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ACCOUNTABILITY IN A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT: A STUDTY OF A VILLAGE IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

ACCOUNTABILITY IN A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT: A STUDTY OF A VILLAGE IN BANGLADESH

By

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In international development, donor organizations often establish community-based organizations (CBOs) when they implement community development projects. As these CBOs are expected to work as intermediaries between residents and donor organizations, questions of accountability often arise within these linkages. This study examines how various actors within a community development project are held accountable, and hold others accountable, for project activities in one small village in Bangladesh. The study found that while the CBO enjoyed the authority to manage resources, it also faced pressure from the donor organization and from residents for ensuring the project's success. These structures thus enabled the CBO to take an active role in project implementation. Accountability within the CBO was well-established, due to the joint responsibility of the members. On the contrary, downward accountability from the CBO to residents seemed to be weaker than that of upward accountability from the CBO toward the donor organization.

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Introduction

Community development is often thought of as a local approach to problem-solving on issues ranging from sanitation to value-added processes for small farmers (Craig, 1998). In international development, poverty alleviation has been a central issue in community development since the 1990s, and projects in this area are expected to improve the lives of poor people by involving them in the processes of problem-solving.

In these types of projects, community-based organizations (CBOs) play an important role. Donor organizations[1] usually establish CBOs in communities to engage project activities. CBOs are expected to act as an intermediate between residents and donor organizations, and organize residents for project activities. CBOs are also expected to carry out community development activities after projects have been terminated. The underlying concern of this research is how these structures constrain and enable various actors in the communities where projects are being developed, maintained, and challenged (Giddens, 1984).

Encouraging sustainability at a local level is an important requirement for CBOs,

[1] In some international development projects, a donor organization sometimes only provides the funds for a project, and contracts a project implementing body such as a NGO or a consultant, to lead the actual implementation of the project. In this case, the NGO or consultant may establish a CBO. However, in this paper I use the phrase "donor organization" to signify a project implementing body in general.

and research suggests that sustainable and self-reliant CBOs have strong leadership, and were transparent in information-sharing and decision-making (Datta, 2005). These aspects can increase residents' reliance on CBOs, which is one of the factors needed to encourage residents to participate in the project. Since residents' active participation in activities is a crucial part of community development projects, information-sharing between CBOs and residents and transparency in decision-making are required.

Once a linkage has been made between a CBO, a community and a donor organization, questions of accountability often arise, as people seek answers for various events and activities which take place within the project. The concept of accountability has gained prominence in the context of the provision of community and social services since the mid 1980s, with calls for people or organizations to be accountable for their actions (Walker, 2002). In community development projects, it is often difficult to discern who is accountable for what activities, as boundaries for each actor (donor organizations, CBOs and residents) in the projects are often blurred. Donor organizations usually decide on the basic framework of projects, and provide financial support. CBOs work closely with these donor organizations, and are expected to know residents' needs and opinions about project activities, and organize activities in the community, while residents are expected to participate. However, who is accountable for a specific matter is often unclear,

since responsibility and authority of each actor is often intertwined. For example, who is accountable if residents' needs are not reflected in the project: CBOs or the donor organizations? Similarly, if residents do not accomplish their duty, is that the fault of the residents for lack of effort, CBOs for failing to provide adequate guidance, or the donor organizations who did not provide enough resources?

This paper will focus on the ways in which various actors and groups in one village in Bangladesh define the ways in which accountability and responsibility are developed, maintained, and challenged within a development project. In addition, it will also be important to investigate how the various structures formed around a project constrain and enable the various actors involved. I turn now to a discussion of accountability as it relates to a community development project.

Information-sharing and accountability in community development

Community development has gained particular attention with the emergence of participatory methods since the 1980s in various developing countries (Kumar, 2005). CBOs are often established in community development projects in order to facilitate participation among residents. While this is to be commended, the numerous agencies involved in these kinds of projects often have different ideas of how to go about generating and implementing projects. For example, donor organizations anticipate

sustainable management, and NGOs expect to balance equity and development. Within these project, the authority to manage resources typically arises at the local level (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999). The use of resources at the local level, in turn, leads to potential conflict between those in charge of the resources (CBOs) and those expecting to see results from the project (residents and donor organizations). If and when something fails to meet these expectations, concerns with accountability often come into play.

Romzek and Dubnick (1987) suggest that in the public sector, there are four types of accountability systems: bureaucratic, legal, professional, and political. Bureaucratic accountability is broadly used for managing public agencies. Two characteristics of the bureaucratic system are an organized and legitimate relationship between a superior and subordinate involving close supervision and/or clearly stated rules and regulations. As Weber (2003) pointed out, bureaucratic organizations are hierarchically arranged, and each lower office is under the control and supervision of a higher. Legal accountability is based on relationships between members of the organization and a controlling party outside the agency that asserts formal contractual obligations or imposes legal sanctions. Professional accountability is brought about in tasks that deal with technically difficult and complex issues. Within these various complicated and specialized cultures, which are increasing in modern society,

bureaucratic administrations are able to dominate discourse and actions through increases in knowledge and expertise (Weber, 2003), creating solutions or strategies that fit the goals of the organization. Nonprofessional superiors must trust expert officials and give sufficient discretion to get the job done, whereas expert officials are expected to be accountable for their solutions. The relationships under political accountability resemble those between a representative and his/her constituents. Public officials are expected to reflect public interest in their tasks (Grant & Keohane, 2005). While public officials who deal with clients (citizens) face direct demands to improve their services, the relationship is often such that citizens are latently controlled by these officials (Lipsky, 2003).

Accountability implies that some actors have the right to hold a group, or an organization, to be answerable for its activities (Ackerman, 2004), or whether responsibilities have been fulfilled (Grant & Keohane, 2005). In short, accountability "is a method of keeping the public informed and the powerful in check" (Mulgan, 2003, p. 1), and involves an exchange of information. In addition, accountability is accompanied with enforcement of sanctions against accounting actors and/or rectification by compensating the victims if they determine that these responsibilities are not fulfilled (Ackerman, 2004; Grant & Keohane, 2005; Mulgan, 2003).

Since accountability implies external examination from others, it is relational

(Brown & Fox, 1998) and directional (Wenar, 2006). Accountability defines the relationships between actors by identifying who can call whom to account, and who has the obligation of explanation and rectification by defining the lines and directions of accountability. The distribution of power is also defined in this sense (Kelby, 2006). The relationship between the account-holder and those who are accountable is unequal and an actor who is held accountable has distinguishable powers. Mulgan (2003, p. 11) stresses that account-holders must recognize that they have a moral authority to call for accounts, "without some recognition of such authority, accountability becomes mere grace-and-favour reporting or informing."

Accountability is also directional with accounts flowing dynamically in hierarchical chains of control. Upward accountability indicates that those in the lower tiers are accountable to those in the upper tiers for fulfilling their obligations. For instance, in a hierarchical organization, whether it is public or private, individuals are upwardly accountable to their superiors above them. Similarly, downward accountability can take place in situations where those in higher positions are expected to protect those below them. In the case of police officers, this group is accountable directly to the public for their exercise of power, and the public are located below the police in regard to the power exercised in maintaining public order. Accountability also flows horizontally. This implies

accountability between two authorities having similar status, for instance, two departments in the same government. Some individuals or organizations may take the role of both who must give accounts for their actions and expect accounts from others (Mulgan, 2003).

These flows of accountability become even more complex within the area of international development, where there are often a number of intermediate institutions, such as the governments of rich countries, those of poor countries, international financial institutions, and aid NGOs (Wenar, 2006). This group of institutions in the development effort often involves different nationalities and organizational backgrounds such as public, private, and non-profit. These institutions form a chain of command in order to reach the people in need. They should be accountable either to the individuals who are the intended beneficiaries of the development projects, or the rich individuals who provide the money in the forms of taxes or donations.

There are several mechanisms of accountability such as financial and/or performance reports, audits, direct public access, and media attention. In international development efforts, implementers of projects such as aid NGOs, are often required to be accountable to donors or funders especially on financial and performance issues. Accountability mechanisms are mainly exerted in the forms of accounts and performance

reports and/or audits. While this is often relatively clear, the accountability of implementers to beneficiaries of the project is obscure with no clear requirement of needing to be accountable. However, implementers often incorporate accountability mechanisms into their activities, such as meetings with beneficiaries to discuss project activities (Kelby, 2006).

Kelby (2006) indicates that downward accountability can be effective in empowerment of the poor. Empowerment is defined here as an expansion of choice, influence, and action by marginalized people (Giddens, 1984). These individuals can obtain information through accountability processes, and if they judge that those in positions of influence have not fulfilled their responsibility, they can call for rectification (Jenkins & Goetz, 1999). Through these processes, marginalized people can stake a claim for their issues and exercise a degree of power. However, downward accountability implies relative powerlessness of the account-holders (Mulgan, 2003), and the marginalized people in developing countries are often too poor to exercise power to sanction anyone (Wenar, 2006). Furthermore, there might not be many beneficiaries who acknowledge a call to be accountable.

In community development projects in developing countries, a CBO is often made for facilitating communication between the residents of the community and the

project. There are a variety of activities that CBOs are engaged in, depending on goals and strategies of the project. However, the essential tasks of CBOs to facilitate community participation are to take the role of informing fellow residents about the project, and to coordinate activities in the community. They are also expected to tell the project officers of the needs and/or opinions of residents. Therefore, CBOs are embedded between projects and beneficiaries in the chain of command. This chain of command forms a particular structure (and often unique), which will become constraining in some situations and for some individuals while enabling others to exercise control over the situation (Giddens, 1984). For residents, CBOs can be a connection with outside resources, whereas residents need to pass through CBOs to obtain local resources. For CBOs, they are ensured the access of outside resources; however, they are obliged to act as representatives of the residents, and typically expected to use the outside resources in a responsible manner. This points to an interface between agency and structure, as there are rules that need to be followed, but within each project there are opportunities for creativity and uniqueness brought into play by the individuals and organizations involved (Sewell, 1992). This creativity, however, can lead to the principal-agent problem in the sense that the agent, such as a CBO, uses the project for its own purposes, either by changing the goals of the project, altering rules, or using the resources for purposes other

than the project intent (Worsham & Gatrell, 2005).

There are three paths of accountability in this case; between donor organizations and CBOs, CBOs and residents, and residents and donor organizations. Walker (2002) suggests the necessity of three contracts corresponding to these three paths of accountability for clarifying obligations, authority, and responsibility. However, these contracts can lead to speculation as to which form of accountability is most important and whether each type of accountability is compatible. In addition, in reality, it is less common in community development to make these three kinds of contracts, especially in a formal way such as written agreements or spelling out the process in a formal meeting.

Considering the four types of accountability systems in the public sector, we can construct a typology as follows: accountability between donor organizations and CBOs can be legal, since CBOs are independent organizations from donor organizations. However, if donor organizations incorporate CBOs into their organizations by paying rewards, the relationships can be bureaucratic, since donor organizations could supervise CBOs as insiders. The relationships between CBOs and residents should be political, since CBOs are required to represent residents' interests. Accountability between donor organizations and residents is also political; however, it is less clear than that of CBOs and residents. If the donor organizations' aim is to improve economic situations and/or

the quality of life in a community, they represent a public benefit, which means that they should represent residents.

Accountability mechanisms can empower residents in community development projects through information-sharing and delivering opinions. However, one study shows that the majority of 15 Indian NGOs that worked with women's self-help groups thought strengthening downward accountability, which involved providing information and opportunities for rectification to those women's group, would weaken their control over the programs (Kelby, 2006). This can lead to no clear requirement for accountability between donor organizations (or project implementing bodies) and residents. In addition, accountability mechanisms between donor organizations and CBOs, and CBOs and residents are, for the most part, determined by the project rules, which donor organizations usually establish. The extent that accountability mechanisms work in community development projects depends on the project designs and strategies that are created by donor organizations. After all, donor organizations could balance empowerment processes and their control, along with the projects' strategies.

This complexity of the real and perceived flows of accountability will be examined in one particular community project in Bangladesh. Considering the relative powerlessness of residents, it is predicted that CBOs are more likely to strive to be

accountable upwardly (to the donor organization) than downwardly (to residents). I also hypothesize that residents will hold the CBO to be accountable for their actions, since it is CBOs that interact with residents. To provide a better understanding of this specific development project, I turn to a discussion of the site and the ways in which data on the project were collected.

Data and methods

Field survey site

I spent one month (from the end of July to the end of August of 2006) in a small village in the Meherpur District (which is inside the Khulna Division) of Bangladesh. This area is located in the western part of the country, near India (see Appendix A for a map of the area). Bangladesh is one of the least developed countries (The UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and the Small Island Developing States, n.d.) with a national GDP per capita of $363 US (18,269 taka). GDP per capita was even lower in the Meherpur district ($335 US) in 2000 (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2005). The national adult literacy rates (ages 15 and older) for women is 33.1% and for men 51.7% (United Nations Development Programme, 2006), although younger people are being provided with greater access to education. The state religion is Islam, with nearly 90% of the population

reporting that they are Muslim. Bangladesh has hosted various development projects over the past few decades, ranging from medicine (Ahmed, Adams, Chowdhury, & Bhuiya, 2000) to agriculture and industrial development (Abedin, 2000).

The government structure of Bangladesh consists of four layers beyond the national government: Divisions, Districts, Upazilas, and Unions. There are six divisions in the country, while the Upazilas can be considered analogous to US counties, and Unions to US townships.

In Bangladesh, villages are located under Unions. A key person in a village is called "matabbor". Matabbors are men and typically over 40 years old. There are matabbors for para (geographical division within a village), shomaji (religious affiliation), and village levels. They are not elected officials and there is no clear leader among a group of matabbors in a village. Traditionally, they collectively govern villages, solving troubles between residents and arranging public activities (Kaida, 2003).

Matabbors can be problematic as pointed out by governmental field officers and NGO staff (Ando & Uchida, 2003). According to these sources, matabbors are often the initial contact when a new project is started, as matabbors are expected to be familiar with village situations and the needs of residents. It is said that matabbors sometimes take advantage of information obtained through the government and NGO staff, keeping the

project for themselves or close friends and family members. However, these gains can backfire. If others learn about a matabbor's abuse of power, villagers and other matabbors may hold a meeting and take action against the individual. It is said that Bangladeshi villages have a mechanism that checks matabbors' behavior through collective action as long as villagers are able to gain information about the abuse of power (Ando & Uchida, 2003).

Project

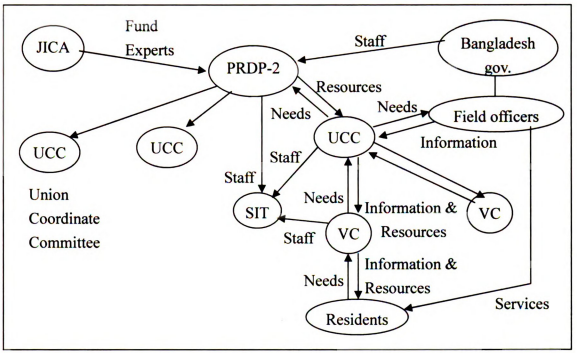
Field research was conducted in one of the project sites of the Participatory Rural Development Project Phase 2 (PRDP-2) by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)[2]. PRDP-2 has been implemented under the cooperation of the Bangladeshi and Japanese government since June 2005, following PRDP phase 1 that was implemented from 2000 to 2004.

The aim of the PRDP-2 is to establish the "link model," which is the mechanism that connects residents to governmental services along with the needs in rural area. The project organization chart of PRDP-2 is shown in figure 1. In the link model, village committees (VCs) are formed which include men and women, and the Union Coordinate Committees, which are formed at the Union level. The VCs hold village committee

[2] JICA is a donor organization as well as a project implementing body, which directly manages PRDP-2.

meetings (VCMs) once a month, where VC members and villagers discuss community and individual needs. Union Coordinate Committee Meetings (UCCMs) are held once a month, attended by the VC chairmen and the public service providers including the governmental field officers and NGOs. In the UCCMs, the VC chairmen present what they discussed in the VCMs, and the field officers announce their schedule of services in the area. While the VC chairmen can talk about the schedule of governmental services to the VC members and villagers in the VCMs, government officers can make a plan of services according to the information that they obtained in the UCCMs. The link model is the network that enables residents to voice their concern to the government, and enables the government to provide their services effectively and efficiently.

Figure 1. The project organization chart of PRDP-2



PRDP-2 includes small scale infrastructure projects (VC schemes). The VC schemes are intended to facilitate the VCs' activities for improving quality of life in the villages, and are planned and implemented by the VCs taking a central role. There are rules regarding implementation of the VC schemes such as processes of planning and implementation, and project proposals including the budget. The funding of the VC schemes is carried by the residents and PRDP-2. The VC schemes are typically surfacing muddy roads, constructing gutters and toilets, and the renovation of public schools.

Notice boards are utilized in PRDP-2 in order to publicize information on governmental services and PRDP-2 activities, and are set up in each Union and village. In

rural Bangladesh, information is channeled through personal connections, and people in power can control information flows. The notice boards can prevent such control and abuse by providing the general public with current and future news concerning various aspects of the project and the public services provided by the Bangladesh government. Although many people are illiterate in these villages, most could obtain the information by asking those people who can read about the notices (Ando & Uchida, 2003).

In the mid-term evaluation of PRDP phase 1, it was indicated that the link model provided a tool for accountability and responsibility among Bangladeshi government field officers regarding their services (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2003). These field officers were expected to announce their schedule of services in the UCCMs, and if they did not follow through, they may be blamed in the next UCCM. Also, since they listened to the villagers' needs, not responding to these needs could lead to being censored. Unfortunately, I did not ask whether residents would blame field officers for problems with the project.

The VC of the village I studied was formed in June, 2005, with VCMs being held once a month after that. Four out of five para matabbors in the village joined in the VC, and the only village matabbor became the VC chairman (VCC). All four teachers in the primary school participated in the VC, two being para matabbors. The VC submitted the

proposal of the VC scheme in January, 2006. That project, which was to install lavatories in 144 households, was approved. The construction work had been completed by July, 2006. The notice board was set up one month before my research, providing ample time for village residents to become familiar with its function.

In this study, the actions of VCs are regarded as proxies for the CBOs taking a role as intermediary organizations connecting villages with the Bangladeshi government and the project (PRDP-2).

Methods

The field research site was selected considering three factors: the size of the community, the location, and the term of the project activities. Communities that have less than 150 households were precluded, due to an absence of dynamic interactions between VCs and residents. I also wanted a village which was isolated (located five miles from a major city) and had been involved in a project for at least one year. The village chosen had an active VC, it was located five miles away from a major city with no direct public transportation services to the village, and had 184 households and 720 individuals (Participatory Rural Development Project Phase 2, 2006).

The research was divided into two parts; a questionnaire survey was given to residents, and interviews were conducted with the VC members, residents, government

officials, NGOs and PRDP-2 staff. Given that I do not speak Bengali, and the residents do not speak English, I used an interpreter who was Bangladeshi, born and raised in Meherpur Sador.

Questionnaire survey. The household list of a village survey conducted in 2006 by PRDP-2 was obtained, and 98 randomly selected people (female 51 and male 47) participated in the survey.[3] Questions focused on such aspects of the project as who the residents thought were responsible if the sanitation project failed, what kinds of information the residents had, and how they had gained this information. Since approximately 70% of the residents do not have formal education, the survey was conducted by both myself (at times) and a translator who spoke the native language, and was able to take notes and fill out the surveys for illiterate respondents. The questionnaire, which was approved by Michigan State University Institutional Review Board (IRB), is attached as Appendix B.

Interview survey. The interview survey was conducted with 19 VC members, eight external organizations' officials – two Bangladeshi government field officers (agriculture and veterinary), four Bangladeshi and Japanese staff of PRDP-2, and two

[3] Random numbers were used (Beyer, 1968).

different NGO[4] staff who were engaged in the micro credit projects in the village. There were twenty VC members in the village: 17 were male, and three female. One of male members had joined one month before this survey was conducted, as another male member had to leave the VC to work in a foreign country. This new VC member was excluded from the data due to his short-term tenure in the VC. In order to give a popular voice to this aspect of the study, interviews with 10 residents were conducted. A variety of residents was selected for the interview.[5]

Results

Accountability between the VC and the project

Accountability between the VC and PRDP-2 tended to be upward, with the PRDP-2 being the group seeking accounts from the VC. PRDP-2 set the rules of the VC scheme implementation, setting the tone for what the VC members were to discuss in terms of what VC scheme the village would propose in the VCM. The VC made the VC scheme application, and submitted it to the UCCM. The minutes and attendance list of the

[4] One NGO ran a micro credit project for women, and another a micro credit project for women and a scholarship program for primary school children. Both NGOs operated the projects in the village separately from PRDP-2.

[5] Interviewees consisted of a female head of family, a day laborer, a woman who participated in a micro finance project, a male who was the member of a farmers' cooperative, a male and a female who joined the primary school committee, a business person, a wife of a VC member, a matabbor who was not selected as a VC member, and the chairperson of the women's association.

VCM were attached to the VC scheme application so that PRDP-2 could know whether the proposal reflected the outcome of the VCM. Once the proposal was tentatively approved, the Scheme Implementation Team (SIT) was formed, which was composed of Union Parishad members, VCC, VCS, a few VC members, an official from the local government engineering department (LGED), and PRDP-2 staff. The VC scheme guideline set by PRDP-2 provided that the SIT was responsible for implementing the VC scheme.

If PRDP-2 finds something that is opposed to the set rules, or does not fulfill necessary procedures, it can stop or force alterations to in the project. PRDP-2 can impose sanctions if it felt that the actions were vicious by nature. The relationship between the VC and PRDP-2 could be considered legal, since PRDP-2 is outside the control of the VC, and held within contractual obligations.

How did both parties perceive accountability in this project? Since responsibility is "a term of very similar and sometimes overlapping meaning" with accountability (Mulgan, 2003, p. 15), and accountability might not be a familiar word within the village, the term "responsibility" was used in the interviews and the survey questionnaire. Three of the four PRDP-2 staff said that the SIT was responsible if the sanitation project failed, based on the ways in which the rules of the VC scheme were written. According to the

rules, SITs are responsible from the planning to implementation of VC schemes; those parties which are included in the SIT, such as some VC members, Union Parishad members, an engineer of LGED, and PRDP-2 staff, have collective responsibility, and the PRDP-2 staff I interviewed recognized this joint responsibility.

Perceptions of responsibility within this project seemed different from other similar undertakings. The field officers of the Bangladesh government (agriculture and veterinary) and the NGO staff admitted that they were entirely responsible for their services. A field officer said that, "as my department gave me proper facilities, I will be responsible for it if the service fails." This statement implies that the field officer was an active participant, and that residents were only receivers of the service. NGO staff in charge of micro credit and scholarships stated that "it is out of question that our services are failed... Because if we see our service may be going to fail, we will find another way to make it success. Then we make it success. So, we never make our service fail." This could indicate a sense of control and knowing what should be done. These individuals seem to carry all the responsibility for the success of the project or services, relating residents as simply receivers of this work. In Giddens (1984) terms, this could be a barrier to information sharing, as these individuals may feel that concerns coming from residents are misguided or uniformed, looking only to themselves or other experts as being able to

gauge the success of the project. This is indicative of the principal-agent problem, as those within the local bureaucracy could use their position to control resources, while using the bureaucratic structure as a foil against complaints from residents (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989).

In terms of this specific sanitation project, half of the VC members thought of themselves as responsible, though the rules provided that the SIT was responsible. In addition, all VC members felt that the VC members or VCC and VCS were responsible for the labor management of the project. Again, the project rules provided that the SIT was responsible[6]. One PRDP-2 staff also thought that the VC was responsible for labor management, and another answered that both SIT and the VC were responsible for this aspect of the project. While PRDP-2 staff members gave some responsibility to the VC, the VC actively took responsibility. This relationship between the VC (residents) and the external organization (PRDP-2) was clearly different from that of the field officers and NGO staff. By being actively engaged in the interpretation of their roles within the project, VC members were creating and maintaining new structural conditions to help enable the project to move forward, as well as potentially increasing their own standing within the

[6] According to the VC scheme guideline, "SIT convener and advisor would jointly take responsibility of the collection of contribution and the management of labor." A SIT convener is the representative from a VC, and A SIT advisor is a Union Parishad member.

community.

The VC schemes were a precious opportunity for residents to improve their living environment. Although the VC was not solely responsible for the implementation of the project, there might be some pressure that the village might not have a VC scheme in the future if the implementation failed. These structures of responsibility and pressure could enable the VC to take responsibility actively, which would also lead to constraining the VC from abusing their power. This is an exemplary example of Giddens' (1984) concern with structuration, and how various nodes within networks reinforce and check each other in a dialectical manner. According to Giddens, structures provide guidelines for behaviors, while the behaviors of those within these structures maintain and reinforce the guidelines. According to some of my observations, VC members, while happy to be in a position of power, actually felt powerless with regards to some of the procedures provided by PRDP-2.

Accountability between the VC and the residents

Another important aspect of the accountability within the project was between the VC and residents. This accountability is downward as the VC was held accountable by residents for various aspects of the project. PRDP-2 expected the VCs to respond to residents' needs and the public interest when they were generating the VC scheme. This

means that the VC should be accountable for their decisions and actions to residents.

Even though the proposed project affects the residents' lives, and it is an important task for the VC to know which project residents need, none of the VC members said that they had asked about the residents' needs. Some of the VC members said that they would not discuss the VC scheme until it was finalized. This could imply that there was no chance of rectification by the residents, constraining their actions. Although residents can attend the VCM when the VC scheme is discussed if they know when it will be held, there were only a few names of residents on the attendance list for that particular meeting. This relationship is expected to be "political" within the formal structure of PRDP-2, as it is expected the VCs would respond to residents' needs. However, the type of accountability seemed "professional" in the village; the VC was in a position to know what was best for the community, and residents needed to follow that decision.

In addition to information pertaining to the project aims, the ways in which it would be implemented could be important for residents. They are, after all, expected to bear some cost, and might need to take part in project activities. Most of those who participated in the sanitation project (97.3%) answered that they knew how much they should pay for the sanitation before it began. Regarding other information such as what fund was used for the sanitation project, about 80% of males and 33% of the female

respondents answered that they were aware of these plans. Only four (all male) out of 98 (8.5%) survey respondents knew the total budget of the project. This information was gleaned from either the VCM or through the VCC, not from the announcement board on which information about the total budget, and how much of the cost each party (JICA, residents, etc.) was to bear, was set up in the village for each VC scheme. It should be noted that this budget was publicized on the board for a few months near the mosque and the primary school that are located in the central part of the village, so the information was available. A majority of the respondents (78%), however, said that they were not interested in this type of information. A resident said "what will we do by knowing that information?" This could imply that the large picture of the project was out of the residents' realm of influence, and their main concern was with their own role and participation in the project, on which they seemed to feel they were sufficiently informed. Also, this residents' weak interest in knowing information about the project might indicate the residents' trust in the VC. If residents were doubtful of abuse of power by the VC in the sanitation project, they may have been more eager to obtain information about the project in order to detect the VC's abuse of power.

Besides the announcement board, a question arose regarding whether the VC members gave residents enough information about the project. Fifteen of the 16 male VC

members said that they told others about the project, which typically meant talking to friends, relatives and neighbors, and no female members said that they had talked to others. One VC member said that he gave out information because, "if I tell the villagers what was talked in the VC meeting, they would try to complete the sanitation construction," which was a typical response among VC members. This seems to reflect an attitude among VC members and providing information to residents in order to make sure the residents were cooperating with the VC members in the sanitation project. Given their position between PRDP-2 and residents, this is not surprising, as these individuals have a vested interest in maintaining a consistent and consensual front within the village. However, if a project that does not require residents' contribution such as money and labor is selected, VC's motivation to give information to residents might be lower.

An important factor of accountability is that residents recognize their right to call for an account if something is not to their liking. In order to do this, they should know who to go to for the account. A majority of respondents (79%) felt that the VC members were responsible for the project, whereas 9% thought it was the residents that should be held accountable, 5% said JICA and 3% looked to the village leader (VCC). To reiterate, the rule devised by PRDP-2 specifically stated that the SIT was responsible for the project. Residents could go to the VC members to ask questions, as these individuals could be

contacted directly.

Looking more closely at the VC members, half felt that they themselves were responsible for the project, while four looked to external organizations (e.g., government, project staff). Three of the 18 said that responsibility was controlled by the VCC and/or VCS, one said it was the residents, and one answered that both the VC and external organizations were ultimately accountable. Comparing these findings to those of the survey in which 79% of the respondents thought that the VC members were responsible, it can be argued that there was a gap of perceived accountability between the residents and the VC members. While the VC does not bear all responsibility of the project according to formal rules, residents tended to see this group in that way. This may be due to the work that the residents could see in the village, such as collecting money from the residents and labor management, which was done by the VC.

Accountability between the VC members

While the VC is accountable in both an upward and downward direction in relation to the sanitation project's implementation, it has to maintain transparency in information-sharing and decision-making in order to work in a collaborative manner. Decision-making about VC activities seemed to concentrate on the VCC and VCS. Concerning the project proposal, there was no one who answered being involved except

these individuals. Concerning labor management, one VC member, in addition to the VCC and VCS, discussed being involved in any way. However, the decision-making procedures seemed to be transparent within the VC. The VCC talked about the decision-making procedure of the VC scheme, noting that "first, I and VCS meet and talk about the project. After we make a decision, I inform the other VC members that we are going to take this kind of project, so whether you agree with us or not. Then they express their opinion, and then, we go for it." All VC members said that all information was shared among the VC members.

The VCC and VCS also played a major role in project activities; more than 80% of the residents who participated in the sanitation project said that they obtained the cost of participation directly from the VCC or VCS. The VC members said that the VCC and VCS collected money from the residents. When I asked the VCC why other members did not help him, he answered:

> They can not give us a time, they are all busy with their work. They used to say that "we all give you responsibility to two of you (VCC and VCS), and it is your duty. We would not have any headache about this. So, do your duty, and we are not asking you any question for coming situation. We are not going to interrupt your matters. We just attend the meeting."

This could represent relatively trustful relationships between VCC and VCS, and other VC members. However, the VCC and VCS consulted with other VC members about their decision, as mentioned above, pulling down possible barriers to implementation of the project if something went wrong. It was indicated that the characteristics of the VC might influence this decision-making procedure and information-sharing. Asked about the qualifications for becoming a VC member, the VCC answered:

> I think there are some qualifications to become a VC member. They must be literate, should spend their time for community, and should be honest. Another thing is that they should have money. If a person has these four things, that person might be a member.

When asked why the VC members have to have money, he answered:

> In our village, many people are poor. When we do a project, some villagers are difficult to pay. In this case, those who have lots of money can give their money at that time, and we can do the project. We are not going to lose the project. After the project begins, if those who could not pay are able to pay, they can pay us in a long term. For this reason, the (VC) members must have money. They can help other people.

This statement implied that the VC members had joint-responsibility in the financial

matter of the sanitation project. The VCC said there were 10 to 15 residents who could not pay 300 taka by the due date. It may be difficult for a small number of people to bear the financial burden on behalf of poor people. The VCC and VCS might need the VC members to take responsibility together by involving them in the decision-making processes. In doing so, the VCC and VCS could make sure that other members would cooperate if something happened. This can also be seen as a structural barrier to some people, as membership into the VC – a committee with at least some power over the project – would not be open to everyone. White (1992) has argued that such exclusionary practices typically lead to decisions which are most beneficial to those already in power. This may lead to the need for VC members to check the decision-making of the VCC and VCS's. One of the main concerns is being able to support these decisions, as the whole VC was regarded as accountable for the project by the residents. These other VC members could be blamed if the decisions and actions of their leaders failed.

There did seem to be some horizontal accountability between the VCC, VCS, and other VC members. Decisions within the organization could affect different individuals who would need the ability to rectify problems when consulted. In this kind of situation, the idea of joint responsibility among the VC members could be perceived by residents as promoting transparency in information-sharing and decision-making. These

constrained the leading members from abusing their power, as well as the other VC members from abandoning their responsibilities. The mattabors' monopoly on information that has been criticized by governmental field officers and NGO staff was not seen in this village, which is not surprising given the relative trustworthiness between the mattabors and residents. It could be said that the transparency of decision-making and information within the VC was maintained at this point. This could be one major step in becoming a sustainable CBO.

Conclusion

Development projects within developing countries and villages are meant to provide new opportunities to residents, and while the intentions of these projects may be appropriate, things can go wrong. This study shows that when asked about accountability, members of the project team often felt themselves responsible, though some also felt that others above and/or below them should share the blame. The upward accountability mechanisms from the VC to PRDP-2 had been formalized, though this did not stop some members from looking to others for help. However, this upward accountability could place constraints on the VC, in that they had to succeed in the sanitation project. There might also be pressure of residents on the VC to succeed in the sanitation project's implementation. These structures enabled the VC to strive to fulfill their duty, and to take

responsibility other than that prescribed in the rules such as labor management.

The contrary was found, regarding the relationship between the VC and residents. While the VC members provided residents with minimum information about the project implementation, such as the cost for participation, they did not ask residents what project was needed. As predicted, the downward accountability mechanisms from the VC to residents seemed to be weaker than the upward one from the VC to PRDP-2.

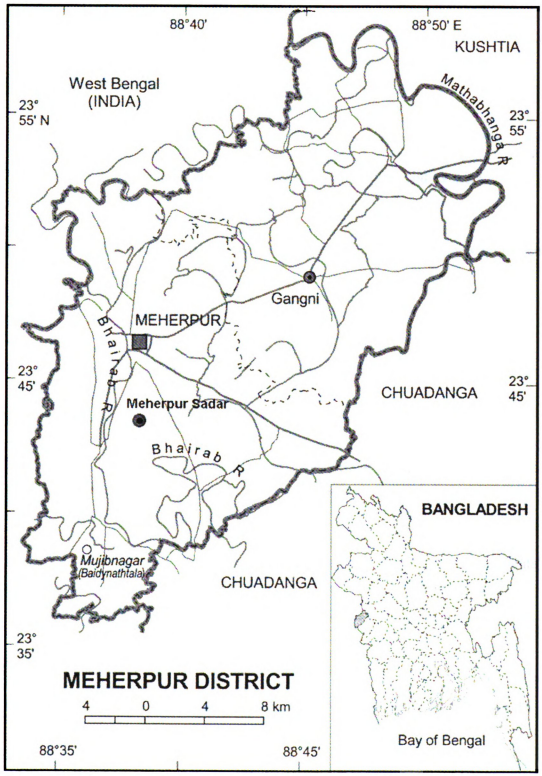
In addition, none of the VC members said that they involved residents in decision-making processes. In the framework of PRDP-2, the VC was expected to represent residents' needs in the VC scheme, and thus, the accountability mechanisms between the VC and residents should be "political." This should be qualified, however, as survey results and interviews with residents seemed to show that the relationship was actually closer to a professional mechanism of accountability, in the sense that the VC perceived themselves as capable of deciding what the village needed. If this was felt to be problematic, it could be rectified by promoting the residents to attend the VCM in which selection of the VC scheme was discussed. This could also strengthen the downward accountability that is required for residents' empowerment.

Village residents, as predicted, looked mostly to the VC for responsibility of the project, whereas some VC members felt other parties, such as the external organizations

and residents, were responsible. This difference in expectations of accountability point to a gap between the residents and the VC members, which could lead to problems if the project was to fail. Given that at least some VC members thought that the external organizations were responsible for the project, while the residents saw the VC as responsible, calls for accountability within the village could bring about conflict as VC members may refuse to be held accountable (Schonbach, 1990).

The village that I studied, at least at this point, seems to have no major problems, even though the possibility exists for misunderstandings to emerge. This is based on the trust I observed within the village toward VC members, which means the problems pointed to above have not yet arisen. This could be due, at least in part, to good communication within the village, though not through the formal community-based channels, such as the notice board. Instead, good communication, in this sense, refers to informal daily contact between and among residents and VC members. The importance and role of formal community-based channels of communication needs to be explored further in future studies that take place in other places that are concerned with questions of accountability.

Appendix A. Map of Meherpur



Appendix B. Survey questionnaire

1. Are you familiar with the Village Committee? (Yes/No)

2. If yes, what is the task of the Village Committee? _____

3. Have you attended the Village Committee Meetings? (Yes/No)

4. Why or why not? _____

5. Are you familiar with the Union Coordinating Committee and its meetings? (Yes/No)

6. Were you aware of the meeting that focused on selecting the Village Committee members? (Yes/No)

7. Did you attend it? (Yes/No)

8. Do you know what fund was used for the sanitation project? (Yes/No)

9. If yes, where did the fund come from? _____

10. If yes, how did you learn about it? (attend the Village Committee Meeting/from the Village Committee members/from the residents/from the notice board/no information/others)

11. If you answered "from the Village Committee members" or "from the residents", that person is: (the same Gusti member/the same Para member/the Para Matabbor/the Gram Matabbor). Who is it? _____

12. Did you join the sanitation project? (Yes/No)

13. If yes, did you know how much you should pay for the sanitation beforehand? (Yes/No)

14. If yes, how did you learn about the payment? (attend the Village Committee Meeting/from the Village Committee members/ from the residents/from the notice board/no information/others)

15. If you answered "from the Village Committee members" or "from the residents", that person is: (the same Gusti member/the same Para member/the Para Matabbor/the Gram Matabbor). Who is it? _____

16. Do you know the total budget of the sanitation project? (Yes/No)

17. If yes, where did you get that information? (attend the Village Committee Meeting/ from the Village Committee members/ from the residents/ from the notice board/no information/others)

18. If you answered "from the Village Committee members" or "from the residents", that person is: (the same Gusti member/the same Para member/the Para Matabbor/the Gram Matabbor). Who is it? _____

19. What information would you like to know about the sanitation project? (the total budget /the accounts /the work schedule /others_____)

20. Do you think you had a chance to give your opinion about what project this village needed? (Yes/No)

21. If yes, how? (Directly in the Village Committee meeting/through the Village Committee members/through the residents/other)

22. If you answered "through the Village Committee members" or "through the residents", that person is: (the same Gusti member/the same Para member/the Para Matabbor/the Gram Matabbor). Who is it? _____

23. Did you notice the notice board? (Yes/No)

24. Do you know what information is on it? (Yes/No)

25. Do you know the government services that are offered by the Health Department?

(Yes/No)?

26. Have you utilized them? (Yes/No)

27. If yes, how did you know about them? _____

28. Do you know the government services that are offered by the Agriculture Department? (Yes/No)

29. Have you utilized them? (Yes/No)

30. If yes, how did you know about them? _____

31. Do you know the government services that are offered by the Livestock Department? (Yes/No)

32. Have you utilized them? (Yes/No)

33. If yes, how did you know about them? _____

34. If the sanitation project fails, who is responsible for it? (the village leader/the Village Committee members/the Scheme Implementation Team (SIT)/all the residents/the local government/JICA/others)

35. If collecting the sanitation cost from the residents fails, who is responsible for it? (the village leader/the Village Committee members/ the Scheme Implementation Team (SIT) /all the residents/the local government/JICA/others)

36. Do you think the Village Committee works for the whole community or only for certain people? (whole community/only certain people/both/none/don't know)

37. Are you satisfied with the Village Committee? (very satisfied/somewhat satisfied/neither satisfied nor dissatisfied/somewhat dissatisfied/very dissatisfied/don't know)

38. Why or why not? _____

39. Do you think this village has changed since the Village Committee was established? (very changed/somewhat changed/unchanged/don't know)

40. If you answered, "very or somewhat changed", have the changes been positive, negative, or they don't really matter? (better/worse/doesn't matter/don't know)

41. Age _____

42. Sex (male/female)

43. Gusti _____

44. Para _____

45. How many years of the formal education do you have? _____

46. What is the main source of your household income? _____

47. How much is the last year's annual income? _____

48. What organizations are you involved with in this village? _____

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