Assessing the political determinants of incentives of Union Parishad leaders in creating and strengthening inclusive, participatory and pro-poor governance

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CARE INTERNATIONAL REPORT

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Acknowledgements

We are grateful to: Maria Cavatore of CARE UK; Anowarul Huq of CARE-Dhaka office; and the following members from the SALT, PQU, and SETU and PRODUCE projects at CARE-Bangladesh— Murad Bin Aziz, Trishandha Rani Dey, Md. Atiqur Rahman, Md. Shamsuzzaman Siddiqui, M Mizanur Rahman, S M Abdul Bari, Md. Taslim Uddin, Camellya Hasan. We thank them for their insights and help with data collection and support. Our greatest debt is to the interviewees of Bothlagari, Khoshabari, Sharpukur union parishads for agreeing to participate in this study.

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Published by CARE International May 2014

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AL	Awami League
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
FFW	Food for Work
FGD	Focus group discussion
JI	Jamaat E Islami
JP	Jatiya Party
KII	Key informant interview
LGSP	Local Government Support Program
MP	Members of parliament
SETU	Social Economic Transformation of the Ultra-Poor(SETU)
TR	Test Relief
UNO	Upzilla Nirbahi Officer
UP	Union Parishad
UZP	Upzilla Parishad
UZ	Upzilla
VGD	Vulnerable Group Development
VGF	Vulnerable Groups Feeding

Glossary

Deshi	from the same district/region
Gushti	clan/kin (related by blood)
Madrassah	Islamic school
Mandir	temple
Nolkoop	deep tubewell
Para	neighborhood
Samajikota	activities to maintain social relationship
Shalish	informal arbitration at the village level
Shobha	meeting
Shobhab Neta	natural leaders

Executive Summary

The study has a narrow focus; exploring the supply side (UP leaders' incentives; i.e., perceived rewards or sanctions for behavior) of the governance process. This study focuses on identifying and analyzing the political determinants of incentives of Union Parishad (UP) leaders in promoting and nurturing inclusive, participatory and pro-poor governance mechanisms at the UP level. The study explores to what extent various new laws (i.e. UP Act 2009) and institutions of social accountability (i.e. Ward Shobha, Open Budget, Standing Committees etc) have succeeded in generating (or not) such incentives among UP leaders.

The empirical context of the study is the governance process of three UPs where CARE Bangladesh has launched the three different programs to improve service delivery and create participatory inclusive spaces. The three UPs where the data were collected from are Botlagari and Khokhshabari unions in Nilphamari district and Sharpukur union in Lalmonirhat district. Both districts are in North Bengal. The rationale for selecting these sites is that they provide contexts where citizens, particularly poor citizens, have been mobilized by NGOs (CARE Bangladesh, but not exclusively) for the last few years to create demands for pro-poor and participatory governance. Primary data have been collected through using semi structured interviews with UP chair, members, secretary and political leaders in each UPs. In total 39 in-depth semi structured interviews were collected and six (6) of FGDs were conducted with natural leaders. Secondary data on local government systems in Bangladesh and nature of political settlements in Bangladesh were collected through desk review and document analysis.

The two analytical approaches elite political settlement (PS) and 'political market imperfections' are used to examine UP leader's electoral incentives.

The idea of *political settlement* according to di John and Putzel (2009, p4) 'refers to the balance or distribution of power between contending social groups and social classes....' Elite political settlement essentially evolves through elites groups bargaining among themselves to establish institutional arrangements that can distribute resources in a way that satisfies all groups. The most critical issue in any elite political settlement (or between elites and non elites) is that the distribution of resources must be compatible with the relative power of the social groups. [I]n developing countries, 'the distribution of power underlying political settlement is shaped heavily by informal institutions-primarily patron-client rules governing the allocation of economic benefits' (Khan 2010, p4). Political settlements in this context are typically asymmetrical clientelist political settlement (instead of symmetrical relations between public representatives and citizens where the latter can assert their formal rights). When clientelistic political settlement operates in a competitive democratic setting, as in Bangladesh, what we get is competitive clientelistic settlement that largely structures the incentives of the relevant actors or groups whether elite or non elite.

The '*political market imperfections*' approach emphasizes three types of imperfections in the relations between politicians (people representatives) and citizens. These are: lack of credibility in relation to promises made by the politicians to the citizens; insufficient information available to voters/citizens to judge politician's performance; and social divisions and fragmentation among voters/citizens as manifested in various forms of identity politics (Keefer and Khemani 2005).

The prevalence of such imperfections affects the electoral accountability dynamics in a significant way. Such dynamics determine the incentive structure of the politicians in delivering services or public goods in specific ways or generate (or not) their 'political will' to nurture pro-poor and inclusive/participatory governance.

Electoral *accountability* also known as *vertical accountability* is exercised by voicing citizens' preferences through periodic elections. Electoral accountability only allows citizens to exact accountability of their elected representatives on a certain intervals (every five years in the case of UP in Bangladesh). Social accountability makes possible to overcome the limitations of the electoral accountability by allowing citizens to seek accountability, monitor leaders' performances, and negotiate policy decisions and management of developmental allocations and modalities of service deliveries in a routine and ongoing basis.

De facto electoral/vertical accountability processes: How does a strong incentive to win election influence this?
Core to the understanding of politicians' incentives (UP leaders in our case) is the de facto functioning of electoral accountability. UP leaders are pre-dominantly motivated to retain their incumbent status in the next round of elections. UP leaders have a political imperative to satisfy the demands of various groups to win elections. These demands from various groups are often conflicting and zero-sum oriented (i.e., if one groups demand is satisfied other groups lose). These groups include: influential intermediaries or core constituencies (i.e., political/social elites, such as large land owners, political leaders, businessmen, teachers, former government employees etc); vote banks and the 'residual' common voters. Things are made more complex by

the fact that the demands are generated from an electoral base characterized by class differentiations, religious identity, regionalism (*deshi*), kith and kin (*gushti*), and local considerations. Maintaining a dynamic balance between patronage distribution among selective clienteles for winning elections and pursuing activities in nonpartisan/impersonal manner to project one as a 'champion of equity and fairness,' is an imperative, as well as a constant challenge, for the UP leaders.

Winning elections – does party affiliation matter?
Party affiliations tend to matter very little (roughly around 10-15% according to the subjective assessment of our respondents, including UP leaders) for securing victory in elections. Also such affiliation only matters for the UP Chairperson and hardly at all for any of the UP Members. This is different from the Parliamentary and UPZ elections where party affiliation plays a key role. Evidence suggests that the probability of winning elections tends to become higher in some cases when the party identification of UP chairpersons aligns with that of the UZP chairpersons or MP since citizens also tend to notice political networking capacities of the UP leaders while electing them.

Voters' knowledge about UP leaders' performance
Compared to past decades, voters' knowledge about the performance of UP leaders has increased considerably in recent years. This is due to: the enactment of various UP related laws/rules (2009 Act, provisions for involving citizens in Standing Committees); introduction of social accountability mechanisms in developmental programs (public meeting for LGSP, for instance); introduction of information technology (IT kiosk) and institutional developments within UP (Ward Shabha, Standing Committees, Open Budget Session, etc); and citizen/ beneficiary mobilization by the NGOs.

Who can win elections?
A few individual/personality traits are generic to the UP leaders who are considered winnable. These include: a high degree of social capital (i.e., social relations and networks) possessed by the individual leader, being pro-active and efficient in mediating conflicts, and also being highly sensitive and capable of fulfilling personal welfare – oriented needs of the community members. Ascriptive status (family, kinship, religious and regional identity) of the leader is also critical. All these attributes mentioned above need to be possessed by prospective electoral candidates as an initial endowment (given minimum ascriptive factors) for being successful in public life. These are necessary conditions but not sufficient.

Other conditions that need to be satisfied are more politico-strategic in nature. The most important strategy is to enhance one's network capital. Network capital is ensured through maintaining good networks with some elements of the elite section, as well as the educated middle class, who act as interlocutors between the UP leaders and the community, especially the poor. In the electoral process these groups are the *core constituency* for any candidates and tapping into their clientelistic base is deemed critical for winning elections. These electoral calculations cut across gender.

Patron-clientelistic based accountability process
Accountability of UP leadership is ensured through the formal process of electoral or direct accountability. Equally important is the informal accountability process that is channeled through pervasive patron-client system and these clientelistic based accountability mechanisms operate on the basis of *both social obligations and political calculations* although both these tend to overlap in real practice.

Social obligations based patronage allocation process (for safety nets, services) is largely driven by somewhat 'pre-political' as well as primordial norms, values and expectations underpinned by the sociology of kith and kin, regional and religious identity, and the logic of the locale i.e., *para* or neighborhood based identities. *Political calculation* based accountability primarily involved the elites and middle class political entrepreneurs to whom the UP leadership is politically obligated to return favor due to the political support lent to them by the former classes during the elections. Here, the patronage distributions (local public goods, services, safety net provisions) follow the logic of strategic political *quid pro quo* rationales devoid of any ascriptive considerations. The political calculation based patronage allocations also bring in the poor, who are clients of the elites, as beneficiaries of patronage, and the poor, who are not part of any elite network, tend to get excluded.

Nature and dynamics of local level political settlement
Elite political settlement at the UP level is generally underpinned by a de facto consensus of incentives and interests of the local elites. Constellations of local elites vary across different Unions but they are typically politicians (affiliated with the four major parties of Bangladesh-AL, BNP, JP and JI), large landowners, businessmen, teachers, former government officials etc. Local level elite political settlement potentially contributes to securing greater resources from UZ chairperson and MP. These local level settlements also contain zero-sum elite led conflicts over allocation of resources whereby ruling party leaders at the Union level manage to largely capture the development resources meant for the poor.

Larger elite political settlement and their influence on up leaders
UP governance process is also embedded in the larger 'political society' (i.e, domain of political actors; Corbridge et al., 2005). To a considerable extent, the political space of UP leadership is determined by the nature of the clientelistic

politics of UZP chairperson and the local MP. Political space of UP leadership is considerably influenced by the nature of relationship it has vis-à-vis the local administration, especially the bureaucratic administration at the UZ level. Given the increasing political party influence on bureaucracy, the dividing line between political society and the bureaucratic administration has become blurred over time. This has led to an administrative interference on UP. Partisan considerations of the bureaucracy makes UP developmental programs and service delivery less pro-poor. The UP chairs having limited room for maneuver to ensure pro-poor outcomes.

Our study shows that electoral accountability can hardly account for the differing quality of governance in the three UPs studied. All chairpersons in the selected UPs have performed better in elections and won consecutive terms. The stark differences among the three UPs are in the domains of UP-political society and UP-bureaucracy relations. Nature of party affiliations across different tiers of local governance, the role of ruling party in the UP governance process, and the nature of the relation between the UP and bureaucracy seem to work as explanatory factors as to why varied forms of governance process exist in the three UPs.

The defacto dual authority and inclusive governance

In general, all three UPs are subject to de facto nature of dual authority of political elites and the UP members. The UP leaders we interviewed noted that though parties have no influence in electoral politics of UP but in terms of service delivery and allocation of resources they have good influence. The political elites we interviewed affirmed their authority as 'representative of the government' (read ruling party). In general the claims of the political elites tend to carry more weight. Our general observation is that this de facto dual authority at the UP level constrains chairperson to act independently to serve the poor constituency.

Gender, UP leader's incentive and local political settlement

The provision of reserved seats with direct elections at the UP level created scope for women to contest in local level elections in large numbers. Our data shows that (as with the male UP leaders) kinship, family's political capital, political party affiliation, all plays a key role in determining *which* women contest elections. Our findings show that women UP leaders do play a role in *shalish*, especially in cases where the issues deal with 'women's concerns' (i.e., marriage, divorce, domestic violence etc). They are able to do so because these issues are not in direct conflict with those related to patronage distribution and resources, thus not resisted by male UP leaders. Moreover, these cases can be treated as an 'individual' problem (i.e., the individual man is violent towards the wife) which does not challenge the local gender power structure. These indicate the limits women UP leaders face in delivering gender responsive governance outcomes and inclusive development.

Ward Shobha and other social accountability forums

One of the most important features of the UP Act 2009 is the introduction of Ward Shobha, a form of social accountability mechanism that engaged citizens on a larger scale. In general, the Ward Shobha has created an opportunity structure for the poor citizen to articulate their voices without fear since poor and women as a *collective* are confronting the UP leaders in an open and relatively larger congregation.

The majority of the UP leaders who we have interviewed agreed that the Ward Shobha and pre/open budget discussion types of public forums help them to get critical feedback on their performance as leaders, provide them with the opportunity to explain to the voters as to why they could not keep their electoral promises, and tend to reduce the tension that exists between the leaders and the voters. These social accountability forums are all the more politically salient for the poor since higher authority figures like UZP Chairpersons, UNO and sometimes even Deputy Commissioner (CEO of District administration) also frequently participate in these, which tends to magnify the accountability pressure on the UP leaders. However, our findings also show that some individuals still believe that they will be cut-off from the prevailing patronage network if they become too demanding and critical by taking advantage of the collective forum.

Poor women's participation at the local Ward Shobha and other places has increased, though the participation of women from middle and elite class is negligible. However we have no systematic evidence to conclude that increased participation by poor women's has led to their demands are seriously taken by the UP leaders beyond the usual shibboleths of pronouncing a few moral exhortations against such gender discriminatory practices.

Unintended consequences of UP Act 2009

There are two important features in the 2009 Act which have created (unintended) deleterious effects on the UP governance processes. The provision of no-confidence motion allows the Up to bring a no confidence motion against the chair if at least nine (9) out of 12 members cast no confidence vote. If this happens the chairperson will be disqualified to perform in the UP. The provision clearly has been introduced to check discretionary behavior and potential abuses by the chairperson. In practice, the provision has enabled the members of the UP to bargain with the chairperson to elicit illegal or undue favors, especially when it comes to issues related to safety net allocation.

Similar unintended consequences have been observed in the case of *paripotra* or government circulars which state that the standing committee for any project must include selected

individuals from the community and this should be approved by the UNO. This was clearly intended to institutionalize community's input into the project management or developmental allocation process. It also intended to enhance transparency of the UP governance process and UP's accountability to the community. What happens in reality is that the UNO asks the local leaders (of the ruling party) for the names to be included in the committees by passing the UP chairperson. In fact, the UNO is simply following the instruction/request of the local MP to consult with the UP based ruling political party leaders for preparing the list. Thus, the policy fails to ensure transparency and societal accountability fails and reinforces the control of the political elites on the UP project management.

Do the social accountability mechanisms change the UP leader's incentives to promote inclusive governance?

Our findings show that UP leaders, as equally true for any public representatives, are very reluctant to be subjected to accountability constraints, particularly of social accountability types, which tend to be more public and may also occasionally involve instant exposures to higher authorities. Though UP Act 2009 has created formal institutional spaces for UP's direct accountability and responsiveness to the citizens; these institutions tend to remain formalistic and ritualistic. Ward Shobhas or open budget sessions are being organized mainly to satisfy the formal mandate of the law. An important feature (or rather limitation) of the social accountability initiatives in our studied UPs is that these mainly involve the poor in the UP governance process only in the domain of safety net related activities. In the governance process of allocations of resources and selection of infrastructure development/ maintenance, poor citizens' participation as a collective social watchdog, tends to be negligible. In the latter domains, the UP members collude/collaborate with the political elites to allocate resources, with minimal formal or informal constraints, given the de facto absence of accountability mechanisms, either top-down bureaucratic or bottom-up social (i.e. lack of effective citizen's engagement since NGOs rarely involve poor in these domains).

Imperfect political market and its consequences

The study shows that politicians (UP leadership in our case) operating in a competitive clientelistic setting have relatively smaller stakes in providing *credible commitments/promises* to the amorphous electorates, particularly to the vast majority of the poor. Ensuring votes, hinges on the appeal of particularistic benefits and allocation of patronages to secure loyalty of the core constituencies, who largely handle the vote banks. The findings show this is largely true for the UP chairpersons, and perhaps less true for the UP members for various reasons.

Political markets are also imperfect due to *information asymmetry* between the politicians and the electorate. With regard to information asymmetry the vast majority of the poor voters suffer disproportionately than the elites. Although the poor tend to be less informed, our research findings reveal that they are more informed now than they were in the past about the performances of their UP representatives. This is principally due to the availability of newly supplied social accountability forums as well as advocacy by the external agencies (NGOs). Political market imperfections are also caused by *social divisions and fragmentations* among the voters. In our UPs, the community is fragmented by various identities (kinship, regionalism, localism) and voting patterns tend to be greatly influence by these primordial loyalties. Such fragmentation of voters has clearly weakened the electoral accountability mechanism to sanction poor-performing UP leaders. Ascriptive factors, rather than individual or collective performances, have become an important criterion for judging leadership. Consequently, voter fragmentation provides leadership with political incentives to allocate resources, to a significant extent, on the basis of the identity of the voters.

Section 1: Introduction, background and structure of the paper

In recent years, Bangladesh has taken significant measures to strengthen the local government system and increase citizen's involvement in governance processes at the local level. The Union Parishad is the lowest functioning administrative tier in local government. The UP system has been in place since the decade of 1970s. The UP consists of 12 members: one UP chairperson, nine general members and three women members in reserved seats.

Devolution of power to the UPs has taken place incrementally through various laws and Acts. However, the impact of these Acts and laws in promoting inclusive and pro-poor governance is mixed. The local government systems, particularly the UPs, are typified by the capture of political elites. Concerns exist around high levels of corruption, lack of responsiveness towards citizen's demands, and absence of citizen's inclusion/participation in governance processes.

In 2009, keeping in line with previous reforms, a new law, Union Parishad Act 2009, was enacted. This Act incorporates many provisions to turn the Union Parishads into effective and responsive institutions. This new Act recognizes the importance of community participation and stipulates that in each electoral ward a Ward Shobha will be constituted for citizen's engagement. The Act also incorporates a Citizen's Charter which states the rights of the citizens and responsibilities of the UP towards the community. The impact of this Act is yet to be systematically analyzed.

In this context, CARE Bangladesh has been implementing three different programs to improve service delivery and create participatory inclusive spaces. These are: Social Economic Transformation of the Ultra Poor (SETU) project; PRODUCE project; and the Building Pro-Poor, inclusive, gender sensitive Local Government project. Through these programs, CARE Bangladesh aims to address weak governance and unequal power distribution by building citizen's capacity and strengthening the ability of the local representatives to respond to these demands. These projects also used a number of interventions to make UPs more functional. These include: supporting the constitution and functioning of UP Standing Committees; ensuring regular functioning of the Village Court; ensuring that plans and budget are prepared with the active representations of UP representatives and the Natural Leaders (NL) who are trained by CARE (see Hinton 2010).

Previous research undertaken by CARE (Hinton 2010) has focused on the demand side of the governance process. It has provided an insight into the nature of citizens' engagement, especially looking at the emergence of Natural Leaders from poor and extreme poor groups and the impact of increased citizens' participation on service delivery. These previous research primarily focused on the following: a) engagement of poor and extreme poor citizen's and expression of their political agency through social accountability mechanisms; and b) how a stronger and representative civil society succeeded in being able to voice its demands and influence the UP members to deliver improved and better-targeted services. The findings of these studies highlighted the challenges regarding the relationship between state representatives and citizens, and in particular the fragile nature of UP body's responsiveness and accountability to its constituents. These findings also reveal the difficulty in clearly identifying the political determinants and the incentives which encourage and enable UP members to create and strengthen their accountability and responsiveness to the poor.

The present study has a narrow focus; exploring the supply side (UP leaders' incentives[1]) of the governance process. This study focuses on identifying and analyzing the political determinants of incentives of Union Parishad (UP) leaders in promoting and nurturing inclusive, participatory and pro-poor governance mechanisms at the UP level. Such forms of governance offer spaces for the poor to deal with the 'exclusion and inequity in the formal and informal realms' and help them to create and strengthen '...spaces for participation, thereby creating the conditions necessary for the extreme poor people to demand their rights and hold government to account' (Hinton 2010, p5). The study also explores to what extent various new laws (i.e. UP Act 2009) and institutions social accountability (i.e. Ward Shobha, Open Budget, Standing Committees etc) have succeeded in generating (or not) such incentives among UP leaders.

The empirical context of the study is the governance process of three UPs where CARE Bangladesh has launched the above mentioned programs – Social Economic Transformation of the Ultra Poor (SETU) project; PRODUCE project and Building Pro-poor, Inclusive and Gender Sensitive Governance project. The three UPs where the data were collected from are Botlagari and Khokhshabari unions in Nilphamari district and Sharpukur union in Lalmonirhat district. Both districts are in North Bengal. The rationale for selecting these sites is that they provide contexts where citizens, particularly poor citizens, have been mobilized by NGOs (CARE Bangladesh, but

1. Incentives means 'the rewards and punishments that are perceived by individuals to be related to their actions and those of others' (Ostrom 2002, cited in Mcloughlin and Bately 2012, p6).

not exclusively) for the last few years to create demands for pro-poor and participatory governance.

Our analysis in this paper centers around how UP leaders engage with poor citizens who are being mobilized by external agencies to initiate collective actions. The paper has the following structure. Section 2 examines the existing analytical approaches towards understanding political settlements and identifies which aspects are relevant for exploring political determinants of incentives of UP leaders. The methodology used to collect data is detailed in section 3.

In sections 4 to 7, we discuss the empirical findings of the study. Section 4 takes up an issue that is core to the understanding of politicians' incentives (UP leaders in our case)—the de facto functioning of electoral accountability. Retaining position in the UP is one of the central factors that determine the behavior of the UP leaders. We show that electoral incentives at times tend to overwhelm (i.e., leaders' failing to maintain the balance between satisfying electoral needs and preserving social justice) other considerations, such as, ensuring social equity and fair justice critical to the need for maintaining rural social stability. We explore issues that largely define UP leaders' incentives in this section. We investigate the following: whether political party affiliations matter-or not – to win elections; how the poor use formal and informal strategies to garner knowledge about the leaders' institutional performances; what are the concerns/demands of different classes of voters and how do these influence electoral accountability; how leaders are judged by the citizens and how these criteria used for judging UP leader's performance affect the strategic behavior of the leaders at present. The two analytical approaches elite political settlement (PS) and 'political market imperfections' are used to examine UP leader's electoral incentives.

In Section 5, we empirically show that the accountability of UP leadership is not only ensured through the formal process of electoral or direct accountability but also through informal processes. Informal processes that are channeled through pervasive patron-client system that tends to crisscross through various societal cleavages. These social cleavages include: economic/social classes, kith and kin, religious groups, regionalism and locality based identities. All of these cleavages are equally important in making UP leader's responsive. This section also analyzes two categories of clientelistic based accountability mechanisms: *social obligations and political calculations*, and show how the combined functioning of these results in accommodating 'deserving poor' in the patronage network, who tend to be otherwise excluded by the individual operations of these mechanisms.

Section 6 narrates and discusses the de facto elite political settlements at the UP, as well as, at the larger political society and state level. The section looks at the local and national (Upzilla, the next tier after the UP; politics of the local MP) levels of political influence on the governance of the UP. The section examines how the chairperson's political affiliation and the existence of de facto parallel authority and interference by the MP/UZP chairperson influence the local governance process. It also analyzes the political agency and autonomy of the UP chair and how the nature of the political settlements influences these aspects. In presenting this analysis, we provide a comparative picture of the three UPs in terms of political settlements, elite incentives and ensuing developmental consequences. We also briefly look at the gender dimension of political settlement and what does this imply for the gendered accountability process at the UP level. We argue that given the current elite settlement, possibilities for promoting women's rights and interests through a network of women leaders at present seem quite challenging.

We examine the effects of new laws and policies and institutional mechanisms of social accountability on the incentive structure of the UP leadership in section 7. The section explores issues such as, whether the Act enabled the UP leaders to serve their constituencies better or is it acting as a constraint in running administration and delivering services in an efficient, transparent and equitable manner. We also analyze whether and how the citizens, especially the poor and women, are taking advantage of the benefits associated with this Act. We explore the nature of citizen's participation in the pre and open budget meetings, standing committees etc; and how these forms of participation influence UP leader's incentives and behavior.

In Section 8, we present concluding observations by highlighting the analytical implications (related to political determinants of elite incentives) and policy/program relevance of the findings of the study.

Section 2: Analytical approaches

The study attempts to investigate the political determinants behind UP leaders' incentives through the analytical lenses of 'political settlement' and 'political market imperfections' theories.

The idea of *political settlement* according to di John and Putzel (2009, p4) 'refers to the balance or distribution of power between contending social groups and social classes ...' Elite political settlement essentially evolves through elites groups bargaining among themselves to establish institutional arrangements that can distribute resources in a way that satisfies all groups. The most critical issue in any elite political settlement (or between elites and non elites) is that the distribution of resources must be compatible with the relative power of the social groups. This point is clearly articulated in the definition of political settlement offered by Khan (2010, p8): political settlement involves '... a series of institutional and distributive compromises that ensure that the distribution of benefits is in line with the underlying distribution of power'. Such distribution of economic benefits is supported by both formal and informal institutions, actually much more by the latter institutions in a developing economy like Bangladesh. Political settlement essentially leads to an institutional equilibrium and this equilibrium must ensure that benefits are secured by the dominant groups.

We define power (following Khan) as holding power, which is 'the capability of an individual or group to engage and survive in conflicts' (p4). '[I]n developing countries, the distribution of power underlying political settlement is shaped heavily by informal institutions-primarily patron client rules governing the allocation of economic benefits' (ibid). Political settlements in this context are typically clientelist political settlement. When clientelistic political settlement operates in a competitive democratic setting, as in Bangladesh, what we get is competitive clientelistic settlement that largely structures the incentives of the relevant actors or groups whether elite or non elite.

The '*political market imperfections*' approach emphasizes three types of imperfections in the relations between politicians (people representatives) and citizens. These are: lack of credibility in relation to promises made by the politicians to the citizens; insufficient information available to voters/citizens to judge politician's performance; and social divisions and fragmentation among voters/citizens as manifested in various forms of identity politics (Keefer and Khemani 2005).

The prevalence of such imperfections affects the electoral accountability dynamics in a significant way. Such dynamics determine the incentive structure of the politicians in delivering services or public goods in specific ways or generate (or not) their 'political will' to nurture pro-poor and inclusive/participatory governance. As this study shows, the political market imperfections do not affect voters/citizens in a uniform fashion. Elites, poor, women, and minority groups, given their differential economic, social, political and ideological resource endowments, tend to be affected by the imperfections in different ways; either positively or in a negative manner or in some combinations of the two.

The study also reveals that other broader structural factors that impinge on the impacts of these imperfections are: the nature of party-state or party-society relations (whether partyarchal[2] or not); the character of the politics-whether *programmatic* (i.e., where politicians or party offer particular policy positions and attempts to stick to these due to its prior electoral commitment to specific constituencies) or *clientelistic* (i.e., party/politicians largely cater to the specific needs of the elite patrons who have greater power to mobilize large number of clients in the society; the politicians' position shifts following the interests of these elites).

One of the central issues in this paper is to examine the de facto nature of accountability between the public representatives and the citizens. *Accountability* is defined as obligation of the power holders to account for and take responsibility for their actions. In a formal sense UP leaders are accountable to the citizens mainly through *electoral accountability* also known as *vertical accountability*. This type of accountability is exercised by voicing citizens' preferences through periodic elections. Electoral accountability only allows citizens to exact accountability of their elected representatives on a certain intervals (every five years in the case of UP in Bangladesh). This deprives the citizens to make their elected leaders accountable to them during the interim period between two elections. *Social accountability* makes possible to overcome the limitations of the electoral accountability by allowing citizens to seek accountability, monitor leaders' performances, and negotiate policy decisions and management of developmental allocations and modalities of service deliveries in a routine and ongoing basis. This practice of citizens or civil society organizations (CSO) to directly exacting accountability of the elected leaders is known as social accountability.

2. Partyarchy is defined as a democratic political system in which 'political parties monopolize the formal political process and politicize society along party lines' (Coppedge 1994, p19). For a systematic analysis of partyarchy in Bangladesh, see Hassan (2012).

Section 3: Methodology

The study is mainly based on the primary data collected in three UPs based in the North of Bangladesh. Primary data have been collected through using different qualitative methods. Secondary data on local government systems in Bangladesh and nature of political settlements in Bangladesh were collected through desk review and document analysis. These included previous evaluation reports on programs implemented by CARE Bangladesh and other research reports produced by CARE Bangladesh, and studies on local governance produced by academics and experts. A senior group of researchers, consisting of 8 members from SALT team of CARE Bangladesh, collected data over a four-week period in December 2012 and January 2013. The field work contained repeat visits to the research sites. The SALT team members were previously known to the interviewees and had good knowledge of the local context. These made establishing rapport with the interviewees and gaining their trust easier.

3.1 Research site selection

Three Union Parishads (UP) were selected from three Upazilas (UZ) and two districts. At least two of the three programs of CARE Bangladesh are being implemented in each of these UPs, which allowed for exploring the various programmatic aspects. The three UPs were selected on the basis of program performance: good, middling and bad. The ranking was determined by the *nature* and *quality* of inclusive governance (citizens' participation, accountability process, and responsiveness of the UP leadership) in each UP based on discussions with the SALT team and also information from previous evaluation reports produced on different CARE Bangladesh programs.

Given that there may be a host of other factors that tend to impinge on the incentive structure and behavior of the UP leaders, the following factors were considered when selecting these research sites. These included proximity to the urban centers, class structure, economic conditions, natural setting. By selecting three UPs which are very similar in relation to these factors the study tried to minimize the influences of these variables and concentrate more on the political/governance determinants.

3.2 Research methods

The study used three types of qualitative research methods for data collection: Key Informant Interviews (KII); Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and secondary document analysis (the latter was discussed above).

Categories of respondents and their number in each UP were the following:

- Three (3) UP Chairperson (KII); one from each union
- Four (4) male UP members (KII) in each union
- Two (2) female UP members (KII) in each union
- Two (2) educated, prominent, and non-partisan citizen of the UP (KII) in each union
- Three (3) political leaders belonging to Awami League, Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Jatiya Party or Jamaat E Islami (KII) in each union
- Three (3) Up Secretary – one from each union (KII)
- Two (2) FGDs with a group (7-10) of natural leaders (*Shobhab Neta*) in each union

In total, 39 in-depth semi structured interviews were collected and six (6) of FGDs were conducted.

All interviewees were asked questions on: the nature of local level political settlements; the influence of electoral accountability on UP leaders; existing social accountability mechanisms and quality of people's participation; the influence of political parties and autonomy of UP leaders in decision making; and the impact of UP Act 2009 on behavior of the UP leaders. This allowed for categorizing the various explanations offered by different actors regarding these issues; cross check information; and identify common trends in the analysis proffered by these categories of interviewees and also across the three (3) UPs. The interviewees were asked to cite/narrate incidents related to their actual experience/governance practices which would illustrate their points. This strategy helped in moving beyond the usual normative answers provided by interviewees when sensitive matters are investigated. It also helped to capture what the UP leader's actual practice. Document analysis and previous research reports were used for supplementing the findings. All of these helped in triangulating the findings of this study.

In order to ensure quality of the data, the data collection process included repeat visits, which helped in filling the initial gaps identified in the interviews. The interviews were transcribed as soon as they were completed and sent electronically to the consultants, which allowed for providing comments while the field work was being conducted. Two workshops were organized during the data collection process with the SALT team members. The initial planning workshop was held to provide training to the SALT team members and design field work. Another workshop was organized after the first phase of interviews for reconnaissance purposes. The first draft of the paper was shared with the Murad Bin Aziz of the SALT team for comments on interpretations of the data.

Section 4: De facto electoral/vertical accountability processes

4.1 Strong incentive to win future elections: How does this effect electoral accountability?

For most UP leaders, winning elections is not a one shot game. They are pre-dominantly motivated to retain their incumbent status in the next round of elections. This incentive largely influences their behavior and actions as public representatives. This means political imperative of satisfying the demands (often conflicting and zero-sum oriented) of various groups of influential intermediaries or core constituencies (defined below), vote banks and 'residual' common voters — become a priority task for them. Things are made more complex by the fact that the demands are generated from an electoral base characterized by class differentiations, religious identity, regionalism (*deshi*), kith and kin (*gushti*), and local considerations.

For a typical UP Chairperson, the juggling act of serving the individualistic and collective needs of the voters involves various strategic considerations. It ranges from very sensitive issues, such as meeting of the needs (through charity if necessary) of an individual in distress (e.g. dowry, sickness etc) or maintaining good personal relations (*shamajikota*) in the community (maintaining and enhancing individual social capital) to satisfying the need of influential elites (i.e. vote bank, local intermediaries) by ruthlessly ignoring, if electoral logic demands, the interests of poor individuals/community (i.e., playing a blatantly partisan role in a mediation or allocating safety net provision to well-off kith and kin by depriving deserving group of poor). It should be noted that being partisan in a mediation is the riskiest political decision that one can make. Most UP leaders will try to avoid being seen as partisan since they need to be perceived by the community member as 'just and fair' while dispensing justice related activities, both, formal (i.e. Village Court, Arbitration Council[3]) and informal (i.e. *shalish*[4]). Maintaining a dynamic balance between patronage distribution among selective clienteles for winning elections and pursuing impersonal activities to project one as a 'champion of equity and fairness,' is an imperative as well as a constant challenge for the UP leaders. But this is critical for UP leaders since their political survival and electoral success are largely contingent upon their capability to sustain such balance.

4.2 Winning elections – does party affiliation matter?

Party affiliations tend to matter very little (roughly around 10-15% according to the subjective assessment of our respondents, including UP leaders) for securing victory in elections. Also such affiliation only matters for the UP Chairperson and hardly at all for any of the UP Members. This is in sharp contrast to parliamentary elections where party identity matters hugely for success in securing votes. Party identity also matter for UZP election to a considerable extent. Even then, for a UP leader, having visible relations with the local UZP Chairperson or MP with similar political identity is considered as an asset, which contributes to the enhancement of their political or network capital. Evidence suggests that the probability of winning elections tends to become higher in some cases when the party identification of UP chairpersons aligns with that of the UZP chairpersons or MP since citizens also tend to notice political networking capacities of the UP leaders while electing them.

4.3 Voters' knowledge about UP leaders' performance:

Chairperson of one of the UP studied noted that usually people (of all classes) hardly show any interest in the functioning of a UP. It is only when they hear about a new development project or service delivery program being initiated, they begin to take notice of the UP governance processes. People's awareness and their incentives to engage with the UP are clearly connected with the tangible programs that they feel they need to engage with. For the elites, the incentives are related to ensuring their involvement with the decision making process linked to projects' site selection and their de facto control over patronage distribution. For the poor, the concern is predominantly ensuring their names in the beneficiaries' lists. For the elites, performance evaluations of UP leaders are, therefore, largely tied to the nature of patronage distribution. For the poor, the priority issue is to see whether fairness and equity considerations have played any role in the distribution process of various welfare schemes run by the UP.

Compared to past decades, voters' knowledge about the performance of UP leaders has increased considerably in recent years. This is due to: the enactment of various UP related laws/rules (2009 Act, provisions for involving citizens in Standing Committees); introduction of social accountability mechanisms in developmental programs (public meeting for LGSP, for instance); introduction of information technology (IT kiosk) and institutional

3. Village Court is a UP based court with limited jurisdiction; Arbitration Council is a mediation mechanism in the which deals only with family laws
4. Informal community/village level mediation

developments within UP (Ward Shabha, Standing Committees, Open Budget Session, etc); and citizen/ beneficiary mobilization by the NGOs. Standing Committees now engage social and political elites, educated middle class (school teachers, social workers) and 'natural leaders' (*Shobhab Neta*) from the poorer section of the community (identified and nurtured by the NGOs, especially by CARE Bangladesh in our studied Unions) in the deliberation of developmental allocations by the UP. Such individuals tend to work as key interlocutors for the common people, especially providing the latter with information that help citizens evaluate the performances of the UP leaders, particularly in relations to resource distribution. Middle class social leaders, due to their participation in the listing process through door to door visits, tend to be reliable source of information on the transparency and integrity of the process of listing of beneficiaries. Another major source for information on UP is the NGO organized programs on UP activities. Women are particularly made aware of UP activities by the NGOs. NGO led forums are also increasingly becoming incubator of critical consciousness among poor citizens (see Section 7).

There are other informal non-institutionalized ways, which help voters, especially the poor members of the community, to garner information about UP activities and leaders' performance. These include rumors, gossips about the quality of developmental allocations and programs and information transmitted to the voters by the natural leaders who tend to get involved, increasingly in higher frequencies, with UP activities.

4.4 Concerns/demands of voters/citizens: What do voters mostly care for?

There is a clear class-based pattern in the voters' expectations from the elected leaders. Such pattern tends to define the incentive structure of the UP leaders in delivering services and public goods. People under extreme poverty tend to be mainly concerned with various types safety nets related services (e.g. VGD, VGF, elderly and widow related allowances, cash for work, 40 days employment generation programs etc) and various relief programs. Interestingly there are spillover effects of programs like cash for work or 40 days employment generation. The outputs of such programs are typically newly built or repaired infrastructures-roads, culverts and so on. There are also high demands for such infrastructures among the middle class and rural rich especially who are engaged in business. Thus, safety nets programs related to infrastructure development are also public goods and their demand cuts across economic classes.

Table 1: Types of demands made by different classes of voters

Class/group	Types of demand	**Nature of involvement and spillover**
Rural rich and elites voters	Public goods: road maintenance, irrigation canals; school/mosque construction High; expect to be consulted	High; expect to be consulted on these issues
Middle class voters	Subsidies for fertilizer, agricultural inputs, deep tubewell installation; maintenance of law and order	High
Poor voters	Safety	High; interested in being incorporated into employment programs

Source: authors

For middle class voters, predominant concerns are around the availability of subsidies related to fertilizers and other agricultural inputs. They expect UP leaders will facilitate the supply of these and also *nolkoop* (deep tube-wells) to them. The richer sections of the rural society expect larger amount of local public goods (i.e., construction and maintenance of roads and culverts and irrigation canals in their own localities). They also expect that UP leaders will consult them while deciding the sites for constructing schools/madrasas and mosques/*mandirs*, tube-wells etc. They also expect to be consulted during the identification process of target groups for safety net allocations so that their clients/followers, kith and kin, receive 'due' share of the public goods and services. Both the middle class and rich voters also have a high concern for better law and order. A priority demand of these classes is the protection of household property and UP leaders have strong incentives to reduce the incidence of petty theft and other economic crimes to maintain their legitimacy among the elite groups.

Different demands emanating from diverse actors, possessing asymmetric political and social capabilities, create a complex incentive structure for the UP leadership that complicates the nature of responsiveness of the UP as a political institution. As discussions below (in various Sections) reveal, the character and degree of responsiveness tend to be largely contingent on the structural conditions. These structural conditions include: the nature of the local and broader elite political settlements where the UPs are embedded, and also

the agency factors, such as, the political skills of the relevant leadership to maneuver through the thickets of politico-structural factors.

4.5 Who can win elections?

A few individual/personality traits are generic to the UP leaders who are considered winnable. These include: a high degree of social capital[5] possessed by the individual leader, being pro-active and efficient in mediating conflicts, and also being highly sensitive and capable of fulfilling personal welfare oriented needs of the community members. Ascriptive status (family tradition, kinship) of the leader is also critical. All these attributes mentioned above need to be possessed by prospective electoral candidates as an initial endowment (given minimum ascriptive factors) for being successful in public life. These are necessary conditions but not sufficient.

Other conditions that need to be satisfied are more politico-strategic in nature. The most important strategy is to enhance one's network capital. Network capital is ensured through maintaining good networks with some elements of the elite section, as well as the educated middle class, who act as interlocutors between the UP leaders and the community. In the electoral process these groups are the core constituency for any candidates and tapping into their clientelistic base is deemed critical for winning elections. The individuals who constitute the *core constituency* are political entrepreneurs (manage vote banks) and patrons of various social and client groups differentiated by regionalism, religious identity, kinship, and locales. A good understanding the importance of these social cleavages is critical to win elections. The UP chairperson of Khokhshabari reflects on the electoral strategy in the following manner:

> *[O]ne wins the election here by taking consideration of local social features; people do not want to vote for candidates who do not belong to the locality. The other factors that work here are religious identity [Hindu and Muslim in our study areas] and regional identity based on the areas of migrants sources of origins-Tangail, Mymensingh, Kuchbihar (India) etc.*

The complex calculation involved in the electoral calculation can be gauged from the case of one female candidate for UP election. In Khokhshabari UP, a female candidate received support from her regional/locality, even from leaders in opposite political parties. Kinship and regional factors in this case have clearly overridden straightforward partisan considerations.

The de facto electoral calculations also cut across gender. In case of a woman candidate, political parties would like to have their 'people' to capture the reserved seats, so they will provide support to women from certain politically influential families who can win elections. Also elite families have incentives for putting forward their women for prestige and also for greater access to UP. Husbands can act, and usually do, as proxy, so they also have strong incentive to support women's candidacy as it increase their personal influence and access to resource (see Section 6).

How do different elite patrons who constitute the electoral core constituency mange to maintain their respective client groups? Clients' loyalty (in terms of voting choice) is essentially maintained through economic dependency. Poor live on patron's land, work throughout the year in patron's business enterprises (commercial firms, industries), take lease of patron's land to cultivate, get loan or charity fund in desperate situations (marriage, dowry, illness, etc), and rely on the patron's political clout to secure safety net provisions, dispute resolution etc. Our key informants have observed that a substantial number of the voters (a rule of thumb assessment of about 30% of the total in Botlagari Union) are loyal to different patrons based on such economic dependency and political clout, although the trend is declining in recent years due to migration of villagers to other regions in search of jobs. Performance (overall quality of service delivery, project completion rate and quality etc) tend to be less salient in ensuring victory in elections since voters tend to care less about these. As one veteran UP Secretary observed:

> *Usually there are hardly any difference between the performances of the previous UP leaders and the current incumbents. For instance, leaders in the past as well as in the present, steal rice meant for relief, demand money in exchange of services meant to be given free and engage in corruption and misallocate fund for development. Elected leaders are hardly judged by their general performances or even personal integrity.*

This explanation of voters' incentive is largely true in the case of UP chairperson. UP members, on the other hand, are judged, to a considerable extent, on the basis of personal integrity and performance related to safety net allocations. In our studied UPs, turnover of incumbent UP members has been much higher than UP chairperson in successive elections. UP members' performances and personal integrity are easier to monitor by the community members because of their close proximity to the community, nature of services (for instance, safety net distribution that routinely exposes UP members to the poor) as well as due to the higher frequency of physical interactions (for various mundane reasons) that ordinary citizens tend to have with them. These observations are much less applicable in the case of UP chairpersons. Consequently, ordinary citizens as voters tend to suffer from high level of information asymmetry in relation to UP chairperson's performance and personal integrity. It is not that poor citizenry care less about UP chairperson's performance or integrity (as implied in the observation of the UP Secretary quoted above) but rather they tend to posses

5. Social network and links possessed by individuals or institutions.

less knowledge about him/her to make informed judgments. This perhaps provides incentives to the UP chairperson to concentrate and politically invest more on the elite vote banks (utilizing money politics, elite kinship network etc) and marginally on the amorphous citizenry. In the case of UP chairpersons, dynamics of electoral accountability tends to center largely around the non-poor.

This means what really matters in winning elections is how the candidate manages and strategically coordinates his/her political relations (largely based on patronage allocations process) with the core constituency. Members of this core constituency usually promote and nurture challengers to the incumbents. Incumbent leaders as well as challengers need to preempt and neutralize such initiatives by building coalitions with the individuals of the core constituency. Such coalitions are typically based on patronage sharing as well as through literally buying loyalties of these individuals.

The chairperson of Khokhshabari union made the following observation:

> *Those who have campaigned for the chairperson they also have given commitment (to provide material benefits) to their followers in his locality. The elected chairperson must appreciate their promise to their respective followers, otherwise the chairperson will lose his legitimacy.*

The latter strategy of buying loyalties has contributed to the increasing trend of money politics in the local electoral arena. The trend of spending money to buy vote banks (core constituencies) as well as general voters is reportedly on the rise. Amount as high as Taka 3.6 million (most data self-reported) has been spent in recent elections. It should be noted that money politics is just one out of many strategies that one needs to deploy to win election. Some candidates in recent elections have spent huge amount but could not ensure victory.

Section 5: Patron-clientelistic based accountability process

Accountability of UP leadership is ensured through the formal process of electoral or direct accountability. Equally important is the informal accountability process that is channeled through pervasive patron-client system that tends to crisscross through various societal cleavages-classes, kith and kin, religious groups, regionalism and locality based identities. To put it very broadly, clientelistic based accountability mechanisms operate on the basis of *both social obligations and political calculations* although both these tend to overlap in real practice.

Social obligations based patronage allocation process is largely driven by somewhat 'pre-political' as well as primordial norms, values and expectations underpinned by the sociology of kith and kin, regional and religious identity, and the logic of the locale i.e., *para* or neighborhood based identities. The leaders representing one or more of these social cleavages get electoral political and moral support not so much based on strategic political economic considerations, but based on his/her ascriptive identity; and the support is more or less guaranteed (given vote banks). This tends to be case for, for instance, the UP chairperson of Botlagari (partly) as well for the woman candidate from Khokhshabari (entirely) as mentioned above.

The representative leadership is obliged, in a more normative sense, to reciprocate by allocating political and economic resources to the vote banks based on a certain de facto socially defined consensus. The leaders are, thus made accountable to the ascriptive based constituencies and in return for votes, other political and social support (critically needed for dispensing justice related services) are offered to the leaders by the relevant communities. The target beneficiaries are typically the poor and benefits are mostly related to social safety nets (VGD, VGF, Elderly and Widow Allowances, 40 days employment etc). Thus a section of the deserving poor are able to secure some benefits by belonging to the largely ascriptive based accountability network.

Note that social obligations based accountability is often justified by a normative commitment to look after the kith and kin who are also at the same time 'deserving poor'. The trick, on the part of the UP leaders, is to avoid overt forms of patronage distribution to the rich, whether friends or family members. To quote one UP chairperson:

> *...[T]here is nothing wrong in helping poor family members or friends...everybody has relatives...if these people are provided with UP resources in a transparent way nobody will criticize.... The question [of criticism] comes only if a well to do person receives [benefits].*

Political calculation based accountability primarily involved the elites and middle class political entrepreneurs to whom the UP leadership is politically obligated to return favor due to the political support lent to them by the former classes during the elections. Here, the patronage distributions (local public goods, services, safety net provisions) follow the logic of strategic political quid pro quo rationales devoid of any ascriptive considerations. Patronage allocations in this domain tend to be mainly public goods oriented (infrastructure, schools, mosques/mandirs etc) whereby elite political entrepreneurs are able, as part of informal deals, to influence decisions about the selection of the sites of the development projects. The political calculation based patronage allocations also bring in the poor, who are clients of the elites, as beneficiaries of patronage. The allocations of safety net provisions for the poor usually follow the tight elite controlled patronage network based on political calculation, and the poor, who are not part of any elite network, tend to get excluded.[6] This accountability mechanism, thus bring in its fold a section of the poor who would have otherwise remained outside any patronage system for not being a part of any ascriptive identity based network of accountability.

6. A villager outside any network or perhaps belonging to the network of the opposition elite remarked 'I have not voted for the incumbent leader so I did not get anything'.

Section 6: Elite political settlement

6.1 Nature and dynamics of local level political settlement

Elite political settlement at the UP level is generally underpinned by a de facto consensus of incentives and interests of the local elites. As defined earlier in Section 2, to remain functional and sustainable, any elite political settlement must reflect the balance of the holding power of the individual/collective elites and should be incentive compatible to the actors involved. Constellations of local elites vary across different Unions but they are typically politicians (affiliated with the four major parties of Bangladesh-AL, BNP, JP and JI), large landowners, businessmen, teachers, former government officials etc. Important common features that these individuals have are: they belong to high status family i.e., they possess reputational capital based on social ascriptions; they have considerable wealth; and perhaps most importantly, also enjoy the necessary social capital/reputation to conduct mediation. Many elite individuals occupy two or more roles listed above. These individuals largely constitute the core constituency for the UP leaders as elaborated above.

Political elites tend to have the most bargaining capacity within the elite political settlement and a perennial challenge for the UP leaders is to maintain their de facto autonomy vis-à-vis the political elites, both local and national (see below for further discussion on this). A de facto political and social consensus among local elites (elite equilibrium) tends to be a minimum condition for stable and functional governance of a Union and its core institution-UP, which has, in turn, important consequences for the welfare of the citizen, particularly the poor. For instance, any verdict in dispute resolution, whether conducted in a formal forum (Village Court, Arbitration Council) or in an informal one (*shalish*), must be underpinned by a de facto social and political consensus of the competing elites, otherwise, such verdict will not be implementable and also will not be deemed as 'fair and just'. This is especially true for potentially high risk disputes which have inter communal dimensions and tend to threat communal stability. Effective maintenance of law and order necessitates better coordination among competing political elites. A stable elite political settlement is thus considered as a critical resource for the local community for achieving durable peace and harmony.

Local level elite political settlement also potentially contributes to securing greater resources from UZ chairperson and MP. These local level settlements also contain zero-sum elite led conflicts over allocation of resources whereby ruling party leaders at the Union level manage to largely capture the development resources meant for the poor. Another very important contribution of the elite political settlement is that it helps in solving formidable collective action problems in relation to developmental projects. For instance, usually it is very difficult to secure land for building schools or mosques or for expansion of roads. Also such developmental projects require large amount of earthwork. Obtaining soil or mud through motivating land owning elites to donate soil/mud poses a serious problem for the UP leaders. This kind of problem is less in a context where the elite settlement is stable and less zero-sum oriented. Collective elite pressure (both political and social) can be more easily brought on the individuals to donate for community work.

Most UP leadership (particularly the UP-chairperson) strive to preserve a functional level of stable and positive-sum elite consensus by deploying various political strategies. These strategies include: collaboration, co-optation, accommodation and compromise, and coalition building across political and social/communal divides—with varying degree of success. Such success hinges on the nature of the agency (i.e. political/social maneuvering skills of individual leaders) as well as on larger structural factors such as, the nature of the relations between UP and the administration units above. The latter refers to the de facto political alignment between the UP and upper tiers of the political and bureaucratic administration at the UZ, District levels. Commenting on the political/social maneuvering capabilities of UP leaders (mainly UP chair) one eminent social elite of Botlagari Union noted that:

> *…[A politically astute leader] maintains amicable relations with the elites…exchange social niceties when he meets them…invites the elites in the jury panels of local mediations, consult them on developmental/service delivery works and also involve them in such works…and generally accepts their recommendations in relation to UP governance processes.*

The benefits derived from a stable and positive sum elite political settlement do not accrue only to the UP leadership. The relationship is symbiotic. This valuable socio-political resource is also proactively utilized by the social elites to secure benefits ranging from local public goods (infrastructure, schools, mosques/*mandirs*) to particularistic goods such as, channeling economic resources for their poor kith and kin, as well as, resolving difficult and sensitive disputes between individual members of one's kith and kin, especially the cases that they could not have resolved by their moral and political authority alone.

Table 2: Larger political settlement in three UPs

Governance Indicators	Botlagari UP	Khokhshabari UP	Sharpukur UP
Electoral Strength/popularity of the UP Chairperson	Political tenure very long (15 years). Elected twice but incumbency was interrupted	Political tenure medium (7.5 years). Elected twice but incumbency was interrupted	Political tenure very long 16.5 years). Elected four times but incumbency was interrupted
Party affiliation	Explicitly non-partisan (implicitly BNP)	AL	BNP
Current Upazilla chairperson	BNP	JP	AL
Current MP	AL	AL	JP
Relationship with government official	Strong and efficient networking with the officials. Many NGO supported programs provided the UP leaders with a good exposure to UZ administration which led to effective synergy between the administration and the UP leaders. Also as president of the district association of UP leaders he commands special respect from the UZ level officials. Due to these contingent factors, UP can easily access services and technical support from the administration. This in turn has increased UP's resources and enhanced its efficiency in service delivery. The specific political settlement has led to the emergence of a virtuous cycle of developmental efficiency. Political settlement not vulnerable to regime change. UP-bureaucracy relation is characterized by a balance of impersonal/rationality and political partisanship	Relationship has been cozy and collusive due to political alignment with the ruling party as well as due to personal friendship of the chairperson with a few important senior bureaucrats. Can access greater resource at present but such privileges, due to the specific nature of political settlement, are vulnerable to regime change and transfer of officials. UP-bureaucracy relation is largely characterized by partisan considerations.	Relationship very weak due to total mismatch of political alignment of 3 key political players at 3 different hierarchies of the government. The existing political settlement has negative consequences for accessing resource from bureaucracy. UP-bureaucracy relation is largely characterized by partisan considerations.
UP's relationship with the ruling political party.	Positive sum relations based on kinship network of the UP chairperson. Political Settlement not vulnerable to regime change since kinship nexus cuts across major political parties.	Strongly and productively (resource access) aligned with the ruling political party. Political settlement is vulnerable to regime change.	Weak, zero-sum and unproductively (resource access) aligned to the ruling party. Situation can potentially change towards better if regime change occurs in UP chairperson's favor

Source: authors

6.2 Larger elite political settlement and their influence on up leaders

UP governance process is also embedded in the larger political society. To a considerable extent, the political space of UP leadership is determined by the nature of the clientelistic politics of UZP chairperson and the local MP. Relevant questions that need to be explored here are: which party dominates the local political process – Awami League, Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Jatiya Party or Jamaat – e-Islami? What is the role of the MP/UZP Chairperson in the UP governance processes? Is the UP leadership subservient to the party leaders or they are able to maintain certain degree of autonomy? Is the political settlement at this broader level in equilibrium (i.e., does an elite consensus exist leading to positive sum elite contestations that functions

in a predictable give and take fashion as in the lower order political settlement discussed above)?

As our evidence indicates, political space of UP leadership is considerably influenced by the nature of relationship it has vis-à-vis the local administration, especially the bureaucratic administration at the UZ level. Given the increasing political party influence (a characteristic feature of partyarchy) on bureaucracy, the dividing line between political society and the bureaucratic administration has become blurred over time. This has led to an administrative interference on UP which tends to have contradictory features. Such contradictory features include: a mix of impersonal bureaucratic rationality (i.e., promoting and nurturing effective accountability mechanisms and ensuring impartial bureaucratic oversight in the UP, among others) and partisan politics (i.e., bureaucrats being readily amenable to political dictates and enforcing rules in a partisan manner). Such mix (in a balanced way as evidence suggests) is prominently noticeable in Botlagari UP. In the other two UPs the balance tends to tilt towards the partisan considerations of the bureaucracy. Such bureaucratic interference creates a complex pattern of accountability process at the UP level. The table below summarizes the structural features and dynamics of larger political settlement (PS) in the three UPs that we studied.

The empirical evidence presented in Table 2 indicates that the nature of governance in the three UPs differs quite distinctively. Participatory and inclusive form of governance seem to be relatively more practiced in Botlagari where one notices a modest degree of transparency and accountability (to the poor beneficiaries) in developmental allocations and service provisioning. Such participatory governance, to a certain extent, can also be seen in Khokhshabari but transparency and accountability dimensions are largely compromised by external political influences. Compared to the two other Unions, Sharpukur's governance process is hardly participatory and service provisioning and developmental allocations are distinctively characterized by poor accountability and non-transparency. How do we account for the differences in governance performance? Can the perspective of political settlement help explain such difference?

Comparing the three UPs

Note that electoral accountability can hardly account for the differing quality of governance. All chairpersons have performed better in elections. The stark differences among the three UPs are in the domains of UP-political society and UP-bureaucracy relations. Nature of party affiliations across different tiers of local governance, the role of ruling party in the UP governance process, and the nature of the relation between the UP and bureaucracy seem to work as explanatory factors as to why varied forms of governance process exist in the three UPs.

In the case of Botlagari UP, the central distinctive feature of the political settlement is that the chairperson is not explicitly affiliated with any political party. This has given him a major advantage, in comparison to other two UP chairpersons, in terms of his capability to negotiate and navigate through the power matrix predominantly defined by partyarchy. Botlagari's chairperson relative autonomy vis-à-vis the ruling political elites (at the level of UZ, MP) allowed him to plan and manage developmental allocations and service delivery process in a relatively more equitable and transparent manner. For a chairperson, not explicitly aligned to any party, the politics surrounding development decisions is mainly underpinned by the political settlement at the local level and to a limited extent by the political considerations acting out at the broader levels. This explanation is, arguably, largely true for the governance process related to the service delivery to the poor and to a limited extent applicable to the governance process linked to developmental project formulation and allocations.

The political settlement at the larger level tends to structure the incentive of Botlagari UP chairperson in a marginal way and the bargaining conditions tend to be asymmetric in his favor. Chairpersons, like the one in Botlagari, who enjoy the historically given high standing/support in the local community based on ascriptive norms, have even more reputational and political capital to bargain with powerful members of the political society. Botlagari's chairperson has the maneuvering space vis-à-vis major political parties since his kinship network penetrates all parties. The chairperson could have used his unique power and social standing to run the UP in a more exclusive and non-transparent fashion. Instead he chose to become a consensus builder by tactically accommodating local political and social elites. As he puts it:

> *I will not say there is no give and take [resource sharing with political elites] thing happening in this Union, but this is happening in a limited scale and this is being managed through a broader network of political elites [of all parties: Awami League, Bangladesh Nationalist Party , Jatiya Party and Jamaat E Islami].*

The style of governance he pursued, i.e., encouraging people's participation in the development process, attracted both NGOs and government to interact more with his UP. This has allowed him to mobilize more resources, develop productive relations with the local bureaucracy and to build management capacity. All of these developments in turn contributed to further development of efficiency in service delivery and better project management. A virtuous cycle of good leadership and external support have helped the emergence of a modestly inclusive and efficient UP governance that has been considered a role model by the

government. Interestingly the chairperson of Botlagari gives main credit to RBNS-CARE sponsored programs for establishing good network between his UP and the Upazila bureaucracy and also for helping in building better image about his UP through inviting government officials and members of other UPs from the surrounding areas.

Khokhshabari UP has the traditional advantage of having strategically correct political affiliation of the UP chairperson with the ruling party MP. In a partyarchal political setting, such correct political alignment ensures easy access to governmental resources but makes it difficult for the UP chairperson to create autonomous political space vis-à-vis the ruling political party actors. Although availability of resources has allowed Khokhshabari UP to allocate more resources to the deserving poor beyond the traditional clientelelistic patronage net, but governance process related to developmental allocations and service delivery has remained less transparent, largely exclusive, and prone to heavy influences by ruling party elites.

The pervasiveness of ruling party control (highly perverse form of control one could say in this particular case) over Khokhshabari UP can be gauged from the account presented below. It also helps us to compare the influence of partyarchy on the governance performance of the Khokshabari and Botlagari unions since Botlagari implemented the same service delivery but produced a very different result.

> *The chairpersons of the Khokshabari and Botlagari UPs wanted to reduce the discomfort of the old people, who regularly go to the district (Nilphamari), where designated banks are located, to collect their old age allowances. For older people the process is physically very strenuous and time consuming (one loses the entire day). Both of the he chairperson negotiated with the banks to send at least two employees to regularly visit the UP and distribute the allowances, so older people can skip the long trips to the city. In both unions a few local people volunteered to raise a small amount of money (20 taka from each older people) to arrange lunch for the visiting bank employees. In Khokshabari UP, the local political leaders (from AL in this case) soon put pressure on the UP chairperson to stop this humanitarian practice on two grounds: that the Chairperson did not inform them about this policy and, perhaps more importantly, did not give share of the lunch money. The process has been stopped under the pressure of the political leaders. Interestingly, and in sharp contrast, the Botlagari UP has successfully introduced similar practice for the old and it is ongoing. The chairperson has utilized his political network to insulate the practice from such perverse influence of the local partyarchy.*

The larger impact of partyarchy on Khokshabari UP means that unlike Botlagari, the capacity to secure resource from the government in this UP is more vulnerable to regime change. In the context of regime uncertainty institutions related to participatory governance and social accountability cannot become routinized and their sustainability remains questionable.

The case of Sharpukur shows what can happen when the larger elite political settlement is absent. The present settlement is chaotic due to political non-alignment of all critical players (UP and UZP chairperson, MP). Political non-alignment between the UP chairperson and the MP deprived the UP of optimum governmental resources as expected in a partyarchal context. The UP chairperson struggles to extract whatever he can from the UZ administration by using his limited network within the bureaucracy. Developmental allocations are managed and distributed in an ad hoc fashion by three different political actors (UP chairperson, UZP chairperson and MP) based on their political clientelistic considerations. There is hardly any synergy between these three political actors. As discussed earlier, such synergy, to a certain extent, can be seen in the case in Botlagari.

Bothlagari chairperson observed that in general, UP tends to be increasingly affected by a chaotic governance process. The lines of accountability among the major actors (MP, UZP chairperson, UNO, UP chairperson) have become confusing and their respective formal roles have been supplanted by de facto informal roles. The MP, who is supposed to make laws in the parliament, is now informally engaged in distribution of test relief (TR) and supervising and allocating funds for food for work (FFW). Delivery order for TR and FFW is now formally given to UZP chairperson instead of UNO. The UNO has some degree of formal accountability to his/her superior but UZP chairpersons are effectively not accountable to anyone. Such mishmash of formal and informal accountability structures and roles have given the larger elite political settlement a certain degree of instability and unpredictability. It is only through skillful navigation of different elite interests that it is possible for any chairperson to deliver service to or manage developmental allocations for the deserving poor. In the process many deals need to be made with the powerful elites and consequently the governance process related to service delivery becomes more compromised and less inclusive.

6.3 The defacto dual authority and inclusive governance

To recapitulate our analytical perspective, we are arguing that the embeddedness of the UP in the local and larger political society tends to affect the nature of UP governance and the incentives of the UP leaders. The nature of effects varies and such variations are contingent on the nature of the concrete elite political settlement. In general, all three UPs are subject to de facto nature of dual authority of political elites and the

UP members. A member of one of the UP noted that '*although parties have no influence in electoral politics of UP but in terms of service delivery and allocation of resources they have good influence*'. In the dual authority structure both sets of actors attempt to derive legitimacy for their claim to resources. As the UP chairperson of Khokhshabari Union noted, the UP members tend to assert their authority as '*true representative of the local people*'.

On the other hand, the political elites affirm their authority as 'representative of the government' (read ruling party). In a partyarchal governance context, the claims of the political elites tend to carry more weight. Our general observation is that this de facto dual authority at the UP level constrains chairperson to act independently to serve the poor constituency. Deserving poor particularly suffer since UP members, who are more adept as well as more forthcoming than the political elites in identifying such category of the local population and serve them (electoral incentives), tend to lose control over resources meant for the poor due to their asymmetric power in the broader political game. Dominance of ruling political elites in the de facto authority structure of the UP poses a major challenge in establishing pro-poor and participatory service delivery and resource allocation mechanism at the UP level. Dominance of the political elite also implies channeling of UP based resources away from the deserving poor to the narrow political clienteles.

The broader trend in all three UPs is that the chairpersons are experiencing huge pressures coming from the UNO to give privileges to the local level ruling party political leaders and these leaders are taking advantage of this. The chairperson has to perform difficult juggling acts to maneuver within this policy space, where political leaders of all major political are involved in a bargaining process to capture developmental resources from the UP.[7] Given the broader trends of UP-political society relations, the actual working of the intra-elite relations varies according the nature of the concrete elite political settlement in each UPs. The de facto intra-elite relations also depend on the leadership skills (maneuvering capacity of leaders, their coalition building skills, despite challenging structural constraints) of the UP members. Therefore agency of the individual leaders also matters.

The most politically convenient elite political settlement and intra-elite relations are seen in the case of Khokhshabari UP. Here, the politics of the UP chairperson and the MP is aligned (both being AL). In the context of local political governance, the MP arguably is the most important actor. Having the MP in one's political side provides an enormous advantage to navigate through the messy local level politics of resource control and patronage distribution. It is relatively easier for the UP chairperson of Khokhshabari to deal with the dual authority of UP members and local ruling party elites given his political identity and the political support of the MP. But such politically convenient elite settlement has been mostly beneficial for the ruling party leadership but minimally positive for the poor. Evolution of such intra-elite relations has been much more difficult in the context of the other two UPs (Sharpukur and Botlagari) where political identity of the chairpersons and their respective MPs do not align. Consequently the management of the politics of resource control has been much more complex and unpredictable and tends to have deleterious effects. Evidence shows that the deleterious effects on the allocations of resources for the deserving poor are larger in Sharpukur and smaller in Botlagari due to coalition and consensus building skills of the UP chairperson in the latter UP.[8]

6.4 Gender, UP Women Members' Incentives and the Political settlement at the Local Level

A separate analysis is required for examining how women representative's political agency is shaped by various political determinants and how these determinants influence the incentives these women may have for addressing local concerns, including those of poor women. There are relatively few studies on gendered analysis of political settlements at national and local level; the majority of these studies focus on women's representation, quotas and gender mainstreaming in policy processes (Nazneen and Mahmud, 2012).

While the provision of reserved seats with direct elections at the UP level created scope for women to contest in local level elections in large numbers (Frankl, 2003; Khan and Ara, 2006), our data shows that (as with the male UP leaders) kinship, family's political capital, political party affiliation, all play a key role in determining *which* women contest elections. This finding is consistent with existing literature (see Khan and Mohsin, 2008; Nazneen et al., forthcoming). A key issue here is whether women are seen as autonomous actors (as largely in the case of male members) or conduits for their families to exercise power. While for both male and female UP leaders, kin and other ascriptive affiliations are key determinants in influencing election victory and taking governance decisions; family members of the female UP members play a larger role in influencing their political agency. However, there are slow shifts in how these elected women representatives are perceived as political actors at the local level.

7. In this regard an observation of a chairperson expressing his predicament is worth quoting: 'we need a complete list of VGD card in 7 days, the party people are requesting that their preferred people should be included... even the opposition party too is part of this...I cannot refuse their request'.

8. The influence of the 'representative of the government' on developmental allocations can be understood from the fact that this year Botlagari UP was forced to give the local AL leaders 3 tons of wheat from its total allocation of 19 tons (related to TR program as reported by the UP Secretary). Botlagari has the reputation of having reasonable power balance between UP and political elites. One can only imagine the quantity of wheat being shared with the political elites in the other two UPs where the elite political settlements are much more slanted towards the ruling party affiliated political leaders.

In all of the unions, the UP Chairpersons and UP members perceive women as 'proxy' representatives for their families. The women UP members in reserved seats have been in some cases actively persuaded by their families and also by the local elite/political leaders to run for elections and helped during the electoral campaigns. The reasons behind this support are largely instrumental. The support these women had from local influentials because of their ascriptive status (i.e., where their families came from, kin relations) ensures that the seats are won by the women who were from their communities/or by an insider. In the case of support these women leaders had from political parties, it ensured that the seats reserved for women were won by women from families loyal to these parties. However, kin (*gushti*) and regional identities (*deshi*) played key roles in securing local support for women. Women UP leaders in making decision regarding service delivery and interest representation give more weight to these factors.

The families of these women were generally supportive of their candidacy, as through these women, the families were able to enhance influence and access to UP decision making bodies. Most of the UP leaders interviewed stated that it is the women's husbands who were active in meetings and committees.

While women UP leaders have less knowledge on the workings of the UP was identified as a gap by all interviewees, we also found exceptional UP women leaders who played the political game well and were reelected by the local people. Interestingly, the UP leaders, while visibly dismissive about women leaders' capacity, did not mention as reasons that women are inherently less capable (i.e, by nature weak). All of the interviewees, identified social barriers such as, gender division of labor, restrictions on female mobility, gendered norms that restrict interactions with various community/ groups and also movement during the night, as reasons why women leaders were not able to participate in UP politics in an effective manner. Identification of various social barriers by the interviewees show a shift in how society analyzes gender biases (see previous studies).

Women UP leaders do play a role in *shalish*, especially in cases where the issues deal with 'women's concerns' (i.e., marriage, divorce, domestic violence etc). These issues are not in direct conflict with those related to patronage distribution and resources. Moreover, these cases can be treated as an 'individual' problem (i.e., the individual man is violent towards the wife) which does not challenge the local gender power structure. Hence the participation by women UP leaders in *shalish* does not face male resistance. While male support for women's inclusion in *shalish* for these matters increases women's visibility and perhaps creates a 'demonstration effect' (i.e, that women can be in these male spaces; Mansbridge, 1999); it does not challenge the local political settlement around gender roles and gender power relations. These findings indicate that there are limits to the space created for women UP leaders through provisions on women's representation. These findings are similar to existing studies (see Nazneen and Tasneem, 2010).

There are fewer cases when there have been conflicts between women UP members and UP chairperson/male member. In one case, where the chair had taken over the project allocation designated for a UP female member, she protested by not attending meetings and making it clear to the community why she was not doing so, which created an indirect pressure on the UP chairperson to admit he was wrong and would never do so again (Khokshabari UP). But these incidents are few. The legal stipulation that women should be included in various UP projects at times leads to the UP chairpersons using these women to control how decisions would be taken for these projects. The UP secretary and other interviewees cited the following reasons for the chair being able to manipulate the women members: women have less knowledge; they are absent at meetings because of gender division of labor, women's husbands may collude with the chair and pressure the women leaders to comply etc.

Our findings from the interviews show that the links between UZP elected women leaders and those at the UP are almost nonexistent, at least in Khokhshabari and Sharpukur. So the possibilities for promoting women's rights and interests through a network of women leaders at present seem low. The female UP leaders stated that they had interactions with the Directorate of Women's Affairs and that at the local level they were included in the various projects on women through the existing bureaucratic channel linked to this directorate. However, other government agencies have not made any special efforts to involve the women representatives. This means, for women representatives, possibilities of countering political pressure using bureaucratic channels also tend to be low. It also indicates that the 'women's concerns' have been ghettoized to the activities of one directorate.

All of the above indicate that possibilities for women UP leaders delivering gender inclusive governance remain limited, although there are areas that have opened up to these women (i.e. *shalish*) and shifts in public perception is taking place. A key issue here is how can the incentives for these women UP leaders in addressing gender related concerns be strengthened? What are the channels that can be created for effectively linking women UP leaders to a wider network and also the local women's constituency (see section 7; discussion on Ward Shobha)?

Section 7: Recent laws, rules and social accountability institutions at the up: are these triggering any changes in the leaders' incentives?

Government in recent years has enacted new laws and policies for strengthening UPs and developed various forums for citizens' participation in UP governance processes. Most prominent of these are the implementation of the 2009 Act, reinvigoration of the functions of different standing committees and the policy of sending circulars (*poripatra*) for the standing committee meetings specifying mandatory conditions for the constitution of this management body. Such policy and institutional developments within the structure of UP governance and processes have, de facto, constrained the behavior of the UP members, generated new incentives for them. These new developments have also bolstered the power of other elite stakeholders, who are outside UP administration but nonetheless included in the power matrix surrounding UP based developmental allocations and patronage distributions process.

The interests, incentives and collective action capability of the citizens, particularly the hitherto unorganized poor have also changed. This change have constrained as well as benefited the UP leadership and created complex forms of incentives for the UP leadership in relation to the poor. This means the nature of internal dynamics of the political settlements have not changed only among the elites but also between the elites and the poor. Such configuration of new interests and actors are also mediated by the dynamics of the larger and local elite political settlements. Below we discuss the changes in the governance dynamics as well changes in the incentives of the UP leadership, local elites and poor citizens following the implementation of the new laws and institutional policies in the UP.

7.1 Ward Shobha and other social accountability forums

One of the most important features of the UP Act 2009 is the introduction of Ward Shobha, a form of social accountability mechanism that engaged citizens on a larger scale than any other social accountability forums currently available at the UP level. The functioning of Ward Shobha has reduced prevailing information asymmetry between the UP leadership and local citizens regarding the nature of development allocations and various types of service provisions. The benefits of this institutionalized channel of information have been accrued to both sides i.e., to both citizens and UP leaders.

Benefits to poor citizens and women and limits of participation

The citizens (participants are essentially poor and women) have been able to vent their frustrations regarding less than expected services received and also misallocations of services. Citizens are also able, in a collective manner, to demand explanations for service related performances of the UP leaders. In general, the Ward Shobha has created an opportunity structure for the poor citizen to articulate their voices without fear since poor and women as a *collective* are confronting the UP leaders in an open and relatively larger congregation. These social accountability forums are all the more politically salient for the poor since higher authority figures like UZP Chairpersons, UNO and sometimes even Deputy Commissioner (CEO of District administration) also frequently participate in these, which tends to magnify the accountability pressure on the UP leaders.

The political benefits of collective action accruing to the patron dependent poor are clearly evident in the Ward Shobha, although such benefits should not be exaggerated. Our study also shows that people still fear future reprisals by the leaders if they are challenged now. Some individuals believe that they will be cut-off from the prevailing patronage network if they become too demanding and critical by taking advantage of the collective forum. It is wise to shut ones mouth now and sacrifice benefits at the present for keeping good relationship and preserving future stream of benefits that one obtains through the traditional informal networks.

Nonetheless the picture that emerges, based on the testimonies of all classes of key informants of the study, is that the Ward Shobha has become a popular site for voicing complaints and claiming rights and making UP leaders publicly accountable for their performances and unmet promises. This is also becoming a site for nurturing deliberative or direct form of democracy hitherto unavailable to the rural poor. NGOs are utilizing these institutions to steadily instill discourses of rights and citizenship among the poor. The rights oriented discourse is especially evolving in relation to the politics of gender.

Women's participation at the local Ward Shobha and other places has increased. Almost every informants in our study remarked on women's visibility in the forums. Interestingly, they also mentioned that women try to raise issues

collectively. The poor women have particularly benefited from their participation in this forum. It should be noted that hardly any women from the middle or elite class participate in the Ward Shobha.

However, poor women's participation requires further analysis. A reason for increase in women's participation (and perhaps less so on the part of the men) is because these are held at a time when women are able to attend (during the early afternoon). It is also because NGO mobilization of women's groups (particularly of poor women) and provision of information and training have enabled women to attend public meetings. Other reasons perhaps are: social conservativeness (purdah) among the elite or middle class women, their reluctance to be seen with women of 'lower' classes in public gatherings, and the fact that elite/middle class women are more constrained by patriarchal discipline (i.e. difficult to get permission from male guardian to participate in local community meetings).

The upshot is that due to a high participation by the poor women, the nature of demands that are being generated in the Ward Shobha has turned out to be particularly relevant for the poor and women. One of the most popular demands is the supply of cheap latrine facilities in the privacy of home. Other relevant demands include that UP leaders take effective measures to: minimize violence within family; prevent dowry practice; protect women from sexual harassment in the public/work places; stop early marriage; address the issue of unequal wages between male and females; implement programs to develop productive skills of women. Many of these gender specific demands are unsettling for the UP leaders given the patriarchal normative context of the society.

A key question here is the *quality* of women's participation. We have no systematic evidence as to what extent these types of demands are seriously taken by the UP leaders and how they deal with these beyond the usual shibboleths of pronouncing a few moral exhortations against such gender discriminatory practices. Our understanding is that women's influence (i.e, using leverage and being able to negotiate one's interests) on the UP leaders or the community, despite their presence in visible numbers at these Ward Shobahs, may be limited. The UP leaders may speak against dowry or women's need for latrines, the issue is *whether* these needs are met or *whether* they take effective steps towards changing gender discriminatory practices in the village. Our observation is somewhat confirmed by the UP Secretary of Khokhshabari Union when he noted that since there is hardly any participation of elite or educated middle class women in the Ward Shobha, UP leaders rarely take initiatives to implement gender specific demands raised in this forum. Such observation of a veteran insider indicates that women's inclusion in spaces and processes may increase their visibility but may not necessarily translate into influence (i.e, being able to ensure their interests). The challenge for the NGOs is to create links between women's inclusion in these spaces that lead to influence in negotiating gender interests at the local level.

Nevertheless, in future, as these gender-specific-demands increase in deliberative forums like Ward Shobhas it may create a new trend in local politics. It would be interesting to see what this new form of gender politics would mean for the female UP leaders in the years to come.

In general, one can only speculate about the potentialities of the newly introduced forums and about their capability to exact higher degree of accountability from the public representatives. Initial findings (see below) tend to demonstrate mixed results (visible and credible pressures on the UP leaders but also unmet demands, UP leaders' non-responsiveness, manipulation and consequent cynicism of the citizen about the utilities of such forums). As evidence tends to reveal, raising questions about certain projects do not necessarily mean being able to alter the activities of that project. Being vocal in Ward Shobha, may be limited in terms of UP leaders seeing these as ways to address concerns and reduce tension (see below), instead of taking public opinion into account and changing their practice.

Benefits for the UP leaders

As mentioned earlier, benefits of having Ward Shobhas also accrued to the UP leadership. This is acknowledged by the UP chairperson of Botlagari when he says '*Ward Shobha is just like a bridge between the citizen of Ward with the members and chairperson of the UP*'. Ward Shobha offers an excellent opportunity for the UP leaders to obtain and share information with the citizen, especially the poor. The majority of the UP leaders who we have interviewed agreed that the Ward Shobha and pre/open budget discussion types of public forums help them to get critical feedback on their performance as leaders, which enables them to adopt corrective measures. Most common observation was that the social accountability forums gave them the opportunity to explain to the voters as to why they could not keep their electoral promises, particularly explain the budgetary limitations behind the many unfulfilled promises. Such communicative actions tend to reduce the tension that exists between the leaders and the voters. UP leaders also benefit by getting necessary inputs for effective decision making and more importantly for budget preparation. Many leaders observed that a major chunk of inputs to UP budgets emerge from the Ward Shobha.

UP leaders also derive similar strategic benefits from other social accountability forums like pre or open budget sessions. As noted earlier, the UNO and UZP chairpersons are present in these sessions. During the deliberation process they get to know that certain large infrastructural projects are truly

based on popular demands and not only based on political considerations of local elites. Such information tends to strengthen the UP leaders' lobbying for special fund allocations as well as technical support from the UZ level, particularly for projects which tend to incur higher costs and have been stuck in the pipeline for a longer period of time. Open budgets have also facilitated, what in developmental jargon is known as co-production[9], although there is no evidence such co-production is being institutionalized[10] at the UP level. This essentially refers to joint initiative by the public authority and the private/citizen. Such co-productions have been in initiated in our studied UPs based on the negotiations of priority projects in the open budget sessions. When a UP lacks adequate budget for certain projects which have popular demand, the leaders take the opportunity in an open budget session to appeal to the citizen for contributions (materials as well as labor) to implement such projects. For instance, a bamboo bridge was built in Khokhshabari Union with citizens' generous contributions (bamboo and even cash donations from a large number of people).

7.2 The unintended consequences of the UP Act 2009

There are two important features in the 2009 Act which have created deleterious effects on the UP governance processes. These are essentially unintended consequences of otherwise well meaning policies. Firstly, there is the provision of no-confidence motion. The policy says if at least nine (9) out of 12 members of the UP give no confidence vote on a particular issue, then the chairperson will be disqualified to perform in the UP. The provision clearly has been introduced to check discretionary behavior and potential abuses by the chairperson.

In practice, the provision has enabled the members of the UP to bargain with the chairperson to elicit illegal or undue favors. In one of the UP we studied, the members collectively demanded that the chairperson allocate 24 kg of rice to individual beneficiaries instead of 30 kg as per terms and conditions of the grant for FFW. The rest of the amount of rice (6 kg per individual) should be allocated to the UP members as illicit benefits typically to be sold out later to the rice traders or to be distributed to one's kith and kin. Under the collective pressure and given the threat of no confidence the chairperson had no alternative but to yield to the pressure of the UP members. Similarly, the UP members have put pressure on the chairperson to build infrastructures in the politically strategic places. In the cases of LGSP-related funds, the members have collectively put pressure on the chairperson to allocate funds according to their wish using the threat of carrying out a no confidence motion.

9. 'Co-production is the joint and direct involvement of both public agents and private citizens in the provision of services' (Mcloughlin and Bately 2012, p42).
10. 'Institutionalized co-production is the provision of publics services through a regular, long-term relationship between state agencies and organized social groups of citizens, where both make substantial resource contributions.

The chairperson of one UP acknowledges that what he has been experiencing after the enactment of the UP Act 2009 is unintended consequences of good laws and policies – '*the government certainly formulated the Act for the benefit of the people … but the reality at the ground level is different*'.

Similar unintended consequences have been observed in the case of paripotra or government circulars which state that the standing committee for any project must include selected individuals from the community and this should be approved by the UNO. This was clearly intended to institutionalize community's input into the project management or developmental allocation process. It also intended to enhance transparency of the UP governance process and UP's accountability to the community. What happens in reality is that the UNO asks the local leaders (of the ruling party) for the names to be included in the committees by passing the UP chairperson. In fact, the UNO is simply following the instruction/request of the local MP to consult with the UP based ruling political party leaders for preparing the list. Therefore, in effect, the policy to ensure transparency and societal accountability fails and as an unintended consequence, the policy tends to reinforce and institutionalize the control of the political elites on the UP project management. The UP chairpersons we interviewed argued that if they had the real choice they would have selected natural leaders of the community for the standing committees. This would have potentially opened the space for incubating, over time, an inclusive form of governance in the UP system.

The UP Act 2009 has also provisions for increased participation of women in the committees. The selection of these women participants again is done by the UNO. Political influences by the ruling party elites on the UNO means that the names of women representatives are selected on political grounds. Consequently, the list of women's names that is sent to the UP contains names of either wives of local political elites or politically-favored elite women from the community. These women tend to be typically full-time housewives. They usually have very little time to participate pro-actively in the UP affairs. Their de facto role in the committees tends to be ceremonial in nature. Such inclusion of elite women in the committees disrupts the process of building inclusive governance at the UP, which had been the principal intention of enacting the UP Act of 2009.

Given the de facto capture of the standing committees by the local political elites it is not surprising that they will be staunch supporters of the new UP Act 2009, particularly of its provision for incorporation of members from the community. As one political leader in Botlagari, who is affiliated with AL, remarked:

> *… the Act is appropriate and timely … it provides scope for the people to participate in determining and*

planning the programs at the UP ... an individual [UP chairperson] is not given the entire responsibility to run the project, instead responsibility is given to the standing committee consisting of a group of people, consequently, the programs run properly and the work load, responsibility, and the pressure coming from the people do not fall on the UP members only.

Local politicians clearly prefer and actively promote the de facto dual authority in the UP.

7.3 Does the social accountability institutions changing the incentives of the up leaders to promote inclusive governance?

Do the institutions and policies of social accountability at the UP level shift the incentives of the UP leaders to promote inclusive governance? What role, if any, NGOs are playing in this regard? As discussed earlier there is a rationale for UP leaders to promote and pro-actively participate in the social accountability forums, particularly in the Ward Shobha, and open budget sessions. But at the same time evidence collected from the three Unions show that for the UP leaders, there are both gains and losses in participating in these institutions. They tend to weigh the losses more than the gains as a part of their political calculations.

We have discussed the nature of gains associated with the social accountability institutions and process in Section 7.1. The perceived losses for UP leaders are the following: 'unnecessary' hazards related to public scrutiny of performances and unmet electoral promises; potential risks of public exposures of political deals made in relation to project selections and developmental allocations; and risk of potential revelations of quite high level of corruption associated with various forms of social provision/safety net related service deliveries.[11] In general, UP leaders, as equally true for any public representatives, are very reluctant to be subjected to accountability constraints, particularly of social accountability types, which tend to be more public and may also occasionally involve instant exposures to higher authorities. Such reluctance is manifested in their actual behavior and institutional performances. These are discussed below.

The first thing to note about the social accountability institutions/forums is their de facto dysfunctional status. UP Act 2009 has created formal institutional spaces for UP's direct accountability and responsiveness to the citizens. Our study findings show these institutions tend to remain formalistic and ritualistic. Ward shobhas or open budget sessions are being organized mainly to satisfy the formal mandate of the law. According to many of our poor as well as elite informants, without such formal/legal requirements, UP leaders would not have organized these events. Although citizens, especially women, have been included in the standing committees, they tend to function in a more

11. The majority of our citizen informants, both from elite and poor classes, believe that UP members are engaged in corruption of various sorts particularly in selling VGD and VGF cards and taking substantial 'commissions' out of various developmental schemes.

ritualistic fashion. Meetings in the standing committees are highly irregular (see below). Since the political elites mainly control the project identification, fund allocation and implementation process, standing committees tend to play more of a ceremonial role. Due to pressures coming from the NGOs and NGO organized citizen groups, committee meetings sometimes do occur but their decisions are hardly implemented. Many of our key informants (both elite and poor) have expressed their apprehension that meetings may not even take place if and when NGOs leave the community or even if these still take place, given the legal mandate; these will be essentially of symbolic nature.

An important feature (or rather limitation) of the social accountability initiatives in our studied UPs is that these mainly involve the poor in the UP governance process only in the domain of safety net related activities. In the governance process of allocations of resources and selection of infrastructure development/maintenance, poor citizens' participation as a collective social watchdog, tends to be negligible. In the latter domains, the UP members collude/collaborate with the political elites to allocate resources, with minimal formal or informal constraints, given the de facto absence of accountability mechanisms, either top-down bureaucratic (i.e. compromised by partyarchy and largely politicized bureaucracy) or bottom-up social (i.e. lack of effective citizens engagement since NGOs rarely involve poor in these domains).

Comparing three (3) Unions

In the case of Khokhshabari Union, the dysfunctional nature of the social accountability institutions and UP leaders' lack of incentives to nurture such institutions has been made starkly clear by the following comments of the UP Secretary:

> *What is the point of conducting Ward Shobha? Union representatives will do whatever they want.... [In Ward Shobha] people invited cannot reach any consensus [on safety nets allocations]. For instance, take the case of VGD card. Each Ward is supposed to get 20 cards. When everyone is invited [in a Ward Shobha] to make a list of beneficiaries, people recommend 50 names... no consensus can be reached...at the end of the day the chairperson and the members actually prepare the list.*

His observations have been largely echoed by our key informants—elite citizens, natural leaders and other middle class educated citizens

On the de facto ritualistic/formalistic nature of functioning of the standing committee, the UP secretary has the following observation:

> *Since it is mandatory to have standing committee, therefore we have such committees, which tend to exist in name only. These do not exist in the sense of true*

public interest … . I have been working in the UP for the last 6 years. So far not even 6 meetings of the standing committees have taken place … No meeting takes place separately [for the committee] … committee discussions are done as part of the UP's monthly meetings. These meetings have hardly any official impact.

On the nature of participation in the social accountability forums the UP Secretary noted:

Rich and powerful elites hardly participate in these. People are invited who are deemed useful to the UP [leadership] and people who feel they need to come [to show loyalty to the leaders] will come. They come for their specific interest [not for collective interests]. These are mostly poor or ultra poor.

'The Secretary also pointed out that whatever the UP leaders plan in advance (listing, location for allocations etc) gets approved in these forums.

The points made by the UP secretary above are particularly applicable in the case of Sharpukur Union. The majority of our key informants in Sharpukur have identified the social accountability institutions and processes as formalistic and ritualistic. They also observed that UP leaders tend to have very little incentives to pro-actively nurture the social accountability process. UP Act 2009 based rules and policies are the main reasons behind the minimal functioning of these institutions. The previous UP Council used to utilize these accountability mechanisms in certain frequency but the current Council rarely does so. The participation of the UP members in these forums is very low. The extent of the use of these forums and the ritualistic nature of institutional compliance can be gauged from the narrative of one of our key informants presented below. (This informant is a natural leader and member of the one of the thirteen standing committees).

A year ago I heard from the female UP member, who happened to be my next door neighbor, that I was included in the standing committee. I also know that I am a member of the tax committee. So far I have been invited three times for the meeting. I usually receive the invitation at the last moment when it becomes very difficult for me to attend the meeting. Consequently I could attend only one meeting out of the three meetings I was invited to. In the meeting I could attend I found out that participants have hardly any interest to carry out any discussion. The meeting essentially ended with the ritual act of collection of signatures from the participants. Although I have attended the meetings only once but I signed in the resolution book of the meetings several times for separate, possibly fictional, meetings. The female UP member routinely collects my signatures from my home.

Another committee member of the same union said that she has participated twice during the tenure of the previous UP Council. Once she came back from the meeting immediately since no one else was attending the meeting. We had two more key informants who are also currently members of the standing committees in Sharpukur (one in the relief/disaster management and the other in the finance committee). They consider themselves as committee members in name only since they have never been invited to any meeting. Both of them were nominated as committee members through the advocacy of SETU and PRODUCE programs of CARE. This indicates the nature and extent of political impediments that NGOs have to face in establishing pro-poor and participatory governance at the local level representative institutions.

The reluctance of UP members can also be observed from the fact that they hardly take the initiative to invite people to the social accountability forums. The invitations are essentially done by the NGOs officials and natural leaders associated with the NGOs (CARE related programs particularly). Such is the case also with other two UPs covered in this study. Our key informants have noted that turn out of people in the forums (Ward Shobha, open budget etc) would have been much more if UP leaders had taken initiatives to mobilize the people.

Social accountability institutions in Botlagari Union have performed relatively better compared to other two UPs. This is particularly true for the mass forums (Ward Shobha, pre and open budget sessions) but not for the functionings of the standing committees, which are hardly distinguishable from the committee dynamics as in two other UPs, in terms of committees' autonomy vis-à-vis political elites and the nature of compromises made by the UP chairperson. For instance, although the functional status of the standing committees is relatively better in Botlagari compared to other two UPs, but still the performance can be considered as middling. According to the UP Secretary of this Union, only seven out of thirteen standing committees are currently functional. Mass social accountability forums take place in the Botlagari UP on regular intervals and these are proactively participated by the natural leaders, poor citizens and even by some elites.

Vicious and virtuous cycles

Looking from the supply-side one could identify the dynamic role of UP leader (UP chairperson) as a major reason for Botlagari being to some degree different in service delivery performance and governance related inclusivity. The chairper'son has strong incentives to maintain the reputation of the UP as a 'role model of inclusive and pro-poor governance oriented UP' among important stakeholders, mainly the government and the NGOs. His gains are not only symbolic and personal (status among political elites, ego satisfaction) but material and political as well. Reputation among government and NGO officials

has ensured increased funding and technical support over the years. This has also increased his political capital. His prospects of winning election in the future seem to be fairly bright according to our key informants. As discussed earlier in section 6, the specific nature of the local and the larger political settlements have also provided the UP chair with the necessary political space to, at least, protect the social accountability mass forums from the debilitating influences of patron clientelistic politics, politics of kith and kin and pervasive corruptions related to safety net allocations (according to our key informants safety nets related cards are rarely sold in Botlagari[12]. This practice is rampant in the other two UPs).

Another factor (from the supply-side) that made the difference in Botlagari is the massive concentration of NGO-led governance activities in this UP. An overwhelming majority of our key informants, including the UP chairperson himself, has noted the critical role of NGOs (especially CARE) in institutionalizing the social accountability mechanisms in Botlagari. NGOs role has not been confined to management/logistical support to the UP. They also played an important role in mobilizing the citizenry. The NGOs helped articulating citizens' bottom-up pressure on the UP. The UP Secretary of Botlagari noted that governance of this UP turned out to be better since there is real pressure from the social accountability institutions like natural leaders' association, neighborhood development committee, and village development committee as well as pressure coming from the NGOs. A major contribution of the NGOs has been the mobilization of the citizens to make them UP-oriented. Instead of passivity and cynicism of the citizens in relation to UP, which are usually witnessed in the other two UPs, poor citizens in Botlagari tend to be more optimist regarding the positive role that UP can play in their collective lives. Their pro-active interactions with the UP (due to intense efforts of the NGOs) have kept UP under constant pressure to deliver services in an inclusive manner. This point was particularly emphasized by the UP Secretary of Botlagari.

In contrast, in the other two unions, cynicism and mistrust towards these UPs have grown due to UP leaders' non-responsiveness to the demands raised in the social accountability forums. Promises made have largely remained unmet, attempts to raise questions in relation to integrity of the UP leaders (corrupt practices related to safety net card distribution, for instance) have been discouraged by the visibly irritated UP leaders. Such attitudes of the leaders have made citizens cynical about the utility of having these public forums. All these seem to have generated incentives among citizens to avoid collective forums and to seek particularistic collusive nexus with the UP leaders to secure individual benefits. For instance, when people tend to notice that unrealistic long list of beneficiaries have been made in the Ward Shobha to placate the restive participants (a form of manipulation), they know eventually some names will be taken out by the leaders in private. Such perception leads many to go to the UP leaders in secret to ensure that their names remain in the list. Retention of names is ensured through monetary payments. These stories of informal transactions tend to spread within the community and further lead to the cynicism and de-legitimation of the social accountability forums. The communities in Khokhshabari and Sharpukur Unions seem to have trapped in a vicious cycle of institutional underperformance and lack of integrity leading to lack of trust and then further decline of these institutions.

In contrast, Botlagari UP appears to have escaped such vicious cycle. Factors such as skillful leadership, favorable elite political settlements, productive synergy between UP and the local government and massive NGO interventions to create the infrastructure of social accountability for a considerably longer period have perhaps contributed to this. A healthy combination of fortuitous conditions, political acumen of leaders, and support from external agencies has helped generated a virtuous cycle in Botlagari.

12. UP Secretary of Bothlagari confessed that there are UP members in his UP who sell safety net cards. But such incidences are low and these happen without the knowledge of the UP chairperson.

Section 8: Concluding analysis and policy recommendations

The following table sums up the analysis in the previous sections about political determinants of UP leader's incentives and the discussion on larger political settlements, clientelistic accountability and impact of social accountability mechanisms on pro-poor governance.

Our findings from the three UP are broadly consistent with the observations of other relevant policy and academic studies on Bangladesh local governance. We have referred to some of this literature in the section 6.4 which is on gender-related political settlement. Studies focusing on the local level social provisioning also show similar trends of how clientelistic politics structures the incentives of the local elites in distributing resources to the poor. Some of these studies also show how the de facto elite political settlement at the local level largely affects the process of governance of the local representative institutions (CGS and BRAC RED 2006; Hossain and Osman 2007; Hossain 2007; BDI, BRAC, NFPCSP 2009; Alim and Sulieman 2009; Ahmad 2007; McLoughlin and Bately 2012). Similar to the empirical observations made in this study on the social obligation based accountability, which ensure resource allocation to the deserving poor beyond the electoral patronage net, other studies have noted that:

> *Notwithstanding the importance of electoral imperatives of the political elites in a competitive clientelist system, it is mainly patron's obligations (social, customary, moral) that largely determine the limited accountability that the poor are able to exact from the local political elites in the context of social provisioning (see detailed analysis of existing studies in Hassan 2012; p: 34).*

The local and the larger elite political settlements depicted in this study are also embedded in a meta level (national policy level) elite political settlement. This meta level settlement is a durable and long standing consensus among national political elites on pro-poor development strategies. The salient characteristics of this elite settlement, in the case of social protection, tend to be the following:

- Successive regimes, both authoritarian and democratic, have showed commitment, through policies and subsequent allocations, to the provision of social safety nets targeted to the poor.
- Unlike many other sectors, strong policy continuity in this sector is evident across regimes. In fact there is a trend of not only programs established by the previous regime being retained but also scaled up.
- Some policy domains are treated as politically highly sensitive and critical determinant of legitimacy by all regimes such as ensuring food security and avoidance of famine through rapid implementation of social protection measures (Hassan 2012; p:33).

Such meta level elite political settlement has ensured massive budget allocations on the social safety net related activities in rural areas irrespective of nature of regime in power. However, the empirical findings of this study have shown, the actual working out (i.e., implementation of policies) of the national elite settlement on pro-poor development policy at the local level has not been characterized by similar unmitigated pro-poor commitment. The study has depicted, with rich empirical details, why such meta level elite commitment cannot entirely structure the incentive of the local elites. The exigencies of the local political settlements meant that the de facto nature of pro-poor development policies and governance process will inevitably diverge to a considerable extent from the ideal scenario expected by the policy elites at the national level. Clearly, an understanding of the 'micro politics' (McLoughlin and Bately 2012) that determine the incentives of the actors at the service delivery level (see table 3 and above discussions), is needed.

Looking from the analytical lens of the 'imperfect political markets,' one can see how the incentive structure of the local UP leaders tends to be formed and what consequences this has on the evolution of pro-poor and participatory governance. Given the absence of 'programmatic politics' (see section 2), politicians (UP leadership in our case) operating in a competitive clientelistic setting have relatively smaller stakes in providing *credible commitments/promises* to the amorphous electorates, particularly to the vast majority of the poor. Ensuring votes, hinges on the appeal of particularistic benefits and allocation of patronages to secure loyalty of the core constituencies, who largely handle the vote banks. The findings show this is largely true for the UP chairpersons, and perhaps less true for the UP members for various reasons (see section 4).

Political markets are also imperfect due to *information asymmetry* between the politicians and the electorate. With regard to information asymmetry the vast majority of the poor voters suffer disproportionately than the elites. Although the poor tend to be less informed, our research findings reveal that they are more informed now than they were in the past about the performances of their UP representatives. This is principally due to the availability

Table 3: Political determinants, nature of up leader's incentives and pro-poor governance

Political determinants	Consequent incentives of the UP leaders	Implications for pro-poor governance
Local level elite political settlement (PS)	• Strong interest of UP leaders to maintain stable Political Settlement (PS) which is incentive compatible to all relevant elite actors	• Stable PS ensures greater resource mobilization by the UP leaders from UZP chairperson and MP. More resource implies more capacity for the UP to channel some resources to poor • Stable PS also means more latitude for the UP chairperson to insulate the institutional process of service delivery to the poor from perverse effects of the local elite politics • Stable PS enables conflict resolution process to be conducted in just and fair manners, which has positive welfare enhancing effects on the poor
Larger level elite PS	• When there is political alignment between national political actors (mainly MP) and UP leadership, the latter tends to have perverse incentives to allow/ facilitate de facto capture of the UP's developmental institutions and programs by the political elites. When this alignment is missing, UP leaders can potentially insulate the developmental activities from external political influences. This depends on UP leaders' pro-poor incentives (based on the expectation of gaining politically, and ideologically in the community and ensuring increased resource transfer from the upper tiers of the administration) to utilize the political space for advancing poor's interests	• Political alignment in the larger level elite PS tends not to facilitate pro-poor governance. • Potential space for poor's participation in the UP institutions (standing committees, open budget etc) can be overwhelmed by presence and influences of the ruling party elites • Such spaces can be potentially utilized for institutionalizing poor's participation by leaders who are relatively independent from the local political elites and also have incentives for establishing pro-poor governance.
Informal/ clientelistic accountability	• Encourages UP leaders to rely on kinship and other ascriptive identity based constituencies for preserving and enhancing their legitimacy	• Largely excludes the poor who are not or cannot be part of the ascriptive identity based patronage networks • Makes it difficult for external agencies (NGO, CSO) to mobilize the poor to demand for programmatic politics and rights of the poor as citizens
Introduction of social accountability forums	• Instead of resisting or undermining, the incentive of the UP leaders is to co-opt/manipulate the social accountability institutions and forums, i.e., going with the grain • Another dominant incentive of the UP leaders is to utilize these forums for deriving certain strategic benefits (explaining why some promises remained unfulfilled, budgetary limitations, mobilizing support for projects by showing popular demand behind these projects, co-production etc)	• Reduction of information asymmetry among the poor and the UP leadership • Social accountability forums providing the poor to exact accountability of the leaders in a direct manner • Forums such as Ward Shobha are providing the poor citizens opportunity for voicing demands and claiming rights as citizens • Standing Committees offer potential space to the poor to have their say in the policy process of the UP • Women are able to articulate gender specific demands

Source: authors

of newly supplied social accountability forums as well as advocacy by the external agencies (NGOs). 'Hand-holding citizenship' still largely characterizes the demand-side of the governance in rural Bangladesh. For the poor, a reduced level of information asymmetry means more opportunities to meaningfully participate in the governance of safety-net allocations process. The effect of meaningful participation by the poor may translate into less corruption in distribution processes. One could witness such process evolving in Botlagari slowly. Greater intensity of clientelistic politics in the other two UPs meant that the impact of social accountability infrastructures and NGO-led mobilization has comparatively limited effect on the incentives of UP leadership to supply transparent, pro-poor, participatory governance.

Political market imperfections are also caused by *social divisions and fragmentations* among the voters. In our UPs, the community is fragmented by various identities (kinship, regionalism, localism) and voting patterns tend to be greatly influence by these primordial loyalties. Such fragmentation of voters has clearly weakened the electoral accountability mechanism to sanction poor-performing UP leaders. Ascriptive factors, rather than individual or collective performances, have become an important criterion for judging leadership. Consequently, voter fragmentation provides leadership with political incentives to allocate resources, to a significant extent, on the basis of the identity of the voters.

Table 4 below summarizes the dynamics of electoral accountability from the perspective of 'imperfect political markets' and identifies policy and programmatic strategies and implications.

Table 4 indicates that the UP leaders' electoral promises are considered much more credible by the elites than the poor. This difference can be explained by the strategic importance of both sets of actors in the context of electoral accountability. As our discussions on the relevant issues have shown, UP leaders need critical support from the elite vote banks and elite consensus is also needed for the smooth implementation of UP's developmental works. The probability of breaking promises made to these selective elites, is thus, highly unlikely. In contrast, amorphous poor voters are assumed to be less salient in clientelistic politics. To a large extent UP chairpersons can rely on elites to ensure 'block' votes from the poor. Breaking electoral promises to the poor therefore, tend to be more politically feasible. This explanation is perhaps more relevant for the UP chairperson but slightly less so for the UP members. UP members need to be more sensitive to electoral promises made since they mostly deal with tangible and countable services (safety net, for instance). The poor are able to judge their electoral promises through an ongoing basis. Due to this electoral calculations, UP leaders have less incentives to establish participatory governance at the UP. Given these incentive structures of the leaders, an important advocacy strategy (for the NGOs) would be to promote and nurture institutionalized interactions between UP leaders and the poor in the policy formulation and resource allocation processes.

The elites enjoy less information asymmetry since they are involved in relevant formal institutions of oversight at the UP. More importantly, elites are consulted by the UP leaders on an informal basis. The poor, in contrast, have little formal participation in the UP's oversight mechanisms or they are hardly invited by the UP leaders for informal consultation. Arguably, new laws and recently established social accountability mechanisms along with NGOs-led mobilization have reduced information asymmetry to a certain extent. But note that the poor can only provide inputs to the policy formulation stage (pre and open budget sessions) and rarely in the implementation stage. Therefore the information related to actual performances of the leaders remains beyond their reach. For reasons presented above, the poor, of course, tend to be more informed about UP members' performances than they were in the past. Information asymmetry, perhaps, can be overcome by conducting (or increasing the intensity where this is happening at present) Information Education Communication (IEC) programs in relation to developmental activities of UP. The IEC strategy should focus not only on the policy formulation and resource allocation processes but also the implementation process.

Table 4: Dynamics of electoral accountability

Political determinants	Elite citizens	Poor citizens	Consequenceds for pro-poor governance
Extent of credibility of the promises made by the UP leaders	High for the elites	Low to moderate for the poor • Low in relation to UP chairperson • Moderate in relation to UP members	Largely Negative: • UP leaders have low incentives to nurture/ facilitate poor's meaningful involvement in UP's governance
Extent of information asymmetry between UP leaders and voters	Low	High in relation to UP chairperson. Moderate in relation to UP members	Mixed outcomes on governance.
Who benefits from voters' fragmentation	High benefits for the elites	Moderate benefits for the poor who have influential patrons. Low benefits for the poor outside any patronage nets	Mixed outcomes on governance.

Source: authors

Voters' fragmentations have differential impacts on the elites and the poor as Table 3 indicates. Note that the poor do not suffer uniformly. The poor who are within the elite networks suffer less and the poor who happen to be outside any networks suffer more. Solution, to a certain extent, lies in transformation of the nature of politics, which is clientelistic in practice. Such transformation will perhaps takes place in the long-run due to changes in the literacy and economic development of the country. But in the interim, one needs to devise short or mid-term strategies to marginalize the clientelistic politics, at least in the domain of service delivery, through the advocacy of programmatic politics.

The most difficult and tricky issue is how to address the larger political settlement. This involves political actors of both national and local levels and the state-society relations; the latter is pre-dominantly partyarchal in nature. For developmental NGOs this larger domain of political governance poses serious policy dilemma. On the one hand, as this study shows, any strategy to align the incentives of the UP leaders towards pro-poor governance must address the larger political settlement. The NGOs as external actors need to nurture a political space for the UP leaders so they develop capacity to maneuver within such settlement. Such capacity will enable the UP leaders to avoid the influences of the local/national political leaders in managing service delivery functions that are not entirely influenced by partisan considerations. On the other hand, such act of NGOs will inevitably put them in conflict with the political leaders and possibly embroiled them in the murky and messy politics of the 'political society' (Corbridge et al. 2005). In practice, NGO interventions tend to avoid such politics and pursue strategic accommodation within the logic of clientelistic politics of the larger political society. Such strategy, although allow NGOs to mobilize the poor in the short run, in the long run NGOs can hardly create sustainable political space for the poor based on which the poor citizen can pursue independent collective actions.

Ideally, politically meaningful NGO strategy would mean mobilizing the poor citizen with the aim to create the social basis for nurturing programmatic politics (thereby reducing the effects of imperfect political markets) in the rural society. Such 'big' transformative politics is perhaps extremely difficult to pursue in reality. NGOs, particularly international NGOs, may not have the necessary formal mandate to do so. But note that the social accountability strategies that NGOs are promoting in recent years (i.e., taking advantages of the law and policies) has the de facto effects of creating building blocks of programmatic politics. For instance, information asymmetry is being reduced and poor citizens' collective actions are being nurtured that are not only helping articulation of the collective voice of the poor but also mobilizing the poor across social divides based on ascriptive categories. Such 'small,' incremental and less contentious transformative politics can be pursued, as our study indicates, without alarming the political elites. Such minimalist strategy of pursuing transformational politics tends to be positive sum for the poor. There are two reasons for this: Firstly, minimalist strategy aims to provide the poor the necessary access to desired services which creates incentives among the poor to engage in collective action. Secondly, this strategy also instills values of citizenship (i.e., incentives to access resources based on rights/ entitlements) among the poor. These may lead to substantive transformation in the nature of the politics at the local level in the long run.

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Section 10: Annexes

Annex 1: Check List for KII (Chairperson and members of UP)

Purpose of the interview with UP leaders: We are trying to understand the incentives and interests of the UP leaders.

- Background information:
  - Name?
  - Occupation?
  - Educational background?
  - Parent's and spouses' educational and occupational information,?
  - How long they have lived in the UP?
  - How long have they held office, why did they decide to run?
- Perception/observations on the electoral accountability at the UP level:
  - Are you pre-dominantly concerned about future electoral performance while serving the local people?
  - How knowledgeable do you think your voters are about your performance as (chair/member)?
  - What do voters in this UP mostly care for?
  - What are the reasons behind kind of electoral performance you see at the UP level? How do the voters compare these (the reasons behind electoral performance) with the national or UZP election?
  - Do voters in this UP vote on party line?
  - Who is a successful leader? What are the attributes of a successful leader? Is this different for male and female UP leader?
- UP leaders' view on the patron-clientelistic based obligations:
  - How important do you think being able to meet the clientelistic obligations are for you as a political leader? If these are important why do you think so? Please tell us a story and explain? (NOTE in Bangla there are perhaps no words for clientelistic—you may need to use a story or refer to the examples used by the interviewee in the section above)
  - Are these obligations politically or socially important or both? Tell us a story and explain why you think this is so. Do these ever conflict?
  - Doesn't social obligation (assuming they are based on relatively narrow constituency-kith and kin) undercut wider political support? How do you balance between the two types of demands? Tell us s story when you had balanced or when you were not able to do so.
- UP leaders' view on the local level political settlement:
  - According to you, who dominates-AL, BNP, JP, JI? What is the chairperson's political affiliation?
  - Is the chairperson subservient to the party leaders or he/she is able to maintain parallel authority?
  - Is the political settlement in equilibrium (positive sum elite contestations on a predictable give and take basis) or in a state of disequilibrium due to zero-sum elite contestation?
  - What is the nature of elite-non elite relations? Is it only based on clientelism (ensuring easy elite domination and hegemony) or non-elites, for whatever reasons, are mobilized and possess capacity for collective action?
- In addition we will ask the following questions:
  - According to you who are the influential local actors?
  - What is the relationship like with these actors? (rephrase for non UP KIIs: how does your UP leaders interact with these actors)?
  - Why is the relationship good/or why is it bad?
  - What do these actors do to help you? What do they not help you with? When do you (UP chair) seek their support? Tell us stories to illustrate.
  - How do you manage your relationship with the influential actors? Tell us a story to illustrate this process?
  - Do you think you are able to act autonomously? What are the challenges in this regard?
- UP leaders' view on national/sub national (UZP) level political settlement
  Please note the purpose of these questions are to explore the degree of autonomy the UP leaders enjoy vis-à-vis the MP/UZP chairperson? What is the exact nature of their interference, especially in relation to service delivery?
  - What is the role of MP/UZP chairperson in the local governance process? Are MP/UZP chairperson from the same party or different?
  - What according to you is the nature and degree of MP/UZP chairperson's interference in the local affairs? Is the political settlement in equilibrium or not
  - What is the nature of the relation between you (UP chair/member) and the UZP leaders?
  - What issues do you work on with UZP leaders? Can you tell us a story illustrating what issues you have worked on?
  - What according to you in the role of the UZP leaders? What should they do? How has this role of UZP leaders affected women UP leaders?
  - Has there been any interaction with the female UZP vice chair and the female UP leader? On what? Has it created space for female UP leader?
  - What according to you in the role of the MPs vis a vis the Union Parishad? What should they do? How has this role affected women UP leaders?

  - Have there been instances where UZP? MPs have not played their role or have overstepped their boundaries? Can you describe the incident?
  - What is the nature of your relationship between UZP based government officials? Why do you think the nature is like this? Tell us a story describing the relationship?
  - Do you think that female UP leaders face difficulties in negotiating relationship with government officials? Why is it so?
- UP leaders' view on formal laws and rules and institutions:
  - What are your views on the UP Act 2009? How has this Act affected your work as UP chair/member?
  - Has the Act been useful in raising women's needs and demands at the UP? Or created pressure on the UP to act on these?
  - Why do you think this Act was passed by the government? What was this in response to?
  - How has this affected the citizen's of the UP? Which type of citizens have benefitted from the Act? What about women?
  - What had the performance of the Ward Shobha been here in this UP? What are the challenges faced by the Ward Shobha? Tell us a story to illustrate. What can be done?
  - What has been the nature of participation of women in ward shobha? Why do you think the nature is such? Do issues specific to women come up in these shobhas?
  - What about other UP mechanisms such as participatory budget, LGSP related participatory activities? How do citizens participate in these? Are these effective? Tell us a story.
  - What has the women's performance in these spaces? Whys is it so?
  - What facilitates these above mechanisms? What are the challenges? What needs to be done?
- UP leaders' view on the role of NGO/CSOs:
  - What are the CSO/NGOs interventions focusing on governance in your area?
  - What is the nature of the relationship with these organizations with you?
  - What has been the impact of these organizations on governance in your area also on the functioning of the UP and your work?
  - How do you think the work done by NGO/CSO on governance affected women in this area in engaging with the UP (voice/participation etc)? What kind of scope has it created for women UP leaders?
  - Ideally, what should be the nature of their work?

Annex 2: Checklists for the three political elites and prominent citizen

- Background information:
  - Name?
  - Occupation?
  - Educational background?
  - Parent's and spouses' educational and occupational information,?
  - How long they have lived in the UP?
  - For local party officials: How long have they been with party? Have they held office? When? How long etc.
- Perception/observations on the electoral accountability at the UP level:
  - Do you think the UP leaders are pre-dominantly concerned about future electoral performance while serving the local people?
  - How knowledgeable do you think the voters are about UP leader's performance as (chair/member)?
  - What do voters in this UP mostly care for?
  - What are the reasons behind kind of electoral performance you see at the UP level?
  - Do voters in this UP vote on party line? How do the voters compare these (the reasons behind electoral performance) with the national or UZP election?
  - Who is a successful leader? What are the attributes of a successful leader? Is this different for male and female UP leader?
- View on the patron-clienteistic based obligations:
  - How important do you think being able to meet the clientelistic obligations are for the UP leaders as a political leader? If these are important why do you think so? Please tell us a story and explain?
    NOTE: In Bangla there are perhaps no words for clientelistic. You may need to use a story or refer to the examples used by the interviewee in the section above.
  - Are these obligations politically or socially important or both? Tell us a story and explain why you think this is so for the UP leaders. Do these ever conflict?
  - Doesn't social obligation (assuming they are based on relatively narrow constituency-kith and kin) undercut wider political support? How do the UP leaders balance between the two types of demands? Tell us a story when UP leaders had to balance or when they were not able to do so.
- View on the local level political settlement:
  - According to you, who dominates – AL, BNP, JP, JI? What is the chairperson's political affiliation?
  - Is the chairperson subservient to the party leaders or he/she is able to maintain parallel authority?
  - Is the political settlement in equilibrium (positive sum elite contestations on a predictable give and take basis) or in a state of disequilibrium due to zero-sum elite contestation?

- What is the nature of elite-non elite relations? Is it only based on clientelism (ensuring easy elite domination and hegemony) or non-elites, for whatever reasons, are mobilized and possess capacity for collective action? (please note: the durability and influence of elite political settlement would be different if the latter is the case).

In addition we will also ask the questions below. Purpose of the questions: Essentially we are trying to understand here leaders' observations on the local political processes.

- According to you who are the influential local actors?
- How does your UP leader interact with these actors?
- Why is the relationship good/or why is it bad?
- What do these actors do to help you? What do they not help you with? When does the UP chair seek their support? Tell us stories to illustrate.
- How does your UP chair /member manage relationships. Tell us stories)
- Do you think your UP leaders act autonomously? What are the challenges?

- View on national/sub national (UZP) level political settlement:
  - What is the role of MP/UZP chairperson in the local governance process? Are MP/UZP chairperson from the same party or different?
  - What according to you is the nature and degree of MP/UZP chairperson's interference in the local affairs? Is the political settlement in equilibrium or not
  - What is the nature of the relation between the UP chair/member and the UZP leaders?
  - What issues does the UP chair work on with UZP leaders? Can you tell us a story illustrating what issues they have worked on?
  - What according to you in the role of the UZP leaders? What should they do? How has this role of UZP leaders affected women UP leaders?
  - Has there been any interaction between the female UZP vice chair and the female UP leader? On what? Has it created space for female UP leader?
  - What according to you in the role of the MPs vis a vis the Union Parishad? What should they do? How has this role affected women UP leaders?
  - Have there been instances where UZP leaders/MPs have not played their role or have overstepped their boundaries? Can you describe the incident?
  - What is the nature of the UP leaders' relationship with the UZP based government officials? Why do you think the nature is like this? Tell us a story describing the relationship?
  - Do you think that female UP leaders face difficulties in negotiating relationship with government officials? Why is it so?
- View on formal laws and rules and institutions
  - What are your views on the UP Act 2009? How has this Act affected your work as UP chair/member?
  - Has the Act been useful in raising women's needs and demands at the UP? Or created pressure on the UP to act on these?
  - Why do you think this Act was passed by the government? What was this in response to?
  - How has this affected the citizen's of the UP? Which type of citizens have benefitted from the Act? What about women?
  - What had the performance of the Ward Shobha been here in this UP? What are the challenges faced by the Ward Shobah? Tell us a story to illustrate. What can be done?
  - What has been the nature of participation of women in ward shobha? Why do you think the nature is such? Do issues specific to women come up in these shobhas?
  - What about other UP mechanisms such as participatory budget, LGSP related participatory activities? How do citizens participate in these? Are these effective? Tell us a story.
  - What has the women's performance/participation in these spaces? Whys is it so?
  - What facilitates these above mechanisms? What are the challenges? What needs to be done?
- Perception on the role of NGO/CSOs
  - What are the CSO/NGOs interventions focusing on governance in your area?
  - What is the nature of the relationship with these organizations with you?
  - What has been the impact of these organizations on governance in your area also on the functioning of the UP
  - How do you think the work done by NGO/CSO on governance affected women in this area in engaging with the UP (voice/participation etc)? What kind of scope has it created for women UP leaders?
  - Ideally, what should be the nature of their work?

Annex 3: Themes for FGD with Nature leaders (Shobhab Neta)

- What criteria do common people use to elect their UP leaders?
- On what ground do they evaluate the performance of the elected leaders?
- How do you evaluate the functioning of the Ward Shabha/participatory budget, other forms of citizen participation in the UP activities?
- Who actually controls the service delivery process?
- Are UP leaders responsive to the common citizen? Explain your response