mandate to work towards reduction and prevention of statelessness in line with the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness: 2014-2024 (#I Belong campaign). UNHCR Bangladesh has been taking stock of progress made in Bangladesh in solving situations of statelessness since 2014.

Since the study in 2014, similar concerns over the accessibility of citizenship rights in particular accessing civil documentation by the Urdu-speaking community in Bangladesh continue to surface. In light of this, there is a need to revisit the community's citizenship status and rights, and to better understand the current situation of the Urdu-speaking community with particular reference to the accessibility of civil documentation such as birth certificates, NID cards and passports, and access to basic rights. This current research is conducted as a follow up on the 2014 research.

1.1 Terms of Reference

This study will:

a. Analyse relevant legislative, policy and institutional framework and national strategy on prevention of statelessness of the Urdu-speaking community in Bangladesh specifically if any amendments were made in the past five years or so (since the study commissioned by UNHCR in 2014);

b. Analyse access to civil registration by the Urdu-speaking community, barriers (if any) and how to address them;

c. Research on policies and legislation on the Urdu-speaking community if any and public discourse on the community in the past five years;

d. Assess the progress made towards access to civil documentation and citizenship rights of the Urdu-speaking community;

e. In light of the findings, make recommendations to UNHCR and other actors on how to address the issues identified, taking into the scope of UNHCR's mandate in this area.

1.2 Methodology

Four methods were used when conducting this study: (a) desk research; (b) quantitative survey;

(c) focus group discussions (FGD) and independent interviews; (d) key informant interviews (KII).

a. Desk Research: Analysis of relevant legislative, policy and institutional framework and amendments made in the last 5 years or so (2014-2021), existing literature on the Urdu-speaking community, and progress made nationally towards civil registration through the CRVS and barriers (if any) were

conducted to determine actions taken in Bangladesh to resolve existing situations of statelessness and the gaps that remain.

b. Quantitative survey: Noting the size of the Urdu-speaking population scattered across 116 camps in Bangladesh, the survey targeted a sample of 200 members from the Urdu-speaking community comprising girls and boys, youth (19 to 29 years old), men and women, elderly and persons living with disability in selected sites in Dhaka and Chattogram. A total of 120 respondents were targeted in two areas in Dhaka: Mohammadpur and Mirpur, and four areas in Chattogram: Wireless, Halishahar, Roufabad and Khulsi.

c. Sample selection for the quantitative survey was as follows:

• At each site, sample was equally divided by female and male, and then by camp and outside camp.

• Sample selection was done on a random basis. Total number of households was divided by sample size for each site, and then households was skipped and picked by the quotient.

• Other criteria for selection included language (Urdu and Hindi), level of education (advanced and less), and economic status (affluent and poor).

d. In-depth interviews, and focus group discussions as appropriate with selected representatives of the Urdu-speaking community (reflecting age, gender, diversity, special needs and geographic spread of the community, i.e.Mohammadpur (Dhaka), Mirpur (Dhaka) and Chattogram) were held with the communities for insights into the process and challenges faced in obtaining civil documentation and services, and steps taken to address the challenges.

e. KIIs: Data were collected through KII from relevant national and local level officials involved in issuing birth certificates, NID cards, voter registration and passports for the Urdu-speaking community as well as in the implementation of the CRVS nationwide, in order to understand the number of people who have received different types of documents; barriers faced by the Urdu-speaking community; steps taken to mitigate the challenges and suggestions for ways forward.

1.3 Limitations and Challenges of the Study

Due to sensitivity over the statelessness issues, 57.5 percent of the total sample declined to respond to certain questions such as immoveable family assets such as possession of land or property. Towards the end of the study certain incidents unfolded due to the eviction threat in Dhaka especially in the Mirpur area. This affected the scheduling of FGDs and KIIs in Dhaka as initially people felt fearful of expressing their opinion in FGDs and interviews. Actual sample groups and areas also differed from those which were originally targeted.

The current 2021 study found that 90.8 percent of the Urdu-speaking community interviewed in Dhaka and 97.5 percent in Chattogram possess NID cards respectively. A further breakdown of data shows that 99.5 percent of men and 88.2 percent of women in Dhaka possess NID cards, while 100 percent of men and 94.3 percent in Chattogram hold NID cards. Hence like the 2014 study we see that that the majority possessed NID cards. The reasons for not possessing NID card also remained the same as the 2014 study. They were: (i) they feared it would undermine any prospective repatriation options to Pakistan; (ii) they were concerned about being deprived from free access to various utilities such as power, housing, gas and water which they enjoyed as camp dwellers; and (iii) they feared eviction.

The 2014 study found that the real obstacles to overcome were found to be in the facilitation of greater improved and unhindered access to citizenship rights. This observation made in the 2014 study has remained to be true even in the 2021 study. From the data gathered in 2021 there are still no prospects of government jobs, difficult to get passport, and the absence of a Gazette Notification. However, the community did think there was a reduced discrimination, were able to access public services such as health services. Respondents in the 2021 study maintained that access to healthcare and education was relatively easy although there are complaints of discrimination in school on the basis of their identity. Access to public services was available but only to those community members who have knowledge about such services. Access to government jobs was difficult if the person has a camp address.

The fact that bureaucratic inertia created obstacles in the path of acquiring documentations for citizenship was mentioned in the 2014 report from which it was concluded that it was the volatile political situation that prevailed in Bangladesh, which exposed the community to continuous de facto statelessness until and unless positive measures were taken to safeguard them from political exploitation.

The above statement made in 2014 was justified by the findings in the current 2021 study. Some barriers were observed to remain in acquiring passports. Passports were difficult to acquire if their permanent address is recorded as 'camp', a situation that has remained the same since the last study commissioned by UNHCR in 2014.

In profiling the passport holders in the current 2021 study, it was found that those who had a minimum education up to level 8, tended to have access to both birth certificates and passport. In the Islamic schooling system, we see 0 percent possessing passports until SSC level, but the numbers rose from HSC onwards. In terms of occupation 20 percent in petty trading, 30.6 percent in private service and 12.5 percent students owned passports. Hence in general, education and livelihood turned out to be key factors in the motivation to possess passports.

Camp dwellers particularly faced obstacles in obtaining passports due to the fact that government officials object to having camps as a permanent address. Hence it could be concluded that the protection of the Urdu-speaking community to enjoy full citizenship rights would have been greatly enhanced if the 2008 High Court ruling would have been followed by publishing a Gazette Notification.

The critical challenge faced by the Urdu-speaking community in 2014 and now for specifically those who lived in 'camps' were their living conditions and the lack of documentation that denied them ownership or residency rights to their current residence. As a result, they lived in constant fear of eviction, something that was mentioned very clearly in 2014 report. In addition, this had also led to the 'ghettoization' of lifestyle leading to precarity of living conditions that made them easy prey to trafficking rackets and drug dealers as mentioned earlier in the report. Whilst such circumstances may also be present in Bengali dominated slum areas, the interviewees seemed to perceive that this added to their general insecurity and stigmatization as Urdu speaking community.

Despite the challenges mentioned above an overwhelming majority of the respondents in both Dhaka and Chattogram (97.5 percent and 96.2 percent respectively) said they were counted in the national census conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in 2011 and 2016, which was an indication of their citizenship status.

Majority of the respondents of the 2021 study (85.8 percent in Dhaka and 95 percent in Chattogram), both men and women in both Dhaka and Chattogram, also said they exercised their voting rights after the 2008

High Court ruling. While the statelessness situation of this community appears to be resolved, this study found that in fact, about 99 percent of the Urdu-speakers who were interviewed wished to exercise their right to recognition of their status as Bangladeshi citizens. Such a statement seemed to reflect the apprehension that was voiced by the 2014 study that the "volatile political situation in Bangladesh perpetually left open the possibility of exposing this community to languish in de facto statelessness until such time as measures are in place to safeguard them from political exploitation."

Project No. 7 : Implementation of an Early Warning System to counter gendered violence in Rohingya and host communities in the Cox's Bazar region
Duration : September 2020 to February 2021 Development Partner : The University of Queensland, Australia

Early Warning System (EWER)

• EWER systems in conflict situations support the prevention of violence by alerting decision makers (within government, security institutions, and Civil Society Organisations) about potential outbreaks or escalations of violence
• While some EWER systems monitor cases of SGBV, most make little-to-no mention of the crime. No systems focus specifically on warning and responding to cases of SGBV
• Understand through analysis and situation monitoring the nature of the violence
• Help initiate a response that is tailored dependant on recommendations from analysts.

Objectives of the Project
• A EWER system for SGBV is implemented through an in-field phase of data –collection and analysis
• Local stakeholders are enabled in responding to the SGBV crimes through using the EWER system
• A monitoring system is put in place through training and dissemination of the report

Process
• Give inputs for template to develop the app
• Develop a questionnaire to contextualize it for Rohingya and host community
• Share findings with technician and local stakeholders to refine the app
• Explore possibility of training local stakeholders for a monitoring process once app is operating

Sample design:
• A total of 500 people were targeted as sample for the survey – 50% from Rohingya and 50% from Bangladeshi community. Roughly 75% of the total sample were women, and 25% men, and in addition, non-binary gender identity were included.

• Purposive sampling was designed based on the access to and permission of populations including those in Camps, and availability of resources.

Survey area:
• Camp 24 at Teknaf, and camp 4 at Ukhiya for Rohingya community.
• UZ Sadar: Vills- Dargahpara, Janarghona and Samitirapa;
• UZ Ukhiya Vills Marichhya and Setni Bot tola

SGBV and Humanitarian Crises

Data from over 80 countries suggest that 1 in 3 women who have been in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in their livesWomen endure multiple and compounding forms of violence in emergency settings
At least 1 in 5 displaced women have experienced sexual violence

Protracted Situation
1978
Military operations
1991-92
New citizenship laws
2012
Inter-communal tensions
2016
Beginning of raid
2017
ARSA Clearing operation

Trends in host and Camp Populations

- Lack of documentation of marriage and divorce gives rise to extra-legal practices (non-stamp marriages)
- Both Rohingyas and majority host population are of the same religion and intermarriages do occur (4.5%) but legally restricted by an executive order of 2013
- Polygamy or 'serial monogamy' practiced
- Gap in discourses on women's rights
- New technology is used as both communication and intimidation

Norms and Social Dynamics
- Age of betrothal is as low as 13-19
- Dowry system pervades despite anti-dowry lawsd
- Trafficking zone: family members (including children) are often used as carriers or even in danger of being trafficked themselves
- Post-traumatic stress: men in refugee camps often resort to 2nd marriage as a release or economic benefit

Lessons for humanitarian actors
- Gender-based household dynamics should be considered in terms of distribution of resources
- Social cohesion should be viewed from the perspective of diversity (gender, multi-ethnic multi-religious, local customary practices)
- Prevention is as important as protection (early warning systems)
- Support for SGBV should be considered as critical service during emergencies (e.g. pandemics)

RTI Events :

(1) RTI status for 2021

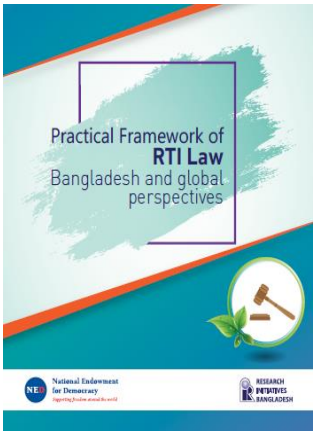
Location (District)	No. of RTI submitted	Reply received	Nature of Issue in RTI applications
Dhaka Dinajpur Rajshahi Nilphamari Rangpur Bogura Jessore Moulvibazar	2509	1711	Nature of Themes that are covered for RTI applications: (1) Government services and facilities (2) Climate change and environment (3) Governance and administration (4) Health and Education (5) Political accountability (6) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (7) Cremation & graveyard (8) Improper road condition (9) Employment (10) Landless and land grabbing

(2) Trainings on Right to Information (RTI)

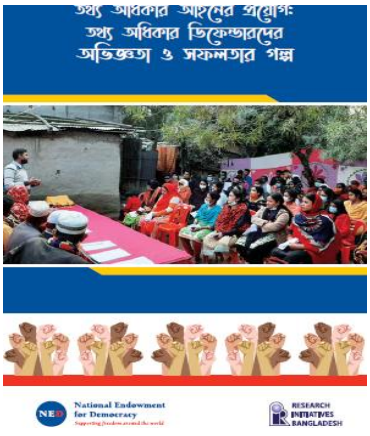
RIB has received support from National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and (Bischofliches Hilfswerk MISEREOR to take research project on PAR & RTI. These international organizations awarded multiyear funds to RIB to promote RTI in Bangladesh in assigned working areas. During the beginning of the project activities, trainings on RTI were directly provided to more than 800 people chosen from above working districts. Such RTI trainings were very interactive and participants learnt on importance of information as well as how to frame right kind of RTI questions. The participants were made familiar with pertinent issues which can be looked through RTI lenses and if the same is resolved then this will promote systemic change in governance system.

(3) Publications on RTI

RIB published posters, books and brochures on RTI during the year 2021 and disseminated to the large number of publics through online and in person delivery. We are confident that the published resource materials are going to be very useful to the readers because the book is a compilation of all our writings on various themes and issues concerning RTI which had been published in the Daily Star newspaper since 2015. This book gives comprehensive idea on RTI and a kind of hands-on resource material to self-educate on concept of RTI.







(4) Regular strategic meetings with RTI Defenders and stakeholders:



RIB has organized regular networking meeting with regional members of 4 organizations who collaborated with RIB voluntarily under a project Advancing Accountability and Transparency through Right to Information, to promote RTI in their respective working areas, the organizations were BLAST, BELA, ALRD, SUJON as well few RTI promoters/ RTI Defenders from Dinajpur district who consented to work with RIB voluntarily agreeing on principle to motivate people in their locality to make use of RTI law and promote it by framing questions on issues, themes and mandates with which they work on. This networking meetings were mainly organized to discuss on RTI law and objectives that we want to achieve through above project, effective issue identification and specifics RTI question framing, the outcome of RTI application, sharing experience and learning to overcome as well on strategic aspect on the use of RTI law so that RTI law use may ensure improvement in governance, accountability and transparency in the work public officers may increase in the sectors like environment, legal aid services, land rights case, and in sectors that involve public participation and political accountability.

(5) Public Campaign, information fair & RTI Road show:



RIB organized public campaigns, information fairs and RTI road show during year 2021 to disseminate knowledge on RTI at places accessible by large groups of people through this project. RTI campaigns have been held at district level where more than 200 people along with the participation of the general public, local administrations/government officials, people's representatives, social activists, and RTI Defenders participated. These campaigns took place at educational institutions, like schools, colleges campuses and haat bazars where large gatherings of people were possible, of course keeping health safety measures in place and taking all kinds of preparation as country is going through covid crisis. The Road show was organized from Dinajpur to Rajshahi where RTI defenders travelled to disseminate information and knowledge on RTI to the people of Dinajpur districts and Rajshahi, during the road shows RTI defenders distributed RTI reading materials e.g. leaflet, books, posters published by RIB. Through RTI campaigns and Road show demand for RTI was raised among the general people. Such initiatives would convey messages on the importance of RTI and its links in promoting good governance and inclusive development.

(6) Dialogue meetings with relevant stakeholders to discuss on RTI status:

RIB has organized number of dialogue meetings with government officials and civil society, relevant stakeholders, RTI defenders at regional/local level to disseminate findings on submitted RTI applications, for raising awareness and strategies for resolving issues between demand and supply side of RTI law, sharing experiences, lessons learnt and discussing the best practices of RTI requesters. These dialogue meetings are organized in collaboration and with participation of local administration including government officials and people's representatives, civil society members, activists, and the general public. Dialogue meetings have turned out to be an effective advocacy mechanism to encourage people to make greater use of the RTI Act, at the same time sitting across the table citizens and public authorities get an authority to interact with each other.



Dialogue meeting at DC office, Jessore



Dialogue meeting in presence of DC in Rajshahi

(7) RTI Resource Centre

Three RTI Resource Centre in the fields of North zone has been established by RIB's motivated RTI Defenders voluntarily. These resource centers have been established to cater to the needs of local people with queries on process of drafting and filling RTI, development initiatives, social service as provided by government and any other information which needs to be given including assisting in filling RTI application. At resource centre RTi defenders make people aware about RTI law and help them in filling up RTI form, appeal and complaint and keeping records of it. That resource centre has been prepared in a way to display some good number of information on service related matters from government to the general public.

(8) RTI Workshops



RTI workshops were organized in Jessore and Rajshahi. Each workshop had a participants of 40 people and it provided them with an opportunity to share their RTI journey with others and gather experiences and lessons learnt from other participants.

(9) Orientation and follow up training on Right to Information (RTI) jointly for Government officers and RTI Defenders.



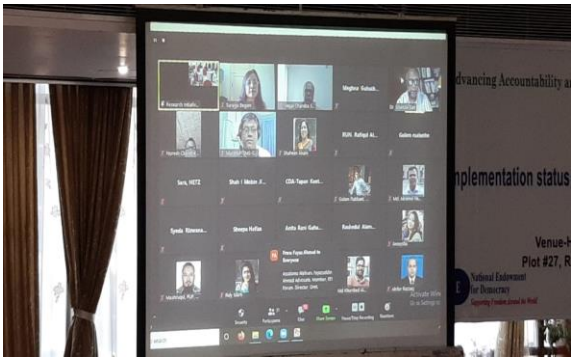
RIB organized a training at UNO Office, Fulbari Upazila of Dinajpur districts. In the said training UNO of Fulbari Upazila himself participated and along with him government officers from 18 local government offices have also participated in the training. During the facilitation, local RTI defenders discussed on the importance of RTI Act to improve transparency and accountability for better governance system in the country.

(10) Monthly publication on use and status of RTI in the Daily Star newspaper.

RTI team at RIB regularly writes a column on RTI which is published in The Daily Star newspaper on 15th of every month. In the year 2021, twelve monthly articles on various important issues encompassing RTI were published. Copies of above articles published in 2021 are available at RIB's website: **www.rib-rtibangladesh.org**.

(11) Webinar on importance of RTI and last 1 year experience of RTI especially during pandemic in Bangladesh –

RIB organized multiple stakeholders' hybrid webinar on 1 year experience of RTI with representation from civil society, Dos and government officers, representative from Information Commission, CSOs from Thakurgaon, Panchagarh, Rajshahi, Naogaon, Rangpur, Dinajpur. RTI Activists and Human rights defender from Rangpur, Nilphamari, Rajshahi, Naogaon, Dinajpur. Such meeting was turned out to be very effective and fruit bearing because through these meetings a good relationship emerged between service recipients and providers. These meetings created an atmosphere where citizen felt empowered to initiate a discussion concerning their rights, entitlements.





(12) Generating number of RTI applications by RIB RTI Team:

RIB's RTI team members on a weekly basis scan through few selected newspapers to identify issues which can be intervened through RTI requests. Not only RTI defenders and RIB's stakeholders submit RTI requests but RIB's RTI team members on a regular basis submits RTI applications to various

authoritative with focus on issues selected from newspaper exercise and field findings and the issues range from lack of accountability and transparency in public services, administrative actions, unfair and discriminatory practices, misuse or abuse of power, corruption in public works, and RIB on a regular basis hold meetings virtually and in person among its own team members as well as with RTI defenders and stakeholder to provide guidance on strategizing techniques to determine RTI issue and how to frame right kind of RTI questions

(13) Regional RTI Networking and sharing



RIB organized a networking meeting in Rajshahi, the meeting was Chaired by a Professor from Rajshahi University. This meeting was organized to launch a voluntary Regional Network on RTI with RTI users representing from Dhaka, Rajshahi, Naogaon, Dinajpur, Nilphamari and Rangpur. This is a voluntary network of people belonging to academic backgrounds, development sectors, many professionals who have come forward to form this network with the following objective-

- Sharing the knowledge, expertise, experiences of RTI users from different regions
- Sharing and learning from each other good practices on RTI
- Take initiative to promote RTI to wider public.

(14) RTI Camps with students



RIB organised RTI camps with students from Jessore and Rajshahi districts. In these camps several college students from the area took part in activities of sharing knowledge on RTI through discussion, debate and writing ideas on promoting RTI in Bangladesh. The students put in test their new acquired knowledge by writing an instant RTI application.

The RIB Secretariat / 2021

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Name	**Designation**
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Suraiya Begum	Director
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Rashida Akter	Senior Program officer
Md. Matiur Rahman	Senior Program Officer
Iftekhar Ali	Associate Program Officer
Babul Chandra Sutradhar	Associate Program Officer
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Md. Arman Hossain	Associate Program Officer
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Admin Department	
Nasima Pervin	Deputy Director (Admin & Finance)
Umme Kulsum	Finance Officer
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Md. Mannan	Driver
Yasmin	Cleaner