



## VSO Approach through Citizen-led Monitoring Engaging Youth in SDGs



যুব সম্মেলন ২০১৮  
বাংলাদেশ ও এজেন্ডা ২০৩০  
তারুণ্যের প্রত্যাশা

১৪ অক্টোবর ২০১৮, ঢাকা, বাংলাদেশ

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### Background

Youth in Bangladesh play a very crucial role in the development of the country. About one third of the population of Bangladesh are youth (18-35 years). The Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) Bangladesh, through volunteers and local organisations, is working closely with various local stakeholders including youth groups in the most underserved areas of northern and southern Bangladesh.

As one of the VSO's prominent approaches towards social accountability programme, this citizen-led monitoring (CLM) practically allows citizens to make use of the evidence and information prevailing in the community to influence the local service providers in addressing their needs. By monitoring public policy and services, citizens are able to tell their own stories from their own perspectives, about the delivery of services and how these, in turn, influence their lives. CLM utilises accessible tools that allow citizens not only to reflect on and analyse their own realities, but also to provide support to them in articulating their demand for rights and accountability from the state, local authorities, private sector, civil society and other powerful actors in the society.

It is VSO's global strategy to put the voice of the poor and marginalised people at the centre in order to contribute to the delivery of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). VSO's global strategy states "we will place poor and marginalised women and men and the organisations that serve them—our partners—at the center of our work". This 'people first framework' is seamlessly connected to CLM, which empowers youth groups in the local community to play leading roles in their own development by exercising their voice, claiming rights and holding those in power accountable.

### Citizen-led Monitoring in SDGs

CLM of the SDGs creates space for those most affected by poverty and exclusion to design and implement activities that they consider important in bringing changes in their lives. In this approach there is also opportunity for the citizens to get engaged in the advocacy work and in measuring the changes in people's lives. The primary focus of CLM for SDGs will be on the active engagement of primary actors and volunteers. CLM of SDG actions will also be

programmatically integrated into VSO's signature programmes, such as International Citizen Services (ICS), National Citizen Services (NCS), National Youth Engagement Network (NYEN), and Adolescent and Youth Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (AYSRHR). These programmes engage youth groups from the community, who act as change-makers, where it is contextually appropriate to do so.

There are some practical tools that are used to support the implementation monitoring of the CLM programme. These are detailed below:

#### *Citizen's Charter*

It involves voluntary engagement and collaboration of local providers and citizens, to promote transparency and accountability in the delivery of services within the community to combat inequality and discrimination.

#### *Social Audit*

This tool enables citizens to organise and mobilise to audit the performance of services and, subsequently, work with or exert pressure on 'power holders' and duty bearers so as to respond to the needs, rights and demands of communities. This requires open meetings with the representatives from civil society organisations (CSOs), specific interest groups and those from the general public directly or indirectly affected by the local service providers' policy.

#### *Participatory Budgeting*

This tool provides the opportunity to identify, discuss and prioritise public expenditure. Participants engaged in this exercise are also responsible for monitoring how the local service providers actually invest their money.

### **Implementing CLM Initiative towards Achieving SDGs**

#### *Support for the Citizen's Action*

VSO will undertake activities related to awareness and capacity building of the citizens to help them understand and engage with the SDGs, know about the government's commitments under the SDGs and help citizens identify the linkages between individual and community priorities in connection to relevant SDG targets and indicators. Citizens will choose the approach by making use of the evidences as to what works and what doesn't work and by thorough analysis of local power relations and the socio-economic context. The chosen approach should be suitable for facilitating reflection on the outcomes by the primary actors, VSO stakeholders, volunteers, decision makers and the community. Accompanied by VSO volunteers, community members will determine what they want to achieve in terms of development in their unique context and the content/materials they need to prepare, and then explore a potential approach, most suitable according to the needs of the communities, to come up with the desired results. In doing all these they will be guided by the Citizen's Charter.

#### *Support from Volunteers*

For the SDG related activities, VSO volunteers, youth networks and alumni will facilitate CLM initiatives that monitor SDG implementation, both within and outside of VSO's programmes. A social audit tool will be suitable for the volunteers to support the primary actors and the local community. This tool will allow the volunteers to help citizens by creating space for them to engage and strengthen relations with the authorities in power. Such relationships will bring positive results in terms of addressing the needs of the communities that would contribute towards sustainable change.

## *Support for National and Global Policy Advocacy*

VSO has a primary actor led approach in order to identify issues and problems that need to be addressed through policy advocacy work. It starts with consulting primary actors to understand the roots of a problem in order to develop sustainable solutions.

Further, our policy advocacy approach is embedded in the programme interventions. These are based on the evidences we generate while implementing our signature programmes. Hence the issues we address through policy advocacy are not additional or related issues, but integral to our programme priorities and the changes/impacts we wish to see in the lives of primary actors. In fact, VSO will strengthen regional, national and global networks of volunteers and alumni, particularly youth, who will draw on the evidences from the CLM activities to support policy advocacy around key VSO priorities and policy work.

The results of our policy advocacy work facilitate accountability within community structures. It is also owned by various stakeholders, particularly primary actors themselves which also ensures sustainability of policy outcomes. We use programme data/evidence to inform policy priorities and processes. To a large extent, our evidence has a strong primary actor/citizen-led component that contributes to our evidence generation approaches like participatory action research, CLM social inclusion and gender analysis.

The evidence from CLM initiatives in select thematic areas i.e. child marriage, girl's education etc. can be used for VSO's policy advocacy at the global level. The evidence will also be shared regularly with the communications team for showcasing the role of volunteers, alumni and youth networks in monitoring the SDGs. This volunteer and youth-led policy and advocacy work is placed at the centre of VSO's global strategy towards contributing to SDG achievement.

### **Youth-Led Evidence**

#### *Child Marriage Prevention: A Case Story from Birampur, Rangpur*

After participating in the workshop on "Gender Awareness and Youth Empowerment in Preventing Child Marriage" conducted by VSO, one of the members of the Stop Child Marriage Watch Group reported that he was able to stop child marriage in his community. The knowledge and skills that he obtained from the workshop enabled him to take immediate and necessary actions. When he learnt that one child marriage was about to take place, together with some other youth group members, he reported the issue to the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) and Union Parishad (UP) Members. He also tried to reach the Upazila Women Affair Officers, who he already knew from the workshop. In this way, the child marriage was stopped.

VSO also supported the youth group to be part of members of Child Marriage and Dowry Prevention Committee and work together with other local authorities such as UNO and UP Members.

#### *Menstrual Hygiene: School-Based Mobilisation in Mongla, Bagerhat*

Through a teacher-training workshop with a professional of Khulna Medical College as the resource person, youth volunteers from VSO have trained teachers from 10 schools to become more confident in addressing issues such as menstrual hygiene as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), especially in connection to dealing with female students. Soon after the workshop, 5 sanitary napkin corners have been set up in 5 schools and the community itself took the lead to monitor the implementation of those corners with full

commitment from UNO and Upazila Women Affair Officers. Since the completion of the assignment by VSO's youth volunteers, the community in Mongla has been able to continue to develop new sanitary napkin corners in other schools. Thus they became the change-makers in their own society.

### *Socialisation of SDGs*

VSO youth volunteers through NYEN has been 'socialising' the concept of SDGs in 15 districts (10 in Khulna Division, 4 in Rangpur, and 1 in Dhaka) and reached almost 1000 participants from local youth groups, educational institutions and local authorities. The SDGs being a new concept to most of the people, the VSO youth volunteers have been instrumental in introducing the SDGs to the local communities. For example, in some of these areas they took initiatives to promote girls' education, which is an attempt to address SDG 4: Quality Education. The 'socialisation' is always followed by commitment they make to focus on one or more specific goals that the community wants to achieve.

### **Key Messages to Highlight**

- The SDGs will not be met without engaging citizens to support, demand, monitor and deliver the goals through structured and continuous interventions.
- Evidence is necessary but not sufficient to address specific goals and collaborative engagement is needed from practitioners, CSOs, researchers, government representatives and development partners. Committed collaboration between various stakeholders (government, private sector, International NGOs, youth-led organisations) is also required to review the changes taking place, and identify what works and what doesn't work.
- The CLM process should be a model for other CSOs who are following different tools of social accountability.
- The data derived from the monitoring process will be fed into different SDG review processes including the voluntary national reviews, shadow reports and other national review processes.



This Brief has been prepared by the VSO Bangladesh ([www.vsointernational.org](http://www.vsointernational.org)), a Partner organisation of the *Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh*.

*The views expressed in this Brief are of the VSO Bangladesh, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Platform or any of its other Partner organisations.*

The **Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh** is a civil society initiative, taken at the national front, to contribute to the implementation of globally adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Platform was formally launched in June 2016, at the initiative of a group of individuals; the objective has been to track the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Bangladesh and enhance accountability in its implementation process. The concept of the Platform was inspired by the participatory and multi-stakeholder approach promoted as a vital element for success in the attainment of all the SDGs. The Platform currently includes 88 Partner Organisations working on SDG issues across the country.



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Secretariat at: **Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Dhaka**

Telephone: (+88 02) 9141734, 9141703, 9126402 Web: [www.bdplatform4sdgs.net](http://www.bdplatform4sdgs.net) E-mail: [coordinator@bdplatform4sdgs.net](mailto:coordinator@bdplatform4sdgs.net)