

# DIALOGUE FOR CHANGE

## PLATFORMS FOR DIALOGUE QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS



Workshop in Shirajdikhan Upazila of Munshiganj District teaches local youth about the RTI 2009 and how to access information and government services.

### Right to Information Day: Promoting Access to Social Accountability

According to the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, all powers of the Republic belong to the people. Many citizens, however, are unaware of their rights and available public resources, including their right to information. To help address this issue, in 2009, the Right to Information Act (RTI) was introduced to establish the ownership of the constitution amongst the people. Platforms for Dialogue (P4D), a European Union funded project in partnership with the Cabinet Division and implemented through the British Council, is promoting a variety of mechanisms, including the RTI, to improve government accountability and increase citizen participation in decision making.

On September 28th, to celebrate the UNESCO designated International Day for the Universal Access to Information, P4D promoted citizens' right to information and government services by successfully hosting events across all 21 project districts. Coined the Right to Information Day, P4D coordinated with 63 civil society partners, Multi-Actor Partner groups (MAPs), local NGOs, and government agencies to organise various community events to promote the RTI. P4D supported local partners to host rallies, discussion forums, cultural events, quiz contests, and awareness raising workshops. The one-day event boasted over 6,300 participants across the country, nearly half of whom were women. To date, this was one of the project's largest coordinated community and volunteer-led events.

### IN THIS ISSUE

Right to Information Day: Promoting Access to Social Accountability

P4D Installs Citizen's Charters in All 21 Project Districts

Social Action Project Exhibitions Begin

Upcoming Events & Trainings



According to a recent study from Professor Afsan Chowdhury at BRAC University, ‘3 out of 4 people [are] unaware of RTI, and only 1 in 20 have seen RTI in operation.’ In an effort to improve these staggering statistics, P4D’s events were designed to inform local citizens of the Right to Information Act, 2009 and to provide practical and relevant instruction on ‘how to’ obtain information from any service providing agency.

Educating the public on the RTI is important because information bridges the gap between

government service agencies and citizens in need of their services. Information is power, and accurate and timely access to information enables citizens to make informed decisions about their own lives. One MAP member, Md. Tazul Islam from Munshiganj district said, “this event really helped me a lot to know more about RTI act and its usages. I learned how to collect information properly by using this act. This will indeed help me to get useful information.” Another attendee, co-organizing Secretary, Rubel Ukil, of Ulpur Jubo Kallan Porishad, Gopalganj, stated, “this is the first time RTI day is being observed with our leadership. While observing the day we had the opportunity to come close with Government officials, Union Parishad representatives, Journalists, community people, NGOs and other stakeholders. From the speech of different government officials, we learned how RTI Act can help us to curb corruption.” With a more informed and proactive public, local authorities are not only motivated to improve their accountability and transparency, but informed communities are collectively improving their wellbeing.



CSOs march through Dagonbhuyan Upazila of Feni District promoting the RTI 2009 with slogans and rally signs.



## P4D Installs Citizen's Charters in All 21 Project Districts

CSO leader of MAC Bangladesh shows local community members the newly installed Citizen's Charter in Kalapur Union of Sreemongol Upazila

Throughout Bangladesh, many citizens are unaware of how to access public services. Uninformed communities especially suffer when they don't know what public services are even available to them in the first place. To give local communities the tools and information they need to learn about and access public services, Platforms for Dialogue (P4D), has helped finalise the 2nd generation of the Citizen's Charter in 21 districts.

The Citizen's Charter is a written agreement between citizens and government service providers detailing service-related information and ways to access those services. Originally, the Citizen's Charter was introduced by the

Government of Bangladesh in 2007, however, after government review, a 2nd generation Citizen's Charter was released in 2017. The charter, which is tailored for each department, aims to bring transparency and accountability to public service delivery by providing detailed information on available public services and the steps citizens must take to access those services. Moreover, it plays a vital role in providing citizens with information related to services, increasing citizens' participation in public service delivery, and holding civil servants accountable.

As part of a tremendous collaborative effort, elected members, chairmen, secretaries of Union Parishads (UPs), and community members, worked with P4D staff, CSO partners, and the Cabinet Division for a month to draft and finalise the Citizen's Charter in project districts. In September of this year, the 2nd generation of the charter was finally introduced and installed at 62 UPs and 1 Poursava in 21 districts.

## Upcoming Events & Trainings

November 1: Youth Day  
November 28-30: Training on Methodology Consultation Management Techniques for government officials in Dhaka  
December 6-8: Experiential Pilot Course on Capacity Building for government officials in Dhaka  
December 9: Anti-Corruption Day  
Ongoing: Social Action Project Exhibitions



SAP exhibition in Munshiganj displays various social action projects for locals.



MAP members from Patuakhali proudly demonstrate their SAP projects



SAP exhibit in Feni shows off their SAP projects to visitors

## Social Action Project Exhibitions

To engage local communities in social advocacy projects, Platforms for Dialogue (P4D) has been partnering with civil society organisations (CSOs) and Multi-Actor Partnerships (MAPs) around the country to coordinate Social Action Projects (SAPs). SAPs range in focus from community clean ups, to advocating for important local issues, to community workshops and trainings on public services. To highlight some of the most successful SAPs and to share best practices, P4D is organising exhibitions of various SAPs in each of the 21 working districts between September and November.

The SAPs predominantly focus on advocacy and campaign efforts to highlight social issues affecting their communities, like improving awareness of rights, increasing access to government services, and educating local communities on sensitive issues like child marriage. The exhibitions aim to encourage citizens to increase their engagement in local development and to use social accountability tools to access their rights. By educating and enabling community members, it not only improves their own wellbeing, but it also strengthens accountability for both government and non-government service delivery in their district.

The exhibitions are also a powerful tool to share best practices among different CSOs and between districts. Community members and MAP members are encouraged to visit the SAP stalls from other districts to learn more about how they can address other social issues in their own communities. P4D encourages citizens to engage in decision making processes and to use social accountability tools to strengthen transparency and service delivery from both government and non-government agencies.



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