



LEARNING PAPER  
Case study from the  
Nobo Jatra Program:  
Gender-transformative  
social accountability  
for inclusive WASH

## Research partners

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# Table of contents

<b>Research partners</b> .....	<b>0</b>
<b>Citation</b> .....	<b>0</b>
<b>Table of contents</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Abbreviations</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Executive summary</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 Water for Women Fund Research Award .....	1
1.2 Rationale of the research .....	1
1.3 Overview of the case study .....	2
1.4 Audience for the case study report .....	2
1.5 Structure of case study report .....	3
<b>2 Research methodology</b> .....	<b>4</b>
2.1 Case study approach .....	4
2.2 Selection of the case study .....	4
2.3 Conceptual framework .....	4
2.4 Research questions.....	6
2.5 Data collection methods and sampling .....	7
2.6 Analysis methods .....	8
2.7 Research team, timing and description of research activities.....	8
2.8 Limitations of the study.....	8
2.9 Ethical considerations .....	9
<b>3 Background to the Nobo Jatra Program</b> .....	<b>10</b>
3.1 Program overview.....	10
3.2 Citizen Voice and Action in the Nobo Jatra Program.....	10
<b>4 Research findings</b> .....	<b>12</b>
4.1 Planning and implementation of CVA for gender-transformative change.....	12
4.2 Gender-transformative change within CVA.....	13
4.3 Gender-transformative change translated to other domains .....	17
4.4 Improvements to women's well-being resulting from CVA .....	18
4.5 Markers of future gender-transformative change.....	20
<b>5 Recommendations for gender-transformative social accountability</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>6 Conclusion</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>7 Annexes</b> .....	<b>24</b>
7.1 Research team .....	24
7.2 Research participants.....	25
7.3 Reference list.....	26
7.4 Research questions.....	27



**List of Tables:**

Table 1: Types of research methods employed and stakeholder types in research ..... 7  
Table 2: Research team..... 24  
Table 3: Research participants ..... 25

**List of Figures:**

Figure 1: CARE’s Gender Equality Framework, (CARE 2018, p.6) ..... 5  
Figure 2: Continium of gender programming ..... 5  
Figure 3: Research areas of inquiry ..... 6  
Figure 4: Overview of the CVA process..... 11

## Abbreviations

CVA	Citizen Voice and Action
DFAT	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DPHE	Department of Public Health and Engineering
FGD	focus group discussion
ISF-UTS	Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney
KII	key informant interview
NJP	Nobo Jatra Program
SHOMOTA	Strengthening Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in WASH in Bangladesh
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer (chief executive of an Upazila (sub-district))
UoR	University of Rajshahi
UP	Union Parishads
UZP	Upazila Parishad
VDC	village development committee
WASH	water, sanitation, and hygiene
WATSAN	water and sanitation
WVB	World Vision Bangladesh

# Executive summary

This Learning Report is part of a research award supported by the Water for Women Fund of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) which seeks to address knowledge gaps in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) project delivery. The research is being implemented through an academic-NGO partnership between: the Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney (ISF-UTS); World Vision Bangladesh (WVB); World Vision Australia (WVA); and the University of Rajshahi (UoR).

The research explores the contribution of social accountability to inclusive WASH, with a focus on improving water service levels in rural Bangladesh. The research contributes to WVB's implementation of Citizen Voice and Action (CVA), a social accountability approach which mobilises and equips citizens to monitor government services and advocate for their improvement. The research is being undertaken over three years (2018 to 2021).

The research is linked to the implementation of Strengthening Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in WASH in Bangladesh (SHOMOTA), a civil society organisation (CSO) project also funded under the Water for Women Fund. Implemented by WVB, SHOMOTA is an integrated project incorporating water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), the empowerment of women and people with disabilities, and engagement with government and the private sector. The project's primary goal is to equip key stakeholders within sub-national governments, schools, businesses and community-based organisations (CBOs) to enable them to improve gender- and disability-inclusive WASH in schools and communities.

The investigation into social accountability practice in World Vision's Nobo Jatra Program (NJP) documented in this Learning Report will inform the co-design of 'gender-transformative social accountability' in the SHOMOTA Project sites (districts of Gaibandha, Jamalpur, Satkhira) and the next phases of the research.

The case study research described in this Learning Report was undertaken in July 2019. Data collection was conducted over four days by the research partners. The case study focused on two Union Parishads (UPs), Kailasganj and Pankali, in Dacope Upazila sub-district in Khulna District. NJP was chosen as the focus of this research since it provides an example of social accountability (CVA) practice focused on water and sanitation (WATSAN) in rural Bangladesh. The sector focus of WATSAN and rural communities is relevant to the SHOMOTA project.

This research recognises 'social accountability' as a broad range of citizen-led efforts to increase state accountability and bring about improvements in service delivery. Social accountability is concerned with increasing citizen engagement, especially of marginalised or vulnerable groups. However, there is little consideration of the gendered nature of voice, accountability and empowerment in current social accountability literature. This research award addresses this gap by focusing on social accountability for WASH system performance and service delivery that leads to gender-transformation, disability inclusion and pro-poor empowerment.

Our research was framed by selected definitions of 'gender-transformative change'. Gender-transformative change targets the structural causes as well as the symptoms of gender inequality, leading to sustainable changes to power dynamics and the choices women have over their own lives (DFID 2015). We used a gendered perspective to consider citizen participation and empowerment central to social accountability. A brief summary of findings is provided below. The summary is linked to research questions and the conceptual framework used for the research.

## *Planning and implementation of CVA for gender-transformative change*

To a limited extent there has been consideration of discrimination against women and the marginalisation of women in the planning for and implementation of CVA in NJP.

## *Gender-transformative change within CVA*

### **Agency**

To some extent women are experiencing increased agency as a result of their participation in CVA. For many women this is coupled with increased agency through their participation in VDCs.

## Relations

The research identified that to some extent positive changes to relations between men and women were achieved within CVA. Relations improved somewhat between men and women as a result of CVA. Relations between women were strengthened through their participation in CVA. Mixed views were expressed about whether relationships between women and government officials had improved within the practice of CVA.

## Structures

The research found evidence that CVA had supported transformation of the informal sphere, but there was no evidence that there had been changes to the formal sphere.

### *Gender-transformative change translated to other domains*

Especially at the household level, both male and female respondents identified changes which were influenced by participation in NJP activities. At the community level, there was also evidence that women were playing a greater role in community meetings and in informing decision-making beyond their participation in CVA. At the governance and sector institution level research respondents described how women increased their engagement with government service providers and elected representatives.

### *Women's well-being resulting from CVA*

The research revealed numerous examples where women benefitted from improvements to water and sanitation services as a result of CVA activities in NJP.

The research revealed limited inclusion of people with a disability and ethnic minority groups, though people living with disability were prioritised for water and sanitation improvements.

### *Markers of future gender-transformative change*

The research did reveal indicators of future strengthened gender equality outcomes and offers insight to longer-term contributions of CVA.

This research sought to learn about the existing social accountability practice in World Vision's NJP to inform the co-design of 'gender transformative social accountability' in the SHOMOTA Project. We recognised that whilst NJP included gender as a cross-cutting issue, CVA in the NJP did not seek to be gender transformative, our research identified important lessons from this practice that could support a stronger gender and social inclusion focus in CVA in the future. Below we set out eight suggested areas of focus to strengthen gender transformative outcomes through the practice of social accountability.

### *Recommendations for a gender-transformative social accountability approach*

1. Ensure strong staff capacity in gender and social inclusion, and support effective planning and preparation of social accountability activities which are inclusive of gender and social inclusion prioritisation
2. Know the context and customise the strategies appropriate to that context
3. Invest in community-based local leadership and ownership of gender-transformative change agendas
4. Engage local leaders' support for gender-transformative social accountability
5. Engage with men to promote gender and social inclusion in Citizen Voice and Action
6. Encourage the practice of dialogue and accountability – citizen engagement (women and men) with the state
7. Advocate to central government policy makers for structural changes to WATSAN committees (regulation of equal representation of women and men)
8. Advocate to central government policy makers for structural changes to WATSAN committees (regulation of equal representation of women and men)

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Water for Women Fund Research Award

This Learning Report is part of a research award supported by the Water for Women Fund of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The Fund seeks to address knowledge gaps in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) project delivery.

The research is being implemented through an academic-NGO partnership between: the Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney (ISF-UTS); World Vision Bangladesh (WVB); World Vision Australia (WVA); and the University of Rajshahi (UoR).

The research explores the contribution of social accountability to inclusive WASH, with a focus on improving water service levels in rural Bangladesh. The research contributes to WVB's implementation of Citizen Voice and Action (CVA), a social accountability approach which mobilises and equips citizens to monitor and advocate for the improvement of government services. The research is being undertaken over three years (2018 to 2021).

The research is linked to the implementation of Strengthening Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in WASH in Bangladesh (SHOMOTA), a civil society organisation (CSO) project also funded under the Water for Women Fund. Implemented by WVB. SHOMOTA is an integrated project incorporating water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), the empowerment of women and people with disabilities, and engagement with government and the private sector. The project's primary goal is to equip key stakeholders within sub-national governments, schools, businesses and community-based organisations (CBOs) to improve gender- and disability-inclusive WASH in schools and communities.

This Learning Report relates to Phase 1 of the research award. Phase 1 explores the praxis of gender-transformative social accountability through a literature review and a case study of CVA practice in the Nobo Jatra Program (NJP). The next phases of the research are:

Phase 2 – Lead and document the co-design and start-up of gender-transformative social accountability in SHOMOTA project sites.

Phase 3 – Lead reflective research of of gender-transformative social accountability implementation by SHOMOTA project.

Phase 4 – Assess outcomes and promote learning on gender-transformative social accountability

Across all 3 years, the research award seeks to catalyse sector dialogue on gender-transformative social accountability for inclusive WASH)

## 1.2 Rationale of the research

The World Bank Development Report 2004, *Making Services Work for Poor People*<sup>1</sup>, was influential in prioritising lack of accountability as a primary reason for service delivery failure in developing countries. The report promotes citizen engagement as a means of addressing poor accountability, and in turn improving services for the poor. Central to social accountability are the notions of (citizen) voice and empowerment and (state) accountability. Since then, the field of social accountability has developed a wide range of approaches including: citizen monitoring and oversight of public and private sector performance; user-centred information access and dissemination; public complaint and grievance systems; citizen participation in decision-making, and resource and budget allocation.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> World Bank. 2003. *World Development Report 2004: Making services work for poor people*, World Bank and Oxford University Press, Washington, DC.

<sup>2</sup> Hepworth, N. 2016. *Social accountability for a water-secure future: knowledge, practice and priorities*, Discussion paper for Stockholm International Water Week, 2016



This research recognises 'social accountability' as a broad range of citizen-led efforts to increase state accountability and promote improvements in service delivery.

Social accountability is concerned with increasing citizen engagement, especially for marginalised or vulnerable groups. However, there is little consideration of the gendered nature of voice, accountability and empowerment in current social accountability literature. As Bradshaw et al. (2016) note: *'The majority of the existing literature does not consider gender issues, nor does it focus explicitly on women's inclusion in social accountability processes'*.<sup>3</sup> Whilst acknowledging that many social accountability practices owe their origins to concerns about social exclusion, a UNDP report (2013) notes that *'despite this growing body of evidence, 'most of the studies do not explicitly examine the impact of such initiatives in service delivery on social inclusion'*.<sup>4</sup> Bradshaw et al. (2016) furthermore finds there has been little investigation of whether social accountability makes a difference to gendered relations, or whether it supports gender equality and women's empowerment: *'Although women's voices are increasingly being given room to be heard and although practical benefits may result for women from being heard, whether having a voice advances women's strategic gender interests is less well explored'*.<sup>5, 6</sup>

This research award addresses this gap in understanding gender in social accountability by focusing on effective social accountability for WASH system performance and service delivery that leads to gender-transformation, disability inclusion and pro-poor empowerment. This is linked to key outcomes identified in the Water for Women Fund Theory of Change.

The investigation into social accountability practice in World Visions' NJP documented in this Learning Report will inform the co-design of 'gender-transformative social accountability' in the SHOMOTA project sites (three districts of Gaibandha, Jamalpur, Satkhira) and subsequent phases of the research award as outlined earlier.

### 1.3 Overview of the case study

The case study research described in this Learning Report was undertaken in early July 2019.

Data collection was conducted over four days by the research partners: ISF-UTS, WVB and UoR, with support from NJP staff.

The case study focused on two Union Parishads (UPs), Kailasganj and Pankali, in Dacope Upazila sub-district in Khulna District. More details are noted in the methodology section below.

### 1.4 Audience for the case study report

The primary audiences of this Learning Report are:


- WVB, to support SHOMOTA implementation of CVA to contribute to gender equality and social inclusion
- NJP, to support learning about CVA and the gender-transformative potential of their WASH activities
- Government, civil society, and donors working on or funding WASH projects and particularly social accountability initiatives. It is hoped that this Learning Report will provide insights into the practice of

<sup>3</sup> Bradshaw, S. et al. 2016. *Gender and Social Accountability: Ensuring Women's Inclusion in Citizen-led Accountability Programing Relating to Extractive Industries*, Oxfam America Research Backgrounder series

<sup>4</sup> UNDP 2013. *Reflections on Social Accountability: Catalyzing Democratic Governance to Accelerate Progress Towards the Millennium Development Goals*

<sup>5</sup> Bradshaw, S. et al. 2016. *Gender and Social Accountability: Ensuring Women's Inclusion in Citizen-led Accountability Programing Relating to Extractive Industries*, Oxfam America Research Backgrounder series

<sup>6</sup> The Moser Framework (1993) divides women's needs into two categories; 'practical needs' and 'strategic needs.' Practical needs are needs that help women to have easier lives, for example, access to goods or services (water, food, health care), safety and protection. Strategic needs are those that will help women to become more equal with men and to share equal power with men in the household, community and society they live in.



social accountability and ways it could be strengthened to support positive outcomes for gender equality and social inclusion.

The report may also be of interest more broadly to those implementing social accountability measures, and those with an interest in strengthening gender equality and social inclusion outcomes.

## 1.5 Structure of case study report

This report has five parts. Following this introduction section, the research methodology is set out (Section 2), and the NJP is introduced in Section 3. Research findings are provided in Section 4, in response to the research questions. Section 5 offers recommendations to strengthen gender and social inclusion in social accountability. Eight recommendations are provided. They are informed by the case study findings.

## 2 Research methodology

### 2.1 Case study approach

A case study methodology (Yin 2014) was chosen to explore World Vision's existing social accountability practice within the social and political contexts of rural Bangladesh. Case studies rely on multiple sources of evidence to generate insights and triangulate findings. Qualitative research is associated with case study methodology and provides an opportunity to develop a detailed understanding of 'how' and 'why' phenomena happen, importantly from multiple perspectives. Furthermore, qualitative research is valuable for exploring gendered relations, and the experiences of women and men in CVA and more broadly within the case study contexts.

### 2.2 Selection of the case study

NJP was chosen as the focus of this research, since it provides an example of social accountability (CVA) practice focused on water and sanitation (WATSAN) in rural Bangladesh. The sector focus of WATSAN and rural communities is relevant to the SHOMOTA project.

In order to explore the practice of CVA and provide practical recommendations, in-depth inquiry was needed. We decided to focus our research at the Union level of government, since CVA Community Gatherings were conducted at this level and the Union Parishad has an important role in WATSAN governance.

The NJP staff supported the site selection, informed by their knowledge of the local context, CVA implementation and the intent of this case study research. Within the nine Union Parishads (UPs) of Dacope Upazila<sup>7</sup>, two of the best-performing UPs, Koilashganj and Pankhali, were chosen for data collection. These UPs were chosen since the intent of this research was to learn about the practice of gender-transformative social accountability in WASH. The team was eager to explore examples of CVA which were considered to be working well, with the expectation that these success stories would help the team to design CVA guidelines for the SHOMOTA project areas.

### 2.3 Conceptual framework

Our research was framed by selected definitions of 'gender-transformative change' and 'social accountability'.

To inform the conceptual framework, a literature review on gender-transformative change and social accountability, and a review of the WASH sector in Bangladesh, were conducted in early 2019.

Gender-transformative change targets the structural causes as well as the symptoms of gender inequality, leading to sustainable changes to power dynamics and to the choice women have over their own lives.<sup>8</sup>

Change occurs at the household, community, organisation, group, market, subdistrict government, and national government levels. Transformative change is a long-term goal and progress may be accompanied by setbacks in other domains. Transformative change is influenced by a diverse set of actors, agencies and events that shape social environments.<sup>9</sup>

We employed the CARE framework of gender-transformative change to structure areas of inquiry in three domains. The CARE framework is employed by the SHOMOTA Project and we sought to use a framework relevant to the programming approach. The CARE framework captures key elements of gender-transformative change. We sought to explore the extent to which gender-transformative change was

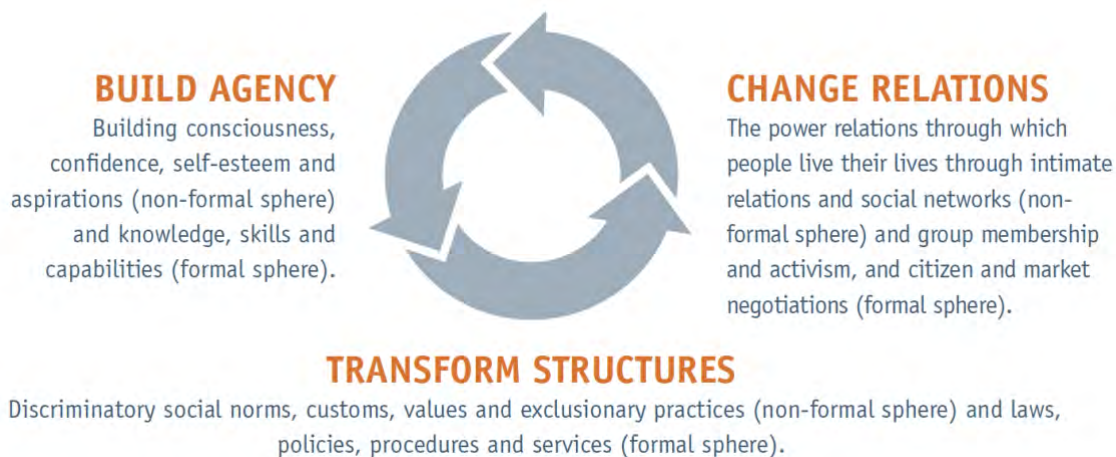
<sup>7</sup> Dacope is one of the nine Upazilas of Khulna district. It has 25,377 households and a total area of 991.58 km. It is bounded by Batiaghata Upazila on the north, Pashur River on the south, Rampal and Mongla Upazilas on the east and Paikgachha and Koyra Upazilas on the west. The southern part of this Upazila is surrounded by Sundarban (11790.13 hectares).

<sup>8</sup> DFID PPA Gender Learning Partnership. (2015). 'What works to achieve gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment?'

<sup>9</sup> Hillenbrand E, Karim N, Mohanraj P, et al. (2015). Measuring gender-transformative change: A review of literature and promising practices.

influenced by the implementation of CVA in the NJP. The three domains of the CARE framework are set out in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1: CARE’s Gender Equality Framework, (CARE 2018, p.6)**



Gender-transformative change is distinguished from other programming approaches, which are often described as forming a continuum. Transformative-change is seen on the far end of the continuum as detailed in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Continium of gender programming**

Gender blind	Gender sensitive	Gender specific	Gender-transformative
Projects that create, exacerbate or ignore gender inequalities in pursuit of project goals	Projects that maintain existing gender dynamics and roles in pursuit of project goals	Projects that support and improve outcomes for a specific gender group in pursuit of project goals	Projects that actively reduce gender inequalities to enhance achievement of project goals

Source: Vunisea et al. 2015, p 13.

Our definition of gender-transformative change also sought to consider multiple spheres of women’s lives. We considered change in the household; within the community; and within systems and structures. We were informed by the Harvard Analytical Framework which recognises the impact on gender equality of roles and responsibilities in multiple spheres.<sup>10</sup>

Our definition of gender-transformative change also recognised the long-term nature of change. We sought to identify immediate and intermediate results, and indicators of ‘stepping stones’ which contributed to the transformation of gender relations, recognising that progress in this area is non-linear.<sup>11</sup>

Key concepts relevant to social accountability also framed our research inquiry. We explored the notion of social accountability and whether strengthened citizen voices led to increased state accountability.

A central premise regarding how change happens in social accountability is that strengthening citizen voice will lead to increased state accountability.<sup>12</sup> Efforts to boost social accountability are therefore concerned with strengthening citizen voice by increasing access to information, strengthening the capacities of individuals to have a voice, and strengthening the political and legal frameworks through which their voices

<sup>10</sup> Vunisea, A., Leduc, B., Bernard, K., Duaibe, K., Cleary, L., Manley, M. and Leavai, P. (2015). *The Pacific Gender and Climate Change Toolkit: Tools for Practitioners*.

<sup>11</sup> Asian Development Bank, AusAID. (2013). Tool Kit on Gender Equality Results and Indicators, <https://www.adb.org/documents/tool-kit-gender-equality-results-and-indicators>, viewed 27 April 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Goetz, A.M. & Gaventa, J. 2001, *Bringing citizen voice and client focus into service delivery*, IDS Working Paper 138, Brighton, Sussex.

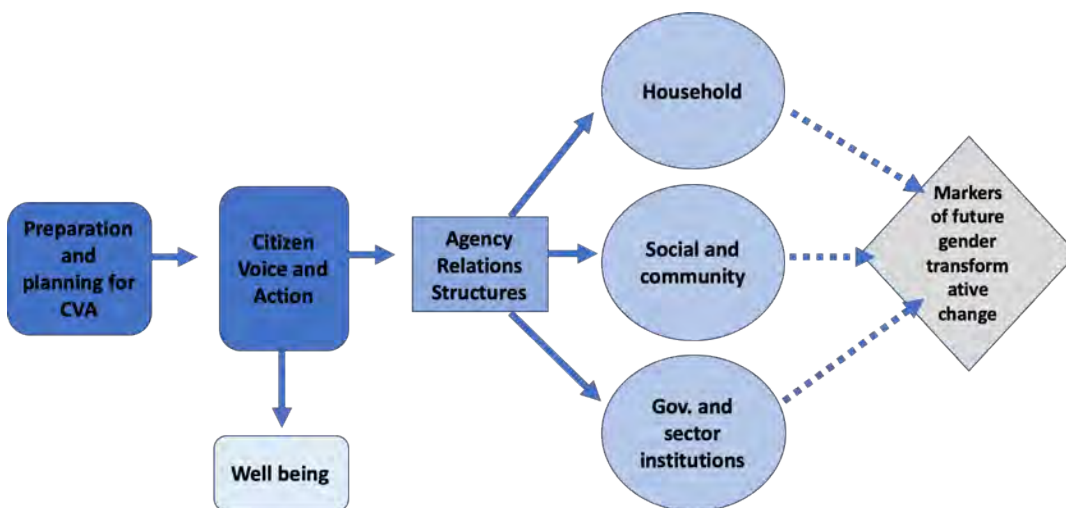
can be channeled. Change is understood to be created through the relationship between voice and accountability: voice seeks to strengthen accountability, and accountability in turn strengthens voice as it demonstrates that voice can make a difference.<sup>13</sup>

Citizen empowerment and participation are described as prerequisites for ‘exercising voice and demanding accountability.’<sup>14</sup> Understanding empowerment as a central vehicle for bringing about change in social accountability reinforces the importance of citizen voice and rights within social accountability practice.

We took a gendered perspective to consider the citizen participation and empowerment that are central to social accountability. By adopting a gendered perspective, we sought to explore women’s experience of voice and decision-making roles in CVA, recognising existing inequalities for women in the local context. Informed by definitions of social accountability and our concern for gender-transformative change, we sought to measure participation, voice, decision-making, and accountability experienced by women.

Informed by these key concepts and our key research questions, our areas of inquiry for the research are detailed below in Figure 3. On the left, the dark blue boxes ‘Preparation and planning for CVA’ and ‘Citizen Voice and Action’, denote the actions of NJP staff in implementing CVA. We then explored different types of change contributed by CVA. We explored well-being improvements such as improvements to water and sanitation resulting from CVA. Using the CARE framework, we explored changes to agency, relations and structures, firstly within the practice of CVA and then secondly beyond CVA within households, and community and government structures. Recognising that gender-transformative change is long-term, in Figure 2 future markers of gender-transformative change are denoted by dotted arrows.

**Figure 3: Research areas of inquiry**



## 2.4 Research questions

The key questions for this case study were:

1. To what extent have **discrimination against women, and the marginalisation** of women, been considered in order to effectively plan for **equal opportunity and benefit** in social accountability activities?
2. To what extent has **gender-transformative change** occurred within the practice of CVA?
3. To what extent has **participation** in CVA informed changes in **multiple domains** of gender-transformative change?
4. To what extent have women experienced **improved well-being** as a result of CVA?

<sup>13</sup> Malena, C., Forster, R. & Singh, J. 2004, *Social accountability: An introduction to the concept and emerging practice*, Social Development Papers, Report Number 76, World Bank, Washington DC

<sup>14</sup> O’Neil, T., Foresti, M. & Hudson, A. 2007, *Evaluation of citizens’ voice and accountability: review of the literature and donor approaches*, DFID, London.

5. What are **indications / markers** of future gender-transformative change?
6. Informed by this case study, what are our **recommendations** for a ‘gender-transformative social accountability approach’?

Our findings in Section 4 respond to the first five research questions. Section 5 sets out recommendations (in response to Research Question 6), informed by the research findings.

## 2.5 Data collection methods and sampling

Within our qualitative research methodology, we used multiple methods and data sources to enable triangulation of research findings. The methods used were:

1. key stakeholder interviews (KII) with a focus on government service providers and elected government officials
2. focus group discussions (FGD) used for gaining perspectives from citizens and community-based groups. Focus groups with citizens were conducted in same-gender groups so that women and men felt comfortable voicing their opinions on sensitive topics. Within the focus groups, there was an individual pocket voting exercise<sup>15</sup> of six questions and joint discussions about voting patterns.

Interview and focus group guides were prepared in collaboration between ISF-UTS, the UoR and WVB.

The criteria used for selecting participants were:

- that participants had participated in, and had experiences to share about, the implementation of CVA for WASH
- that we heard the perspectives of both women and men
- that we had comparable groups of participants from Kailasganj and Pankhali Union Parishads to provide a depth of understanding of experiences of, and contributions of CVA.

Obtaining a range of perspectives from different types of stakeholders was prioritised, as shown in Table 1. Further details, including numbers of participants, are provided in Section 7.2.

**Table 1: Types of research methods employed and stakeholder types in research**

Stakeholder types	Research method	Number	Disaggregated
CVA implementers - Village Development Committees (women/men)	FGD	4	2 female 2 male
Citizens – Middle-aged CVA User Score Card Group (women/men)	FGD	2	1 female 1 male
Citizens – Youth User Score Card Group (women/men)	FGD	4	2 female 2 male
Union WATSAN Committee	FGD	2	Mixed groups
CVA Group Lead Facilitator	KII	2	1 female 1 male
World Vision Bangladesh NJP staff (Field Operation Manager, Social Accountability)	KII	3	3 male

<sup>15</sup> In a democratic way, participants anonymously vote (in pockets) on pre-defined topics related to their experience. Following individual voting by the group, the facilitator then explores the reasons for the voting patterns and invites comment from the group members.

Stakeholder types	Research method	Number	Disaggregated
and Good Governance Officer, WASH Officer)			
Government service providers (line department (UNO and DPHE))	KII	2	2 male
Elected representatives of local government (UP Chair and UZP Vice Chair)	KII	3	1 female 2 male
NGO Representatives/Partner Staff (Shushilan – Technical Officer (Good Governance and Social Accountability), and Social Accountability Organisers	KII	3 KII	2 female 1 male
Ward WATSAN Committee	FGD	1 FGD	Mixed group

## 2.6 Analysis methods

An analytical framework based on the conceptual framework and research questions informed our analysis of the primary data collected. Data analysis was completed using a phased approach. An initial synthesis of findings was prepared by ISF-UTS and UoR in a two-day joint meeting immediately following data collection. This provided an opportunity to share contextual understandings and prepare an early snapshot of findings. These initial findings were presented at WVB head office in a sense-making workshop to validate and receive comments and questions from senior management and staff. Paper notes of FGD and KIIs were transcribed into an electronic format. Data was then compiled, and a detailed thematic analysis was conducted by UoR, with a review by ISF-UTS researchers. This detailed analysis of FGDs and KIIs informed the research findings.

## 2.7 Research team, timing and description of research activities

In mid-2019, the field work was planned by ISF-UTS in collaboration with UoR and WVB. The research team members comprised two ISF-UTS researchers (female), three UoR researchers (male) and four WVB researchers (two female, two male). See Annex 1 for details of the research team.

ISF-UTS led a three-day researcher training workshop in Dhaka to introduce the local research team to the purpose and approach of the case study research, explain key concepts relevant to the research project, ethical research and to co-develop the data collection tools. The research team then travelled to Dacope Upazilla, Khulna to conduct four days of data collection in two UPs.

## 2.8 Limitations of the study

It is helpful to note limitations of the research to inform interpretation of the research findings, and it is helpful to describe how these limitations were mitigated as much as possible.

When researchers asked participants about their experiences and opinions of CVA, at times participants' recall of CVA needed to be activated through prompting questions. CVA was not an extensive practice in NJP, especially for WASH, as only one round had been conducted in 2018. Furthermore, CVA was one activity among many CSO-led activities that community members had participated in. Sometimes participants' responses about CVA were vague and were mixed with experiences of the Village Development Committee and other NJP activities. We do not claim that the changes that participants described were necessarily due to participation in CVA activities alone.

The case study did not conduct a detailed gender analysis. For example, the design did not include an intra-household comparison between men and women, as usually the men and women in the FGDs were from different households. However, the community-level learning about gender and social inclusion was

considered sufficient for the purpose of developing a model of gender-transformative social accountability for WASH programming.

A primarily qualitative approach was used, with quantitative data collected through pocket voting that was included in the FGD, and through closed questions in the KII. Whilst the sample size for quantitative analysis is recognised as small and cannot provide generalisable findings, it does provide an indication of women's and men's experiences of CVA.

Our research did not have a specific focus on gender and sexual minority groups, and did not include specific analysis of intersectionality. This limits our findings to generalisations about women and men. Whilst this is a limitation of the current research, our findings do provide insights into poor and marginalised women living in remote rural areas.

Our research team included non-researchers which could have limited research findings. An important component of this case study research was to build the capacity of the WVB staff as researchers and to enable first-hand learning through their involvement in the field work. Researcher training sought to strengthen their skills before the field work, and trouble-shooting and feedback were provided in real time during field work by ISF-UTS and UoR. Daily debriefs were conducted to support the team to make sense of their learnings and prepare appropriately for the activities of the next day.

The research team was made up of WVB and UoR members who spoke Bangla and English, and ISF-UTS researchers who spoke English only. Translation of questions from English to Bangla and translation of participant responses from Bangla to English posed risks. Two interpreters were hired to provide language support, but some meanings may have been lost during the field activities, or in the summarising of the actual interview responses in the interpretation process. Efforts were made to ensure the quality of research notes by assigning at least two note takers (usually including one professional researcher) for each data collection activity and cross-checking the notes for accuracy afterwards.

## 2.9 Ethical considerations

Ethical practice was a key component of the research principles agreed to by the research team and has been a core practice implemented by ISF-UTS, UoR and WVB. During researcher training, the topic of ethical research was included and principles of ethical research (beneficence, respect, justice, research merit and integrity) were introduced by ISF-UTS and contextualised by WVB. WVB staff discussed strategies such as building the rapport and comfort of research participants, providing an accurate description of the purpose of the case study at the beginning of the research activity, acknowledging contribution to the study and respecting research participants time. We also discussed the importance of gathering perspectives from multiple stakeholders to triangulate findings and ensure research integrity.

An information sheet, and a script to gain verbal informed consent from research participants, were prepared and translated to Bangla. Documentation of verbal consent was completed by local researchers, and this documentation was collated and recorded as part of the data collation process. Records and interview notes were stored securely, ensuring the privacy of research participants. Personal information about research participants was not collected. Participant responses have been presented in a de-identified and anonymous manner. Findings from this case study will be shared with research participants by the NJP.



## 3 Background to the Nobo Jatra Program

### 3.1 Program overview

World Vision Bangladesh (WVB), in association with the World Food Programme (WFP), Winrock International and three local partner NGOs, embarked on a \$76m, five-year USAID Food For Peace Title II Development Food Assistance Program in September 2015. The program, titled ‘Nobo Jatra – New Beginning’ (NJP), seeks to improve gender-equitable food security, and the nutrition and resilience of vulnerable people within the Khulna and Satkhira districts in Bangladesh. In order to attain this goal, the program had the following four purposes in mind:

- improving the nutritional status of children under five years of age, pregnant and lactating women, and adolescent girls
- increasing equality in household income
- increasing the gender-equitable ability of people, households, communities and systems to mitigate, adapt to and recover from natural shocks and stresses
- improving social accountability and national policy engagement in service provision for vulnerable men and women.

The program is being implemented through an integrated approach that is building synergies across six program elements: Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition; Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH); Agriculture and Livelihoods; Gender; Good Governance and Social Accountability; and Disaster Risk Reduction. To achieve its objectives, NJP is being implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) of the Government of Bangladesh in four Upazilas under two districts – Dacope and Koyra Upazilas in Khulna and Shyamnagar and Kaliganj Upazilas in Satkhira. The Program seeks to reach 856,116 direct beneficiaries.

NJP is designed to seek and achieve immediate and lasting change in the lives of children. It complements ongoing programming of WVB and its partners. Inherent to the NJP Theory of Change is the recognition that addressing pervasive challenges related to food security, nutrition and resilience requires broader coordination and long-term solutions that can only be achieved by strengthening linkages with relevant state and non-state actors at the national and regional levels. Sub-national governance, social accountability activities and national policy work to improve the accountability of government ministries are central tenets across NJP, and they effectively serve as a binding theme across the program.

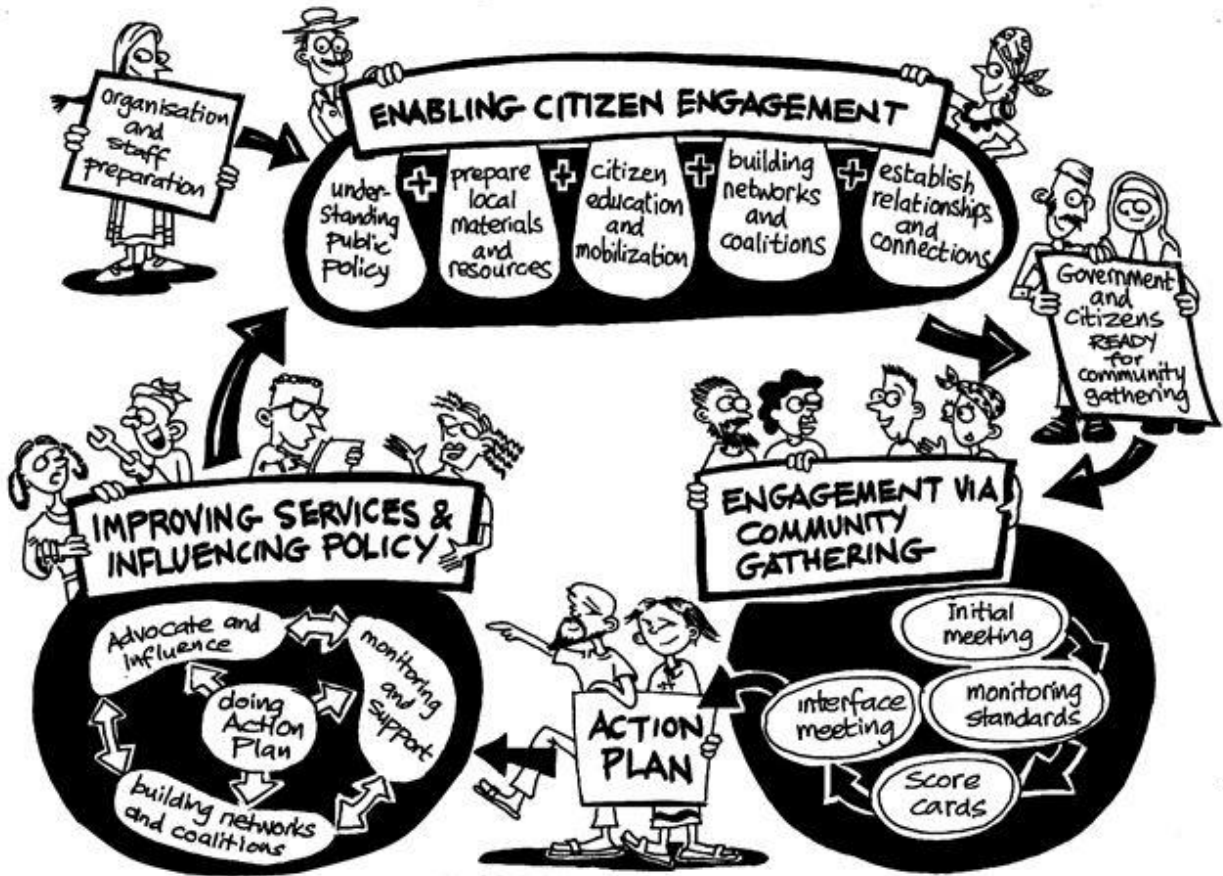
### 3.2 Citizen Voice and Action in the Nobo Jatra Program

In line with CVA guidance, the implementation of CVA in NJP has been focused on the service delivery of three government departments (WASH, Agriculture Extension Department and Community Clinic). Addressing issues related to services and gender and social inclusion was included but as a secondary issue. This research focused on CVA in WASH, in line with linkages to the SHOMOTA project.

CVA was implemented in the WASH sector in 2018, with one implementation of the CVA process inclusive of ‘engagement via community gathering’ conducted at the Union level, with government-mandated Ward WATSAN committees, Union WATSTAN committees, and Union Parishads engaged. CVA was supported through already established Village Development Committees (VDCs) set up by the NJP.

NJP implemented the CVA process as detailed in Figure 4. This figure is sourced from World Vision’s Citizen Voice and Action Guidance Notes.

Figure 4: Overview of the CVA process



Source: Citizen Voice and Action Guidance Notes (2016)

## 4 Research findings

This section sets out case study research findings in relation to the defined areas of inquiry for the research as set out above.

### 4.1 Planning and implementation of CVA for gender-transformative change

The first area of inquiry for the research focused on planning and implementation of CVA and the extent to which discrimination against women, and the marginalisation of women, have been considered in order to effectively promote equal opportunity and benefit in social accountability activities.<sup>16</sup>

***To a limited extent there has been consideration of discrimination against women and the marginalisation of women in the planning for and implementation of CVA in NJP.***

World Vision's focus on gender equality and disability inclusion informed a focus on gender and social inclusion, as did NJP's own gender and social inclusion strategy. The limited focus on gender and social inclusion in World Vision's written CVA guidance also informed this research finding. This finding is to be expected, since NJP staff implemented CVA as per World Vision Guidance.

As noted by an NJP social accountability organiser:

*[Gender and social inclusion were] not considered separately. There should be changes made in the guidelines of Village Development Committees. More women members should be members of the Committee. There should be representation of people with disability (NJP social accountability organiser).*

Also noted by a community-based CVA working group facilitator:

*Women's interests should be considered more often. Issues are identified through a general approach that focuses on a particular problem with a wider angle, not through gender-focused lenses (CVA working group facilitator).*

In line with the CVA guidance, implementation of CVA in NJP was focused on the delivery of water and sanitation services and addressing issues related to services, and gender and social inclusion were included but as a secondary issue. As described by an NJP staff member:

*Because, when the guideline was prepared, NJP's focus was how to implement the CVA. We didn't think about gender-transformation in the process. We focused more on service delivery as there is a gap between entitlements and what they can get from the government. So they focused on services. But, during implementation of the project, gender inclusion has been taken into consideration. Yes, the different needs of women have been considered – for example, advocacy for the installation of women-friendly latrines (NJP staff member).*

By virtue of women's roles as primary managers of water in the household, women were involved in CVA, and their needs and interests were considered. Whilst their needs and interests were considered, this was not from a gendered perspective, but rather a gender-blind perspective:

*The approach that is followed is more issue focused. For example: a member of a household has to collect water from a long distance. Usually it is women who collect water for the family, but sometimes men also collect water. So, decisions to provide water tanks were not based on the fact that women have to collect water for them (Social accountability organizer).*

The research revealed that staff had a good appreciation of cultural contexts and how they can discriminate against women. Staff reported that 'power structures and male dominance', and 'engagement [and

<sup>16</sup> Research question: To what extent have discrimination against women, and the marginalisation of women, been considered in order to effectively plan for equal opportunity and benefit in social accountability activities?

responsibilities of women] with household activities' limited women's participation. Staff and partners also described factors which limited women's participation: *'they are more involved in traditional activities. They are not in the habit of providing opinions, feel shy, they have fear in mind, lack of education, lack of confidence'*.

This awareness of the patriarchal context and limitations to women's participation supported planning for equal opportunity and benefit in social accountability activities. The research identified opportunities to strengthen gender and social inclusion within the practice of CVA, as outlined in Section 5 below.

## 4.2 Gender-transformative change within CVA

As noted in Section 3.3 this research was informed by the CARE (2018) framework for gender-transformative change which focuses on enabling transformation across the multiple domains of agency, relations, and structures. The research sought to identify the contribution of CVA to enabling change in these three domains.<sup>17</sup> As already noted above, the implementation of CVA in NJP had no explicit intention to promote gender-transformative change, but it is interesting to learn what change was created regardless, and how, such that this experience might be built on in the future.

This area of the research inquiry related to changes experienced within the experience of CVA and also how these changes translated to the following domains: the household; social and community networks; and governance institutions. First, we set out evidence of gender-transformative change within the context of CVA, before looking at broader domains.

### Agency

***To some extent women are experiencing increased agency as a result of their participation in CVA. For many women this is coupled with increased agency through their participation in VDCs.***

Key to social accountability is the notion of *voice*, which links to agency, as defined in the CARE gender-transformative framework (CARE 2018). During our pocket voting process, we asked men and women to assess the extent to which 'women speak up and voice their opinions in the CVA activities'. Similar views were expressed by men and women, with the majority of both genders voting 'somewhat': 63% male (n=40) 59% female (n=29) and smaller numbers, though slightly more for women voting 'a lot': 38% male (n=24) 41% female (n=20). There were no votes for 'not at all'.

A similar question was asked during KII: 'Do you think that women and men can equally raise their voices in the CVA process?' In line with the pocket voting results, respondents to the KII stated 'yes' 55% (n=6) and 'somewhat' 45% (n=5). No respondents stated, 'none at all'.

A key enabler of agency or voice is increased access to information. During our pocket voting process we asked men and women to assess the extent to which 'women have access to information to enable participation in CVA. There were similar views, with the majority of both men and women voting 'somewhat': 52% male (n=33) 67% female (n=33) and to a lesser extent voting 'a lot': 48% male (n=31) and for females much less 33% (n=16). There were no votes for 'not at all'. KII respondents similarly provided a mixed response, highlighting that whilst there was some positive change, more positive change was still required. As noted above, because women had a primary role in relation to water management, their views were listened to.

*[Women] know better about what they have at home. Since they are largely involved with WASH activities, their opinion on WASH gets priority. They identify the areas where latrines are to be installed (female FGD with VDC members, Pankhali).*

Another key enabler of agency is the confidence of women. During our pocket voting process we asked men and women to assess the extent to which 'women are confident to participate in CVA activities'. Whilst the majority of both 59% of both men and women voted 'a lot' (male n=38, female n=29), different views were

<sup>17</sup> Research question: To what extent has gender-transformative change occurred within the practice of CVA?

also expressed. A relatively high number of both men and women voted 'somewhat', male 41% (n=26), female 35% (n=17). 1% (n=3) of women voted for 'not at all'.

The research revealed multiple reasons why women's confidence increased as a result of their participation in CVA. NJP project activities prioritised the participation of women, working in contrast to societal norms. Through CVA activities, women also had access to new types of information. NJP project activities also included training for men to change their attitudes and perceptions about women's participation. The research found evidence that women's participation in the public sphere had increased to some extent. Growing experience of women in participation also reduced shyness and lack of self-worth. Women's self-confidence also increased when their views were sought and listened to in meetings such as VDC meetings and CVA Community Gatherings. Illiteracy and social expectations regarding women's participation were barriers to participation, but change was noted during one female group pocket voting exercise:

*Society used to think that women going to a meeting was wrong, but now things have changed. At first my husband sent me to the meeting, then afterwards I shared the information with my husband and then he changed his mind (pocket voting with females, VDC Kailashgonj).*

Another key enabler of women's agency is male or spousal support for women's participation, as expressed in the statement above. Permission is often needed for women to attend meetings. As noted by one woman in the pocket voting process with women who had participated in the CVA scorecard at Kailashgonj: 'I have to get consent from my husband to give an opinion'.

It is not just agency and voice that are needed to promote agency – having an active role in decision-making is also important. During our pocket voting process we asked men and women to assess the extent to which 'women are active in decision-making in CVA activities'. The majority of both men and women voted 'somewhat' (63% male (n=40) 57% female (n=28)). Smaller percentages voted 'a lot' (38% male (n=24) 43% female (n=21)). There were no votes for 'not at all'. This pattern of voting confirms that the research participants were uncertain about the status of women in decision-making processes.

## Relations

**The research identified that to some extent positive changes to relations between men and women were achieved within CVA.**

We explored multiple sets of relations for women and whether changes were experienced in their participation in CVA. Importantly, there were different perspectives shared through our different data sources and stakeholder groups. First, we consider relations between men, within women and then between women and government officials.

### Relationships between women and men

**Relations improved somewhat between men and women as a result of CVA.**

During our pocket voting process we asked men and women to assess the extent to which 'men and women listen to each other in the CVA activities'. Women and men expressed similar views, with the majority of both men and women voting 'somewhat' (83% male (n=53) 63% female (n=31)) and to a lesser extent 'a lot' (17% male (n=11) 37% female (n=18)). There were no votes for 'not at all'. A similar question was asked during KII: 'Do you think that men and women listen to each other in the CVA activities?' Responses from the KII were more positive, with the majority saying 'yes' (73%, n=8), and a smaller number voting for 'somewhat' (18%, n=2) and 'no' (9%, n=1).

Examples of men and women listening to each other were provided in relation to experiences of CVA as well as participation in VDCs. As noted above, research participants often combined CVA and VDC activities in their responses which is a limitation of our research findings. Often, changes described by the research participants occurred as a result of participation in both VDC and CVA activities, and it was difficult to isolate the individual contribution of CVA.

## Relations between women

### **Relations between women were strengthened through their participation in CVA.**

Feminist literature<sup>18</sup> and social theorists<sup>19</sup> talk about the importance of collective action for transformative change, and the research sought to explore whether there had been any changes for women, and how they related together as women, as a result of participation in CVA.

Responses in all-women focus groups identified there had been changes to relations between women. Examples of changes were provided and are noted below.

Women described sharing information with other women and increasing knowledge. As noted in one focus group:

*[Our] capacity to get things done has improved. [Our] knowledge level has increased. Other women come to us when they encounter a problem. Now they can influence others in relation to water and sanitation. They share various sorts of information with others (FGD with VDC (Female) Pankhali).*

Women described feeling proud and were respected for belonging to groups of women, as a result of participating in activities together:

*I have learned new things. I can express my opinions better. Now people respect me. I was deprived before, but now I have the right to talk. I get bored being at home, I feel better meeting new people. I had no respect, but now people respect me because I am a member of the team. Now women manage family and also take part in social activities. I feel proud being a woman, sitting with other women, being part of activities. I want to study and participate in society. Before, my relatives, especially husband, would never listen to my words, but now I am becoming accepted. The thing is if I am working as part of a team, I get the respect of the authorities. Before, when I went alone, they didn't listen to me and maybe they asked me for a bribe (FGD with VDC (Female) Kailashgonj).*

The above quote also alludes to increased responsiveness towards women, which was also described by government officials and is explored more below.

Women increasingly took collective action to engage with and advocate to government officials. Through CVA activities women increased their networks within the community and sought to work together for collective advocacy. The strengthened relations between women as citizens, and their collective action to claim rights strengthened social capital in the community, and informed good governance outcomes. These types of actions were described during a FGD Women Scorecard Group, Kailashgonj:

*We have the mobile numbers of everyone in the scorecard group, so we can easily communicate. We go to the union council as a team, and put pressure for our demands to be fulfilled. As citizens, we are doing advocacy with the authorities on behalf of people who have alerted us about their needs (FGD Women Scorecard Group, Kailashgonj)*

The research also identified that whilst advocacy efforts were made to government due to reasons such as limited resources, not all issues were addressed.

## Relations between women and government officials

### **Mixed views were expressed about whether relationships between women and government officials had improved within the practice of CVA.**

A CVA coordinator noted the need to encourage women to raise their voices, and recognised the role of the patriarchy, established social practices, and expectations that women would play a limited role in the public sphere. Similar views were also expressed during the pocket voting process by men and women. Male VDC members in Kailashgonj noted, “when women go to government service representatives, they are sometimes

<sup>18</sup> Moser CO. (2017) Gender transformation in a new global urban agenda: challenges for Habitat III and beyond. Environment and Urbanization 29(1): 221-236.

<sup>19</sup> Arendt, H. (1958). The human condition. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

*given less importance/attention than men. Our society is male-centric / male-dominated. It is difficult for women to attend meetings all the time, so that is why the government focuses on men's participation".*

Improved relations between women and government officials resulting from CVA were also described. A Social Accountability organiser identified positive changes: *"The relationship is way better than it used to be. Women [were] asked to give feedback on certain decisions taken at the Interface Meeting. Also, women now have better access to government offices. Their opinions are listened to carefully and appreciated by government officials".* Likewise, in a pocket voting process with the Union WATSAN Committee in Pankhali, participants described improved relations:

*Earlier government departments were not giving much attention to public demands. In fact, women were reluctant to visit government offices. But, now, since there have been events such as the Interface Meeting, where government officials were present in the meeting and people from the community had the opportunity to speak up and express their demands directly to government officials, women have been encouraged to visit government offices. A rapport has been built up between people and government officials (Union WATSAN Committee in Pankhali).*

Access of women to government officials was also noted as an issue by research respondents. Whilst a UP Chairman noted that *"yes, women are coming collectively to protest or raise their voice"* (UP Chairman), women in the pocket voting process in Kailashgonj described some challenges in meeting government officials due to limited mobility associated with travel budgets and social norms related to patriarchy.

*We cannot go there anytime, or all of a sudden, we want to go but have to wait for the budget to come ... For men, they have more acceptance because they can talk with people's representatives even on the roadside, such as in tea stalls. Women cannot go to their gatherings, because if we do society will see us in the wrong way (Women Scorecard Group, Kailashgonj).*

Another key theme that emerged from the research was that government service providers and elected representatives listen to, and were responsive to, women's concerns as part of the CVA when the concerns were viewed by those key decision-makers as valid and legitimate. Interestingly, it is those men decision-making roles who decide the legitimacy of women's views. One respondent said that *"If they are practical or logical or rational in providing their opinions, they are heard"*. Another reported that:

*Females' opinions are given importance if they are practical. For example: there was a big pond in the community and the pond water got polluted. Women demanded that the pond water be made drinkable as safe drinking water is an issue for their locality. Since their demand was logical, it was accepted in the meeting of the CVA working group (Community-based CVA group lead facilitator).*

During our pocket voting process we asked men and women to assess the extent to which 'government service providers and elected representatives listen to and are responsive to women's concerns as part of the CVA'. Men and women expressed similar views with the majority of both groups voting for 'somewhat' (91% male (n=59) 59% female (n=29)), though women's vote spread more evenly between 'somewhat' and 'a lot' (8% male (n=5) 41% female (n=20). There were no votes for 'not at all'.

A similar question was asked during KII: 'do government service providers and elected government representatives respond to concerns related to WATSAN raised by women?' Responses were more positive, than the pocket voting process with 45% saying 'yes' (n=5), 45% saying 'somewhat' (n=5) and 9% saying 'no' (n=1). This suggests that when water and sanitation issues were raised by women, the responses from decision-makers were more positive than when women talked about issues that they were not considered to be knowledgeable about.

## Structures

Gender-transformative change emphasises the need to transform structures to achieve and sustain transformative impact (CARE 2018). The structures in need of change may include discriminatory social norms, customs, values and exclusionary practices, in the non-formal sphere, and laws, policies, procedures and services in the formal sphere.

As noted above, ***the research found evidence that CVA had supported transformation of the informal sphere, but there was no evidence that there had been changes to the formal sphere.***

Relevant to water and sanitation management at the community level are WATSAN committees at the Ward and Union levels. Participation in these committees is not equal. The law mandates 30% of members should be female, but this requirement does not consider existing cultural barriers and limitations to women's participation. Research participants had mixed views about the current law. Some officials noted that the 30% minimum female participation requirement was not discrimination but an equity measure that encouraged gender equality. Others interpreted this 30% figure as a maximum target that was limiting women's participation.

Union budgets for WATSAN are defined by government, but don't include consideration of specific budgets for marginalised or disadvantaged groups. Our research indicates that only effective lobbying and advocacy, and responsiveness on the part of government officials, will ensure that initiatives are introduced in response to citizen demands. This means that there is no guarantee that the unique needs and interests of disadvantaged groups in the community will be considered.

### 4.3 Gender-transformative change translated to other domains

The research sought to explore the extent to which change experienced by participants of CVA, translated into changes in other spheres of their lives.<sup>20</sup> We know from the literature that gender-transformative change takes place in multiple spheres: in the household; in social and community networks and in governance and sector institutions. During the FGD with community members who had participated in CVA, we asked 'Do you notice any other changes for women due to CVA, within the household, at the community level or with government?' When respondents described changes we asked for examples to be shared.

***Especially at the household level, both male and female respondents identified changes which were influenced by participation in CVA and NJP activities more broadly.*** Men and women both commonly described increased confidence of women in the home, and increased roles in decision-making. Women's experiences in NGO meetings increased their confidence, and increased the knowledge they brought to family decision-making. Husbands were also described as having changed their attitudes to women's roles outside the home, and they increasingly supported women's mobility. Husbands were described as having more confidence in women due to their participation in the CVA activities. In an FGD with female VDC members Kailashgonj, a participant noted:

*Before I couldn't talk, and now I could talk. By being called to different meetings, they made us work and this has built confidence in me. I have applied some of the learnings with my family members and it provides motivation to them. I am able to make my family members understand the benefits of coming to meetings. Whenever I go home from the meeting, they ask what I have learned. Before, I had no importance; now my husband has some confidence in me (female VDC members, Kailashgonj).*

We heard one example of change in the distribution of household responsibilities which is indicative of transformative change. A husband described how he took on his 'wife's job' as she started working for a local NGO. As his wife was not at home, he took the cows out and taught his daughter maths, jobs which were usually done by his wife. After taking part in CVA, this woman became a representative of Pushti, a project run by Rupantar. This story was not verified by the wife, but indicates changing attitudes and a valuing of women's roles outside the home. Other women and men described how they were helping each other in household work.

***At the community level, there was also evidence that women were playing a greater role in community meetings and in informing decision-making beyond their participation in CVA.*** One example was offered during the research team's meeting with the Union WATSAN Committee, Pankhali:

<sup>20</sup> Research question: To what extent has participation in CVA informed changes in multiple domains of gender-transformative change?



*In a meeting of the Union WATSAN committee, women members proposed that we install separate toilets for boys and girls and distribute sanitary napkins in high school. That proposal was taken as a resolution, which was later included in a list of decisions that was approved in a meeting of Union Parishad. After allocation of funds from the LGSP budget, the decision was implemented (Union WATSAN Committee, Pankhali).*

Women from the scorecard FGD, also in Pankhali, noted:

*Women were shy previously and did not want to come out to attend meetings or even talk to anyone who was not a family member. But now they are no longer hesitant about attending meetings and talking publicly (Women Scorecard Group, Pankhali).*

**At the governance and sector institution level, as already described earlier, research respondents described how women increased their engagement with government service providers and elected representatives.** Of particular interest is that they were doing this collectively and were more likely to be listened to acting in this way. Participants at a score card FGD, also in Pankhali, noted:

*Women know where to get the services from. Even though they are yet to visit public offices alone, they are visiting UP officials and government departments with other women members of the community, or with someone from the family. Women are getting acknowledgement and respect from government departments (Women VDC, Pankhali).*

The ward WATSAN committee in Pankhali also described changes:

*In the past, women were reluctant to visit government offices. There was a sense of guardedness among community people, particularly women, about visiting public offices. They feared rejection. However, things have changed since they have been engaged in the CVA process, which gives them a platform to meet government officials. Now, the government officials are more responsive to public demands than in the past. Even if they have limited opportunities to offer services, they listen to these citizens and try to find a solution (Ward WATSAN committee in Pankhali).*

Whilst women were increasing their engagement with government service providers and elected government officials, this was not a universal and widespread practice. As already noted above, mobility issues, including transport costs and social norms preventing women travelling without male company, limited women's engagement at the government level.

#### 4.4 Improvements to women's well-being resulting from CVA

**The research<sup>21</sup> revealed numerous examples where women benefitted from improvements to water and sanitation services as a result of CVA activities in NJP.**

- Changes in WASH are indicative of women's voices being raised and listened to through CVA activities in addition to ongoing VDC activities.
- The incidences of positive change revealed through the research were too numerous to cite here. They can be categorised as follows:
  - construction of new water and sanitation facilities
  - upgrades to existing water and sanitation facilities
  - relocation of latrines to safe places away from water sources
  - use of government funds for WASH.
  - Importantly for women, these changes have meant a reduced need to collect water, improved water quality and improved sanitation services.

<sup>21</sup> Research Question: To what extent have women experienced improved well-being as a result of CVA?

Through the CVA process, issues related to WASH were raised and often addressed during the CVA Interface Meetings, or they were followed up by citizens who approached government officials after the meetings. For example, commitments to provide water tanks and latrines made during the Interface Meetings have been met. VDCs followed up on agreed actions of the Interface Meeting with government service providers elected officials and to ensure the commitments were made. Committee members visited the Union Council as a team to ensure that commitments were honoured. They also advocated on behalf of those that had raised their needs with the authorities.

A factor which enabled these well-being outcomes to be achieved was increased accountability of the Union WATSAN committees, influenced by increased citizen knowledge of the committees' roles and responsibilities. Increased knowledge of citizens, increased action of citizens, and their increased influence on the committees, were described by an NJP staff member:

*At first, they knew nothing. Now, they have the information and knowledge about the services and how to get them. Previously the Union WATSAN committee had no plan. There was no plan. Now, they have a plan, a monitoring system and follow up. Water tanks, pond excavation, shelter, and solar panels have been provided to the people in need through advocacy work. Community people are making a list and sending it to DPHE They know what their role is. Now they know what the services are. Now the Union WATSAN committee has its own action plan. Now the community is identifying the water services that are dirty and contaminated, they know where to drink the water from. The VDC is keeping them updated and the community is also putting pressure on the government (NJP staff member).*

In some instances, calls for upgrades to existing facilities were supported by the actions of multiple stakeholders including multiple levels of government and citizen groups such as the VDCs. For example, ponds which had become polluted with leaf litter and plastic were restored as safe drinking sources as a result of the CVA process.

*Members of CVA working group were thinking of reforming the ponds so that their water could again be made usable safely. In this regard, they were asked to contact the Ward WATSAN Committee while seeking assistance from different stakeholders including UP representatives and NGOs working in their locality. A few days later, they sat together with the Union WATSAN Committee and informed them about the importance of restoring the ponds. Based on the recommendation of the WWC, the UWC adopted resolution in its favour. The required money was allocated to restore the ponds after money was released to the UWC from the UP budget. What we can learn from this story is that CVA activity has brought somewhat positive change in ensuring safe water for citizens.*

A key theme related to enabling positive change was the role of VDC members and elites who initiated, and in many cases carried out, the work. This also increased the engagement of women and the broader community with government officials.

***The research revealed limited inclusion of people with a disability and ethnic minority groups, though people living with disability were prioritised for water and sanitation improvements.***

Our research considered the question of whether anyone was missing out on receiving benefits from CVA, and different views were expressed by those we consulted. Some described how those living with disability were supported through the CVA activity. Various instances were described where families with disabled members had been supported with upgraded water and sanitation facilities. Others considered that there was limited engagement of those living with disability, and they also said that ethnic minorities were not engaged in CVA and they missed out on gaining benefits from the CVA process.

Partner staff and NJP staff acknowledged that sex workers, beggars or those living on the margins of the community were not engaged and it was not known whether they were benefitting from CVA activities.

It's a limitation of our research that we didn't speak to representatives of those living with a disability, or other marginalised and vulnerable groups noted above.

Example: Women's voices are responded to. Case study: Baroikhali, Khulna, Pankhali 2017.

A woman-friendly latrine has been installed at the community clinic in response to women's voices. Concrete rings for a slab latrine have been provided. There was also no water tank in the community clinic and the issue was addressed in the interface meeting. The chairman made a commitment that water tanks will be allocated for the community clinics. The water tanks have now been installed.

#### 4.5 Markers of future gender-transformative change

The research sought to identify markers which would be indicative of gender equality outcomes in the future.<sup>22</sup> We know that gender-transformative change is a long-term process, that it is part of broader socio-cultural and political processes, and that it is unique to specific contexts. We also recognise the NJP did not have gender-transformation as an explicit objective in its program design. ***The research did reveal indicators of future strengthened gender equality outcomes and offers insight to longer-term contributions of CVA.***

Markers for future change evident through our research findings include:

- changing gender roles in the home, such as decreased rates of early marriage and some men taking on 'women's roles'
- women becoming more active in public sphere including as decision-makers and holding government service providers and elected officials accountable, especially through the CVA Interface Meetings and follow-up monitoring visits to government offices
- women taking active roles in VDCs, resulting in women standing for elected positions in the Union Parishad.

Research participants believed that in the future, gender equality and the empowerment of women would increase. When asked, 'do you think women will play an active role in decision-making in the community, especially in relation to WASH in five years' time?', all research participants agreed 'yes'. Elements included:

- girls treated equally to boys and, girls and women treated with respect
- women leaders, active and respected in decision-making
- women educated and taking on paid professional roles and/or responsibility in government
- increased accountability through improved awareness of women, and increased demands for women's rights.

Whilst for some respondents saw this as a natural extension of the current situation, others recognised that efforts were required to support this outcome. Some research participants recognised that more was required to support this vision, including the following:

- Men need to be proactive in enabling women's empowerment
- Women need to work together in solidarity, as noted in the assertion that 'women need to be organised, women should move together'
- There needs to be a prevailing mindset which supports gender equality and women's empowerment
- There needs to be better communication and rapport between women and government
- The agency of women needs to be improved through training and skill development initiatives.

<sup>22</sup> Research Question: What are indications / markers of future gender-transformative change?

## 5 Recommendations for gender-transformative social accountability

This research sought to learn about the existing social accountability practice in World Visions' NJP to inform the co-design of 'gender-transformative social accountability' in the SHOMOTA Project.<sup>23</sup> We recognised that whilst the NJP included gender as a cross-cutting issue<sup>24</sup>, CVA in the NJP did not seek to be gender-transformative. Nevertheless, our research identified important lessons from the CVA practice in NJP that could support a stronger gender and social inclusion focus in CVA in future.

Below, we set out eight suggested areas of focus to strengthen gender-transformative outcomes through the practice of social accountability.

### 1. Ensure strong staff capacity in gender and social inclusion, and support effective planning and preparation of social accountability activities which are inclusive of gender and social inclusion prioritisation

The literature on social accountability is predominantly gender blind, and whilst it has at its core an interest in giving voice to marginalised people, it often fails to consider and respond to all and different types of marginalisation. The needs and interests of women, of gender and sexual minorities, and of people with various types of disability are not specifically recognised. Social accountability practitioners should not adopt a 'one size fits all' approach to enabling citizen participation – they should recognise the unique needs and interests of different types of citizens to ensure all have an equal opportunity to participate and also benefit.

Staff appreciation of gender and social inclusion in the local context is essential as a foundation for gender-transformative social accountability.

It is also important that gender and social inclusion is considered within each phase of the Citizen Voice and Action approach.<sup>25</sup> It is important to recognise that every development initiative has an equity outcome, whether intentional or not. Therefore, CVA practitioners should be aware of what gender and social inclusion outcomes could be achieved, and how to plan a CVA process to ensure that outcomes are positive for all.

### 2. Know the context and customise the strategies appropriate to that context

Building on the appreciation of gender and social inclusion issues, it is important to integrate theory and practice in the local context. CVA planning can benefit from a social and gender assessment in the local context.

Another important contextual factor to consider is the need to identify starting points for conversations about gender and social inclusion which might be already present in the community. It is useful to adopt a strengths-based approach, and it is useful to consider: what aspects of the existing context can be built on, who are the champions and advocates who can become allies, and what pathways will best support equality outcomes.

### 3. Invest in community-based local leadership and ownership of gender-transformative change agendas

An important principle of social accountability is ownership by local citizens. This ownership involves citizens leading participation and also advocacy to government service providers and elected government officials. Similarly, this is important for prioritising gender-transformative change.

The dimensions of gender-transformative change in social accountability include:

- promoting inclusive participation in local leadership for social accountability, and ensuring the inclusion of vulnerable and marginalised groups

<sup>23</sup> Research Question: Informed from this case study, what are recommendations for a 'gender-transformative social accountability approach'?

<sup>24</sup> For example, NJP has mandated 40% representation of women in VDC.

<sup>25</sup> The next phase of this research project seeks to develop a model of gender transformative social accountability

- strengthening solidarity through connecting citizens at the local community level and with existing groups, which best enables advocacy with decision-makers
- ensuring the legitimacy of community groups in the eyes of government, to promote government responsiveness and the sustainability of a good governance agenda.

Within the context of CVA in Bangladesh, prioritising gender and social inclusion within the CVA Working Group is important. This includes:

- inclusive membership of women, men and marginalised groups
- a clear understanding of gender and social inclusion and social accountability
- collective action at the ward level (lowest level of governance)
- registering the CVA Working Group for legitimacy and sustainability.

#### **4. Engage local leaders' support for gender-transformative social accountability**

Within the CVA process 'enabling citizen engagement' involves establishing relationships and connections and ensuring support for social accountability by decision-makers and authorities. Equally important in the context of gender transformative social accountability is support for gender equality outcomes. There is a need to ensure that government service providers and elected government officials are committed to gender and social inclusion as part of social accountability. Other local leaders such as religious leaders and school teachers could also be encouraged to value the importance of gender and social inclusion and encouraged to be champions for change.

#### **5. Engage with men to promote gender and social inclusion in Citizen Voice and Action**

Male engagement and male support for gender and social inclusion outcomes is essential, especially in patriarchal societies. An enabling environment for women's empowerment and gender equality is critical in the household and at the community level. Spousal support is often described as necessary to enable women's active participation. Especially within the context of social accountability, promoting the shared interests of men and women, and encouraging men to value women's empowerment, will avoid backlash from men. Specific training and orientation for men to support women's participation will be beneficial.

#### **6. Promote skill development for women and encourage women's collective action**

Gender-transformative change is a long-term goal, and women's empowerment requires practice. We learnt from our research the value of 'practising voice' and women developing public speaking skills and gaining more confidence through their experiences of CVA. Maximising opportunities to practice active participation, voice and accountability in safe environments with other women and/or with decision-makers is important to promote sustained gender-transformative change.

We also learnt from this research, and it is also evident from the gender studies literature, that collective action of women is effective in influencing change. Promoting the collective action of women can strengthen both gender-transformation and social accountability.

#### **7. Encourage the practice of dialogue and accountability – citizen engagement (women and men) with the state**

As already mentioned above, it is vital that women practise participation, voice and accountability for their own skill development and empowerment. It is also important that skills and empowerment are acknowledged by government service providers and elected officials relevant to social accountability initiatives. Regular practice of dialogue between citizens (ensuring gender and social inclusion) and government service providers and elected officials supports transformative change, as new types of roles, behaviours and expectations of participation, voice and accountability become the norm. Within the Citizen Voice and Action process, dialogue is enabled within the Interface Meetings, and this activity should be

conducted regularly to enable those involved to practise the skills of participation, and to strengthen women's empowered roles in community.<sup>26</sup>

Connected with regular practice of voice and accountability is regular monitoring to ensure that commitments agreed to within the CVA process are fulfilled. Informed by a gender-transformative perspective, it's important that commitments made are reflective of the needs and interests of women and/or other marginalised groups. It's also important that monitoring by both women and men ensures that commitments made support gender equality and women's empowerment.

#### **8. Advocate to central government policy makers for structural changes to WATSAN committees (regulation of equal representation of women and men)**

In line with a gender-transformative approach there is a need to transform systems and structures and the current guidelines for WATSAN committees which do not mandate the equal participation of women.<sup>27</sup> There is an opportunity for WVB to advocate to government officials, informed by its extensive community practice.

## **6 Conclusion**

The case study research described in this Learning Report demonstrates that the implementation of CVA does contribute to gender-transformative change to some extent, and there is potential to strengthen the practice to support gender-transformative outcomes. Currently, there is limited focus on gender and social inclusion in the World Vision-written CVA guidance.

Whilst NJP did not intentionally have gender-transformative outcomes as a goal of CVA, the research found evidence of change in women's agency, changes in multiple sets of relations (women-men, women-women) within the practice of CVA. There were mixed views on whether CVA had contributed to changes in women's relations with government service providers/elected government officials. Changes to structures were only evident in attitudes and practices; there were no changes to policies or laws. There still remain numerous barriers to gender equality within the CVA process, including social norms and expectations about women's roles in the private and public spheres, women's limited mobility beyond local villages, and women's lack of confidence and the skills needed to participate. Through the CVA process, equal participation of women and men is prioritised but initiatives to ensure equity are needed, such as male engagement programs to encourage men's promotion of gender equality and skill development for women.

There is limited evidence that gender-transformative change has contributed to change in the household and broader community spheres. At the governance and sector institutions levels, as already described earlier, research respondents described how women are increasing their engagement with government service providers and elected representatives.

The research identified some gender-transformative change through CVA in WASH in the NJP, though the social accountability outcomes experienced by women were not at the same level as those experienced by men. Whilst they had equal opportunities to participate, women did not have equal opportunities to voice their concerns or issues. Women were also less likely to be involved in decision-making related to the CVA process. Women are increasing their engagement with government service providers and elected officials, but the research found that these government officials were less responsive to women's voices than men's. Our research highlights the need to consider gender and social inclusion. This is needed to ensure that, through the practice of social accountability, voice, accountability and empowerment are equally experienced by women and men.

<sup>26</sup> When CVA activities first start, it is proposed to hold interface meetings quarterly in first year, and in subsequent years six monthly.

<sup>27</sup> The current membership of WATSAN committees at Ward and Union levels is 70% men, 30% women.

## 7 Annexes

### 7.1 Research team

Table 2 below sets out the research team (gender disaggregated: F-female, M-male). Since the research was carried out across two Union Parishads, the research team was split into two groups and the membership of these groups was changed each day. This team structure promoted uniform practice of the research methods and also cross fertilisation of emerging findings within the research team. Each group had representatives from ISF-UTS researchers, the UoR and WVB to ensure teams had both strong research skills and contextual knowledge. The two groups were formed with due consideration to women's participation, with women group leaders conducting FGDs of women participants.

**Table 2: Research team**

Organisation	Role	Name	Gender
Institute for Sustainable Futures	Research Project Director / Lead Researcher	Dr Keren Winterford	F
Institute for Sustainable Futures	Researcher	Tamara Megaw	F
University of Rajshahi	Researcher	Professor Pranab Kumar Panday	M
University of Rajshahi	Researcher	Dr Harold Sougato Baroi	M
University of Rajshahi	Researcher	Kamrul Ahsan	M
World Vision Bangladesh (SHOMOTA)	SHOMOTA GESI Officer	Hasina Ferdows	F
World Vision Bangladesh (SHOMOTA)	SHOMOTA Project Manager	Proshanto Ranjan Sharma Roy	M
World Vision Bangladesh (Khulna regional office)	Regional Technical Program Coordinator-Health, Nutrition and Wash (HNW)	Dr Sankar Kumar Saha	M
World Vision Bangladesh (Khulna regional office)	Program Officer – InHelDeR Project (Integrated Health and Livelihoods Development project for Poverty reduction), Assasuni AP	Milita Sarkar	F
Nobo Jatra Program – research support			
World Vision Bangladesh (Nobo Jatra Program)	Good Governance and Social Accountability Officer	Nirmal Sarker	M
World Vision Bangladesh (Nobo Jatra Program)	Good Governance and Social Accountability Officer	Stephen Hembrom	M

## 7.2 Research participants

Research activities were carried out in Union Parishads Kailashgonj and Panthali in Dacope Upazila of Khulna district. Table 3 sets out the number of participants in the research across the different stakeholder types, and shows the genders of the research participants.

**Table 3: Research participants**

Stakeholder types	Dacope Upazila Headquarter	Kailashgonj Union	Pankhali Union	Male	Female	Total
Elected representatives	UZP Vice-Chair (Female)	UP Chair (Male)	UP Chair (Male)	2	1	3
Government service providers	UNO & DPHE			2		2
NGO Representatives/Partner Staff (Social Accountability Organiser: (1 male & 1 Female from Shushilan) and Social Technical Officer (Good Governance & Social Accountability: 1 female from Shushilan)				1	2	3
Union WATSAN committee		1		6	4	10
Union WATSAN committee			1	4	4	8
Ward WATSAN committee			1	6	3	9
(NJP) VDC committee		Male		12		42
		Female			10	
			Male	10		
			Female		10	
CVA Working Group leaders		1	1	1	1	2
CVA Score card Groups (participants)		Male (Youth)		11		44
		Female (Youth)			11	
			Male (Youth)	11		
			Women (Youth)		11	
NJP staff [(Field Operation Manager), Social Accountability and Good Governance: GG&SA Officer, & WASH Officer				3		3
<b>Total number of research participants</b>				<b>69</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>126</b>



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## 7.4 Research questions

Key questions for this case study were:

1. To what extent have **discrimination against women, and the marginalisation** of women, been considered in order to effectively plan for **equal opportunity and benefit** in social accountability activities?
2. To what extent has **gender-transformative change** occurred within the practice of CVA?
3. To what extent has **participation** in CVA informed changes in **multiple domains** of gender-transformative change?
4. To what extent have women experienced **improved well-being** as a result of CVA?
5. What are **indications / markers** of future gender-transformative change?
6. Informed by this case study, what are our **recommendations** for a 'gender-transformative social accountability approach'?

Linked to the research questions and conceptual framework, the areas of inquiry for the research were:

Areas of inquiry
1. Planning for and implementation of CVA
2. Gender-transformative change within CVA <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- agency</li><li>- relations</li><li>- structures</li></ul>
3. Gender-transformative change translated to other domains <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- household</li><li>- social and community networks</li><li>- governance and sector institutions</li></ul>
4. Women's well-being resulting from CVA <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- practical needs of women</li></ul>
5. Markers of future gender-transformative change





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