Executive Summary

During this reporting period, THP-Bangladesh staff and volunteers carried out more than 12,000 bottom-up, gender-focused activities in 804 clusters of villages (unions) across 57 of Bangladesh’s 64 districts, involving more than 320,000 participants. This work continues to take place through the dedicated work of THP staff, volunteers and partners across all seven administrative divisions of the country under a three-pillar strategy: Social Mobilization for Self-reliant Action; Interventions for Gender Equality; and Strengthening Local Democracy.

As part of the strategic planning process, THP-Bangladesh will carry out a more intensive strategy to create 300 “MDG unions” by 2015, beginning with 80 in 2012. With increased resources and integrated mobilization campaigns, based on lessons learned in a pilot project in partnership with BRAC, the goal is for these 300 unions to track their own progress in achieving all the MDGs and serve as models for nation-wide policies.

Accomplishments

Engaging with Union Parishads to meet the Millennium Development Goals: THP-Bangladesh trained more than 500 elected representatives as Union Parishad (UP) animators. Each UP body has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with THP-Bangladesh to transform their UPs into “MDGs Unions.” An MDG Union is one that is working in partnership with citizens, government officials and NGOs to meet the MDGs at a grassroots level (as well as the national level) by 2015. As a result, 80 UPs are now engaged with The Hunger Project Bangladesh to create MDG Unions. The MOUs clearly outline the strategies and agreed upon goals for promoting community-led development projects in partnership with government. This innovative approach to direct collaboration between THP and UP bodies is unique as this formalized role has not historically been undertaken by civil society organizations.

Moreover, the Union Parishad at Patichara of Naogaon district has inaugurated their five-year plan document for the first time ever in Bangladesh with the technical cooperation from THP.
• **International Women’s Day**: A successful International Women’s Day event was organized jointly with the National Girl Child Advocacy Forum and other organizations in March of this year. There were nearly 1,500 women and young girls who joined the rally in Dhaka from different organizations. Nationally, more than 28,977 women and men participated in 252 events to observe the day throughout the country.

• **Enrollment of local adults in literacy centers is increasing.** For example, at Sarai local senior citizens are regularly attending learning sessions in the adult literacy center that consists of a free community library developed by the local Youth Ending Hunger (YEH) volunteers. These senior citizens, who were incapable of reading and writing, are now able to recognize alphabet and are writing their names.

• **The campaign to reduce primary school dropout is also achieving success.** The THP volunteers are working shoulder-to-shoulder with teachers of local institutions and UP standing committees to persuade the guardians of dropped out children to send them back to school. For example, at the Shat Gambuz Union Parishad, animators, including the THP-trained UP body and other volunteers, are working to enroll the dropped-out students and eligible children with disabilities in local primary schools.

**Challenges**

• **Working with UPs to focus more intently on community-driven priorities**: Many NGOs and development organizations, including governmental departments are working at the Union level for socio-economic development. As a result, the Union Parishad body is often over-extended. It is real a challenge to keep them focused on activities aimed at meeting the MDGs. To address this challenge THP-BD is helping UP bodies to create a five-year plan which consists of the annual planned activities including initiatives in collaboration with THP-BD and other NGOs. THP-BD also meets with UP members each month to ensure follow-up on planned activities and provide support. This collaboration and support is intended to keep the UP Body focused on community-driven priorities.
• **Ensuring 100% primary and secondary school enrollment education:** The biggest challenge for THP volunteers in re-enrolling children who have dropped out of school is that it often requires long conversations with their family and is often related to the income of the family. Even if the children were to return to school, it is sometimes difficult for the families to provide the necessary materials and required school fees. Moreover, the government does not yet ensure the required accessibility in school facilities and inclusive education for children with disabilities, nor does it supply school feeding or logistics support schemes for low-income families.

**Lessons Learned**

• **An expressed need for income generating opportunities:** A big challenge has been to keep animators on-track through participation in different THP activities. The skills building activities are successful in expanding knowledge and capacities, but there is a demand for opportunities to expand that knowledge into sound income generating activities (IGAs). The design and implementation of IGAs needs to be incorporated into THP-BDs core programs, especially for women. This is a key component of the empowerment process for women because when they are able to contribute to the family (financially) it becomes easier for them to raise their voices and participate in social service and community development work.

• **Building capacity of UP bodies:** As the Five-Year Plan for the Union Parishads is a new innovation in Bangladesh. There is a suggestion for such strategy papers by the government, yet the UP bodies seem to lack the technical capacity to develop them. Hence, it was a provision for THP to cooperate with the UP bodies with technical and strategic resources. This way, the UPs initiated practicing open budget meetings among the community, increased participation of civil society through standing committees, and gathered knowledge and experience on strategic development.

**Partner Story**

Dr. Tafura Akhter Mazumder (left) is a newly elected Union Parishad member. As a girl, Tafura’s dream was to unveil herself and become a highly educated and established woman in the society. She grew up in a humble working-class family. Her father was an herbal doctor and her mother was a homemaker. Tafura is the youngest among six siblings. Her childhood had many uneven paths, often full of scarcity and sadness. In many ways, Tafura was obstructed primarily due to the fact that she grew up in a male-dominated society.
The first challenge for Tafura was her struggle to complete her primary education. Her family did not want her to continue her studies because they felt girl children do not need to be educated - that spending money on girl’s education is not a wise decision the family. She is adamant that one reason she was able to fulfill her dream is because her elder brother, Mr. Delwer Hossain, who always supported her mentally and emotionally (though not financially) to continue her studies. While in school, she was tutoring other students for a small fee to help her pay her own expenses. Unfortunately, this was not sufficient for her to manage the costs of her education. She became highly concerned completing her paperwork and registration for the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) exam, because she had no savings. Her family was not able to pay the required fees, but her passion impressed her teachers so much that they had started to collect money for her exam application fees.

In 1993 Tafura successfully passed the SSC exam. She then began to prepare for further study and has since been admitted into Chowdograam Degree College with a reference from an esteemed profession, Mr. M. A. Matin. Unfortunately, because of her family problems Tafura was unable to take her higher secondary certificate exam until 1996. In the meantime she kept tutoring and began to care for her parents who had both fallen ill.

It was in 1999 that Tafura was first introduced to The Hunger Project-Bangladesh by an animator. She heard about animator’s training and was interested in attending. After she has received animator’s training (in the 63rd class), Tafura said she felt different. She said she had regained her lost confidence and her pessimism began to lessen gradually. She has since decided to take the H.S.C exam and passed successfully in 1999. She has since been admitted into Lalamai College in Laksham. She has a plan for her future to save. Therefore, she has sold her gold chain and earrings and bought a cow. Tafura is now participating in social work activities to help manage her studies, pay for tuition and maintain her other household tasks.

Sadly, Tafura lost her father after a long sickness. She was a 2nd year student at that time. Before her father died, doctors had prescribed medications but remarkably there were no doctors available to give the injections. Tafura was deeply affected by this and has decided to study medicine. In 2001 she left the Lalamai College and went to Comilla city where she was introduced to Dr. Halida Hanam. Tafura shared her passion about medicine with Dr. Hanam and it was Dr. Halida who helped her to get admitted into Health Promotion Limited medical organization in a maternity course. She sold her cow and took money from savings to begin her studies there. After the successful completion of the course she returned to her village and established a village health care center in Vatra union with the help of Dr. Halida Hanam in 2003. Dr. Halida helped her establish this center for ten thousand taka (approximately $125 USD).

Tafura is an example of a woman leader who has overcome many obstacles. She never stopped struggling in the face of so many problems. She had to cross many uneven paths in her life. In 2011, Tafura was elected as Union Parishad member in reserve seat. She is not only an animator but also a Women Leader in The Hunger Project. She is an idol for underprivileged women in her village of Vatra.

This story was written and translated by: Tasmia Foyez, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh
Country By Numbers*

Nutrition and Maternal Health

M&E data for this reporting period reflects only 80 priority unions (MDG Unions). Because of limited staff resources, volunteer activities for the other 220 unions will not be tracked as rigorously going forward.

Women Leaders

* All data presented herein is taken directly from the internal online Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) System, updated quarterly by Program Country M&E Officers. The Global Office works continuously with each M&E Officer to audit and verify this data.
Partnerships, Advocacy and Events

THP-Bangladesh is currently engaged in the following partnerships:

- **Australian High Commission**: Partnered with THP-Bangladesh to implement a systematic approach to building the capacities of the Upazila Parishads (the middle-tier) and Union Parishads (the last-tier) of local government in Bangladesh. The project will establish a roadmap for making the Upazila Union Parishad function effectively and for greatly improving the ability of the rural poor to access government resources and programs for meeting their needs. It will involve training and working with Upazila leaderships to engage the populations of the Upazila in a process of participatory planning, producing a five-year plan and with the ultimate intention of achieving MDGs.

- **British Council**: Since September 2009, THP has partnered with British Council to implement the Active Citizen Program (AC). The program is dedicated to engaging youth in community development projects, with the theme “locally engaged, globally connected.” This partnership also supports projects such as the adult literacy center, sanitation and safe drinking water workshops.

- **HYSAWA (Hygiene, Sanitation and Water Supply)**: Working in partnership to provide Union Parishads with training on project management, water, sanitation and other cross-cutting issues.

- **BRAC**: THP and BRAC have entered into a partnership for creating MDG unions in four unions of Mymonsingh District. The initial one-year pilot project ended July 2011, but based on the success and performance of this project, the life of the project has been extended for one year more by BRAC.

- **SHUJAN: Shushanar Janniya Nagorik** – made its debut in 2002 as an initiative of a group of concerned citizens of Bangladesh with the purpose of promoting democracy, decentralisation, electoral reforms, clean politics and accountable governance. As a non-partisan pressure group, it provides an effective platform for people to discover their voices and be heard. THP serves as the SHUJAN secretariat.

- **Bangladesh Election Commission**: Partnered with THP and Shujan this reporting period to host a large-scale governance campaign on voter rights and awareness (entitled City Corporation Election), which took place in Narayangonj and Comilla.

- **Women and Children Affairs Ministry of Bangladesh**: Partnered with THP this reporting period to host National Girl Child Day events. Plan Bangladesh, South Asian Partnership, Action Aid Bangladesh, USC Canada, Acid Survivors Foundation also partnered with THP to host National Girl Child Day events.

- **World Bank**: A team of six worked on a collaborative study with the World Bank to review accountability mechanisms in Bangladesh. The study included a detailed desk review, focus group discussions, observation of local government meetings, as well as interviews with key stakeholder.

Outreach and Media Coverage

- In March, Shujan and THP-BD jointly organized a roundtable conference at National Press Club was held about the state of Bangladesh politics. The conference highlighted THP’s good governance program and eight national daily newspapers covered the event.
Future Plans

Community Mobilization
- 666 Ward Action Team Meetings
- 65 Animators Trainings
- 456 Citizen Workshops
- 76 Community Facilitators Trainings
- 3 Participatory Action Research (PAR) Facilitators’ Trainings and 50 PAR unit Meetings
- 4 Special Animators Training
- 164 VCA Workshops for Youth Unit formation and 48 VCAWs
- 75 Youth Leaders Trainings and 175 Youth Unit meeting

Gender Equality
- 37 three-day Women Leadership Trainings and 90 one-day Women Leadership Trainings and follow-up

Village Development Campaigns
- 420 campaign on community-based WASH program
- 413 Courtyard Meetings on Stop Early Marriage
- 35 Courtyard Meetings on Preventing Domestic Violence
- 210 Maternal & Child Health Counseling
- 205 Primary Education Committee Meetings to reduce drop out
- 684 meetings for Self-help Group Formation

Good Governance:
- 38 Meeting with Union Parishads (UP) to Develop Plan Book
- 71 Bi-monthly meeting with UP
- 76 Open Budget Meeting

Advocacy & Alliances:
- Work with National Committee to review of the progress of the implementation of the National Plan of Action for Children
- Work with National Committee to finalize the fifth Periodic Report that will be submitted to the Child Rights Committee of UN

Monitoring & Evaluation:
- Finalize the baseline survey tool
- Fix technical glitches in the online M&E system
- Develop improved reporting system