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Daniela Christina Buchmann

Summary

This paper, part of an IDS and Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation research project, is about the promotion of accountability at the local level in Bangladesh. By exploring in this context the legal grounds for accountability, the role of social hierarchies based on gender, education, family and wealth, and the impact of political alliances on accountability, the paper focuses on the social and political factors which may enable or prevent emerging accountability practices. The accountability practices studied in this context are local networks formed and supported by SDC's local governance programme Sharique. These networks strive to emerge as catalysts of social and economic development as well as good governance in Bangladesh. Composed of local governance actors, local networks bring information, spaces for participation and opportunities for oversight closer to citizens in rural Bangladesh, making it easier for them to benefit from accountability options provided by their government. This paper elaborates the strategy Sharique applies to help networks take on this role in a socially and politically divided context. It maintains that this strategy contributes to a transfer of power from a powerful individual to a group, setting off a process of collectivisation and affecting each member's role in engaging in local development and promoting accountability. However, the paper also draws attention to disparities that persist between members of the networks studied, with respect to different elements of accountability. It argues that the active promotion of all elements of accountability is necessary for Sharique to reach out to all populations through this initiative. It concludes that the success of accountability practices both on a conceptual and applied level is subject to clear differentiation between elements of accountability, which avoids relying on assumed casual connections between them.

Key words: accountability, participation, citizen engagement, transparency, answerability, enforceability, local governance, Bangladesh, power relations, elite capture

Daniela Buchmann has completed a Master's degree in social sciences with specialisation in social development and social policy, and has carried out applied research in Bolivia for her Master's thesis. She has worked in the field of governance for UNDP and is currently engaged as a research associate for the Swiss Parliament. Her main areas of interest are the politics of poverty and development, governance, power relations and gender.

HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation is a development no-governmental organisation, one of the largest and most experienced in Switzerland. It came into existence on 1 July 2011 through the merger of two organisations, Helvetas (founded in 1955) and Intercooperation (founded in 1982). For further information see http://www.helvetas.org/about_us/.

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Acknowledgments

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Abbreviations

AL	Awami League
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CPIA	Country Policy Institutional Assessment
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DFID	United Kingdom Department for International Development
HELVETAS	Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
LGSP	Local Governance Support Programme
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
UDCC	Union Development Coordination Committee

UNO	Union Nirbahi Officer
UP	Union Parishad
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UZP	Upazila Parishad

Terms

Chapai-Nawabganj	District in north western Bangladesh
Hartal	Enforced country-wide strikes
Mastaan (mastaana)	Group(s) of muscle men who are hired by politicians and elites to enforce decisions and to silence opponents
LGSA	Local Governance Self-Assessment
Parishad	Committee
Samriddhi	Meaning 'prosperity' in *bangla*, SDC pro-poor market development project
Sharique	Meaning 'partner' in *bangla*, SDC local governance programme
Union	Section of the Upazila, regroups 25,000–30,000 people and consists of 9 wards
Upazila	Section of the District, regroups 8,000–2 million people
Ward	Section of the Union, regroups 2,000–4,000 people
Ward platform	Group of volunteers acting as a development group for their locality
Ward *shava*	Gathering of at least 2 per cent of the citizens of a ward for decisional purposes

Local representative and villagers during the distribution of food rations, which are part of a Social Safety Net Programme. Rajshahi District of Bangladesh, 29 February 2012. Photo by Daniela Buchmann.

1 Introduction

Accountability is currently being presented as one of the key elements for human development, human rights and even economic solutions. Development agencies and donors see accountability as one of their core principles, allowing them to tackle developmental and democratic deficiencies in their countries of activity (McGee and Gaventa 2010). The concept has been defined and re-defined, connecting it to good governance, participation, citizenship and poverty reduction. Newell and Bellour argue that these multiple references have made accountability a ‘malleable and often nebulous concept’ (2002: 2).

The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex has many years of experience in research on accountability and transparency. In 2010, through a literature review on accountability and transparency, McGee and Gaventa took a step toward tying policy discourses on accountability to evidence from practical contexts of transparency and accountability initiatives in social development. They examined assumptions that suggested a link between these concepts and governance, development effectiveness, empowerment and the realisation of human rights.

Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation (henceforth HELVETAS) approached IDS, drawing on its grassroots experience in the field of transparency and accountability. The two institutions agreed to collaborate on studies of successful accountability and transparency initiatives in fragile contexts to further contribute to research in this area. This collaboration consists of three case studies, based on HELVETAS development initiatives, and a final publication on the topic of accountability at the local level in fragile contexts by IDS and HELVETAS’ 'Governance and Peace' Desk. The studies have been carried out by three Swiss junior researchers in Mozambique, Nepal and Bangladesh. The overall research objective is to ‘contribute to increased learning on accountability initiatives in fragile contexts [in order] to increase understanding of successful practices and enabling factors’ (HELVETAS 2011(a): 1).

As the junior researcher carrying out the Bangladesh case study, I have received the support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)’s local governance programme Sharique, which is implemented by HELVETAS. This programme has been in Bangladesh since 2006 and accompanied local government structures throughout political unrest, several elections and the resulting policy changes, all of which have completely restructured the local government context. Even today Sharique frequently faces national strikes and works within a firm structure of traditional power relations.

This case study focuses on local governance actors’ perceptions of the relationship between citizens and local authorities. It draws on discussion of the various meanings of accountability to contribute to theoretical debate grounded in grassroots experience. It analyses the social and political factors that intervene in citizen–local authority relationships as conditions that create an environment of accountability for local government in Bangladesh. Finally, it examines the role of local elites in this context, especially in one of Sharique’s successful activities, the ward platform. The study aims to illustrate the role social hierarchies play in realising the Sharique programme, and to present the strategy Sharique applies in this context.

This paper first introduces the history of Bangladesh and its decentralisation process, laying out the legal basis for accountability at the local level. It describes the focus for this case study, SDC’s local governance programme Sharique. The following chapter presents the conceptual framework for the study, identifying elements of accountability and introducing how it might be understood in fragile contexts. After presenting the research process and methods, later sections identify spaces for accountability in the Bangladesh legal framework

of local government and examine social and political factors affecting the context of local governance. A social hierarchy based on gender, education, family and wealth emerges and a group of individuals at the centre of power relations in rural Bangladesh will be presented: the local elites. The introduction of an additional contextual element, political allegiances, leads to a discussion on clientelism and citizenship in the relationship between local authorities and citizens. The next section tackles Sharique's activity in this context, especially the ward platform, investigating the success the network can have in this challenging environment. This section addresses the creation and support of networks through the ward platform, specifically those that are capable of sustaining or modifying existing power relations at local level. An examination of Sharique's engagement with transparency, participation and accountability – concepts at the heart of this study – leads to a conclusion that draws attention to the strategy of collaboration with dominant actors that Sharique uses when attempting to influence the local social and political context in ways conducive to accountability, while at the same time finding its activities affected by this same context.

2 The context of this research: local government in Bangladesh and Sharique

Bangladesh, a small South Asian country, is located in the floodplains of the Brahmaputra, Ganges/Padma and Meghna. The country is densely populated, reaching 964 persons per km^2 (BBS 2011: 8). According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), 31.5 per cent (GPRB 2011: 97) of the 142.3 million Bangladeshi (*ibid.*: 3) live beneath the upper national poverty line[1], 50% of Bangladeshi residents live with less than $1 a day and 80 per cent with less than $2 (DFID 2011: 2). In terms of the Millennium Development Goals, BBS and DFID agree that the country has made significant progress in poverty reduction, enrolling boys and girls in primary school, and reducing child mortality rates (DFID 2011, BBS 2011). Nevertheless, DFID considers Bangladesh to be off track both on progress towards access to safe drinking water and basic education for half the population and the goal to improve maternal health (DFID 2011).

This chapter introduces selected moments in Bangladesh's history, including changes in the legal framework for local government. This section also presents SDC's local governance programme Sharique, which contributes to the practical realisation of this legal framework and is the object of this study.

2.1 A short history of Bangladesh[2]

> *'The history of Bangladesh is an eventful combination of turmoil and peace, as well as prosperity and destitution'.*
>
> (BBS 2010: XIX)

Bangladesh was constituted only forty years ago as the small south Asian country it is today, following divisions of the Bengal region and several wars of independence. When British colonial rule ended in 1947, the Bengal region was divided between India and Pakistan. Until 1971 today's Bangladesh was part of Pakistan, separated from the western part of Pakistan by about 1,500km of Indian terrain (Van Schendel 2009: 107). Conflict around the definition of the Pakistani national language demonstrated several cultural and political differences

1 The upper poverty line is based on the price of a bundle of food that provides 2.122 kcal per person per day plus the price of a minimum bundle of non-food items (World Bank 2008: 2).
2 If not otherwise referenced, this section is based on Van Schendel (2009)

between East and West Pakistan (*ibid.*). During this conflict, a Bengali language movement arose, along with a new struggle for independence that not only opposed East and West Pakistan but also created a Bengal identity. Van Schendel (2009) states that this feeling of unity in a Bengali culture was represented by the Awami Muslim League and its leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He posits that the Awami League, having formed the first Bangladeshi government after a violent struggle for independence from Pakistan in 1971, was identified with socialist and populist demands. He states that the Awami League is still one of the major political parties and represents the centre left in Bangladesh, pursuing a vision of the united Bengal region. The author identifies the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) as today's major opposition party. The BNP's vision of the Bangladeshi nation emerged after recognition of Bangladesh's independence by Pakistan in 1973. This vision is positioned at the centre right of the political spectrum and was established by Major General Ziaur Rahman, who seized power through a military coup in 1975 and created the BNP in 1978. Van Schendel (2009) adds that the BNP's vision of the Bangladeshi identity was based on a strong Muslim-Bengali identity and supports a division of the Bengal region. Van Schendel opposes these two visions: the Awami League's pursuit of a united *Bengaliness*, and the BNP's national vision of *Bangladeshiness.* Today, many other factors seem to contribute to the opposition of these two parties (Van Schendel 2009).

The phase during which Bangladesh became a country and today's major political forces emerged was followed by a violent period of assassinations and a military takeover. In 1982, Ziaur Rahman was assassinated in a military coup. After a few months of a military-backed civilian government headed by Ziaur's wife, Khaleda Zia, Major General Hussain Muhammad Ershad seized power and introduced his own party, the Jatiya National Party. In the 1990s, a widespread and prolonged civilian campaign of agitation with mass protests forced Ershad to step down and initiated a system of elections under a caretaker government formed of non-political individuals (Yousuf 2010). The first elections organised under this system took place in 1991 and were won by the BNP. This started a period of alternation between the BNP and the Awami League in ruling the country: the second elections in 1996 launched a transfer of power to the Awami League. However, the BNP won the majority of parliamentary seatsthrough an opposition alliance with the Jamaat-e-Islami and Jatya parties under the 1996 Awami League regime. Van Schendel (2009) asserts that this coalition led to violent clashes between secularists and Islamists during the 1990s, especially on university campuses.

In 2006 the electoral system under the caretaker government was destabilised (Yousuf 2010). Significant pre-election violence arose (Yousuf 2010; Van Schendel 2009), elections were postponed and a military backed interim government was installed in 2007. This government organised elections for 2008, in which the Awami League won the majority of seats in Parliament. The Awami League has continued as the ruling party since that time.

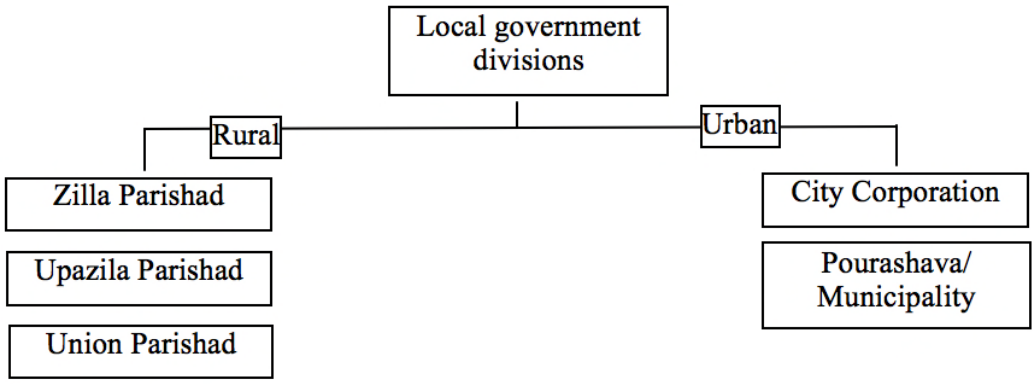
2.2 Short history of the legal context of local government in Bangladesh[3]

Local government in Bangladesh dates to the period before Mughal rule (1526-1761). Legal provisions for local government entities were introduced under British Rule (1761-1947): the 1885 Bengal Local Self-Government Act introduced a local government system based on three tiers, the Union Board, the Local Board and District Board, and established the Union Committee, which is the basis of today's lowest tier of local government, the Union Parishad (UP). The number of tiers has been modified several times since British rule, varying between two and four tiers of local government. Today, three tiers of local government are in place[4]:

3 If not otherwise referenced, this section is based on Van Schendel 2009 and Uzzaman 2011

4 An illustration of the evolution and modification of the tiers of local government throughout the history of Bangladesh up until the 2009 UP Act can be found in Annex II. This illustration reflects consistency in the Union Parishad since its creation in 1885,

Figure 2.1 Tiers of local government



Source: Based on BBS (2010) and Uzzaman (2011)

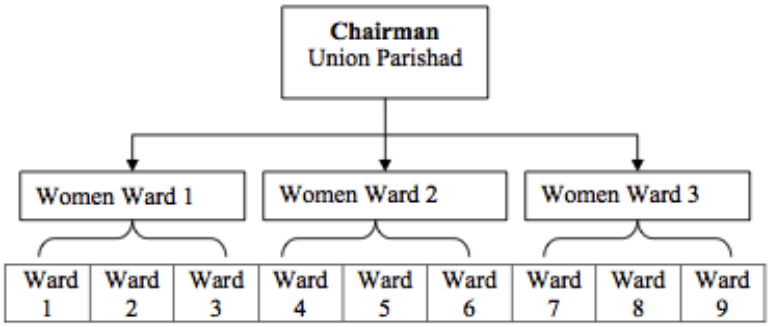
The caretaker government took initiatives in 2007 to start a process of decentralisation (Uzzaman 2001: 67). The Awami League introduced a set of acts that created a new legal basis for these three tiers of local government and attributed more responsibilities to the UP which until then was an executive entity. It also organised long overdue Upazila Parishad (UZP) and UP elections.

The Upazila Parishad has been a central institution since the Ershad regime, allowing this *parishad* to have influence on policy deliberations and allocating enough resources to this tier to free it from bureaucratic control (Nizam et al n.d.: 24). The UZP went through an unstable period after the Ershad regime, dissolved in 1991 and revived as 'a bureaucratic exercise' (*ibid.*: 28) in 1998. Since 2009 it has acted as a democratically elected body, with the UP or the Pourashava chairmen, a UZP chairman, and two vice UZP chairmen and women as its members. Today the UZP still plays a relevant role in policy making, planning and implementing development projects, as well as in supervising their implementation. Uzzaman (2011) states that almost all developmental functions have been shifted from central government to the UZP (Uzzaman 2011: 65). Nevertheless, Nizam et al (n.d.) argue that since 2009 the number of actors who affect its activities has restricted the autonomy of the UZP; it can influence the design and implementation of a number of other actors' plans but is also open to influence from many different sources (Nizam et al n.d.: 11). This, added to new liberties of the lower instance of local government, leads Nizam et al to state that the Union Parishad and Upazila Parishad are no longer in a hierarchical relationship, but in a collegial one (*ibid.*: 40).

The lowest tier of local government, the Union Parishad, has been functioning since British rule and is based on a committee. This committee became a fully elected body in 1962 (Rahman 2002: 113), when it was constituted of one elected chairman and nine elected members, as well as two nominated women and two peasant members, who were selected by central government (Uzzaman 2011: 58). Unions were divided into 9 wards[5] from 1997 on and an additional female member was brought into in the committee that leads each union. Each of the three seats that are now reserved for females were also opened up to election.

and the various changes the higher tier, the Upazila Parishad, has undergone.
5 For an illustration of the different divisions with an estimation of their current population, see Annex 1

Figure 2.2 Reservation of seats for women in the Union Parishad



Source: Uzzaman 2011: 62

Since 2006, a Local Governance Support Project (LGSP), enabled by World Bank assistance, has allowed local government entities to receive financial incentives from non-governmental structures, improving their financial accountability and allowing them to undertake more activities (Nizam et al n.d.: pp 28-19). This reform allowed partial independence of the UP from the financial resources of the UZP, as UPs became eligible to receive development funds without UZP approval. The current Local Government (Union Parishad) Act 2009[6] further increased the responsibilities of the UP and established a planning process. This is based on consultation with citizens, which progresses from gatherings on the ward level to discussions on the union level and ends in approval on the *upazila* level by the elected UZP chairman. Since 2009 a Right to Information Act allows citizens to access information on UP activities.

Decentralisation efforts and good governance are part of the Bangladeshi government's most recent Five Year Plan, the 'National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction II (2009-2011)'. Various development partners collaborate with the government on this topic. The Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) is one of them, and identifies local governance as one of its two thematic areas of activity (SDC 2008(b)).

2.3 Sharique local governance programme

Sharique, which means partner in *bangla*, is a Swiss Development Cooperation local government programme with the overall goal to 'improve wellbeing and economic, social and political participation of the poor and poorest women, men and marginalised' (Sharique 2012: 1). More specifically, the programme has a threefold aim:[7]

- *Building the capacities and competences of the supply side* of local government in Bangladesh, the Union and Upazila Parishads; making them more effective, transparent and inclusive in the management of public affairs; and leading them to more accountable practice. Sharique provides trainings on the activities mentioned in legal provisions, such as tax collection, reaction to applications for information, budget planning, the selection of beneficiaries for social safety net programmes[8], and the formation of standing committees and their responsibilities. It also trains local governance actors on the organisation of public hearing events that contribute to the

6 A more detailed description of the legal grounds of interaction between Union Parishad and citizens can be found in Chapter 7
7 These aims and applications are based on Sharique (2012) and on workshops with the regional staff in Sunamganj on 10 May 2012 and with Rajshahi regional staff on 13 May 2012.
8 Social safety net programmes are schemes 'protecting individuals from falling into poverty beyond a certain level through redistribution and correcting market failures' (Kam 2009: 3). Bangladesh has currently more than 30 different programmes, relying on cash transfers or food aid (*ibid.*).

proactive disclosure of information and participatory planning such as the ward *shava*, open budget sessions and UDCC meetings. Sharique also provides trainings to UP members on topics not tackled by the legal framework of local government, such as the inclusion of poor, marginalised and female populations. These topics are promoted through training on pro poor budgeting, participatory gender analysis, women leadership, and disaster risk management activities. Finally, Sharique has developed a Local Governance Self-Assessment (LGSA) tool, which allows communities and UPs to identify central actors of local government, learn what duties different actors need to fulfil, assess the performance of local government, define priorities and integrate them in an officially approved local governance action plan (Arnold, Fendrich, Byrne and Mejia Acosta 2011)[9].

- *Empowering the demand side*, namely citizens, especially poor and vulnerable populations of the rural areas where Sharique is working. Through trainings, awareness raising campaigns and cultural events, Sharique wants to make citizens aware of their rights and legal responsibilities, especially their responsibility to pay taxes, their right to obtain information from UP on demand and their right to benefit from UP services. Sharique also forms new citizen groups and supports existing groups, which can have a supervisory and advocacy function to the UP, to evolve as central actors in local development. Sharique supports these groups – called ward platforms[10] – through different trainings, which enable them to use spaces for accountability effectively, to understand the possibilities of participation and to support the UP in organising participatory events and implementing development schemes.

- *Utilising lessons learned* in Sharique's practice and influencing the shaping of policy.

Sharique has been operating in Bangaldesh since 2006 and was implemented by Intercooperation and CARE Bangladesh during its first phase from 2006 until 2009. After this phase, Intercooperation took full responsibility for Sharique implementation. When Intercooperation merged with Helvetas in 2011, the two organisations became Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation (shortened to HELVETAS).

Sharique operates in two regions of Bangladesh: the district of Rajshahi and Chapai-Nawabganj in the North West and the district of Sunamganj in the North East of the country[11], which include in total 130 UPs and 21 UZPs. It covers 3 per cent[12] of UPs and around 4 per cent[13] of UZPs in Bangladesh, and reaches out to around 4 per cent of the country's population (Sharique 2011(a): 1). Sharique follows the SDC's geographic focus, stating that the targeted regions are two low income and underserved rural areas (SDC 2008(b): 16). Sunamganj is an especially difficult location, as it is submerged by water for several months every year. Aside from geographic difficulties, Sharique identifies high illiteracy rates, general scepticism towards those in authority and communication problems as challenges for the implementation of its activities (Sharique 2011(a): 1). Sharique also mentions that Bangladesh's sound legal framework for local government is hampered in its application by conflicts of interest among different actors (*ibid.*) and local government actors' lack of knowledge about the legal framework (Sharique 2011(b): 16). Ultimately, Sharique identifies strong power relationships between landlords and labourers, men and women, the

9 Sharique produces manuals for its trainings, such as: the Right to Information manual for community level, for UP level and UZP level; a module on UP rights and responsibilities; a module for gender analysis; one for LGSA. Some of these manuals can be downloaded from the following URL: www.swiss-cooperation.admin.ch/bangladesh/en/Home/Local_Governance/SHARIQUE
10 The roles of such groups are further explained in a chapter on the Sharique programme. It seems relevant to mention that Sharique forms its own groups in wards where such local development groups do not yet exist, and works with existing citizen groups in localities where strong citizen groups are already in place.
11 A map illustrating Sharique's area of activity can be founds under Annex III.
12 This number is based on the number of Union Parishads in Bangladesh, indicated in BBS 2010: 31, and the number of Union Parishads under Sharique's area of activity, indicated in Sharique 2012: 5.
13 This number is based on the number of Upazila Parishads in Bangladesh, indicated in BBS 2010: 31, and the number of Upazila Parishads under Sharique's area of activity, indicated in Sharique 2012: 5

Muslim majority and other religions, and tribal minorities in Bangladeshi society as the most important challenge for good governance (Sharique 2011(a): pp.1-2).

This case study will examine the interactions between the local governance context in Bangladesh, marked by these challenges, and the Sharique programme.

3 Accountability in the context of this study

In the introduction, accountability was presented as a concept with various meanings. This section will introduce aspects of accountability that are relevant for this case study, based on a selective overview of Newell and Bellour (2002) and McGee and Gaventa (2010), two literature reviews on accountability, and on the presentation of relevant literature for the latter report by Barrett *et al*. (2010). Defining accountability as, the 'holding [of] actors accountable for their actions' (Newell and Bellour 2002: 2), the authors introduce the question of who is held accountable by whom.

The overall HELVETAS and IDS study on accountability defines accountability as, 'the obligation of power holders to take responsibility, and to be answerable and liable with regard to their actions and choices' (HELVETAS 2011 (b): 3). This introduces the actors concerned: local government members as power holders to be held accountable by citizens. This case study is therefore interested in what Newell and Bellour (2002) refer to as 'public accountability'. Public accountability can refer both to 'an intrastate system of controls' (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz 2006: 6) or horizontal accountability, and to the relationship between the state and external actors, often referred to as vertical accountability (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz 2006; McGee and Gaventa 2010). The overall study on accountability provides clearer insight on the type of public accountability on which this case study will focus:

> Public accountability is specifically about the spending of public resources, the execution of public duties and responsibilities that serve the public. It is thus national, district and local governments that are accountable to citizens for all their actions and decisions taken. (HELVETAS 2011(b): 3).

The definition of accountability given by the overall study on accountability also states that accountability involves answerability and liability. McGee and Gaventa (2010), Newell and Bellour (2002) and Malena (2004) agree that answerability, as well as enforceability (the legal response to liability), are part of accountability. McGee and Gaventa (2010) define answerability as 'the responsibility of duty-bearers to provide information and justification about their actions' (McGee and Gaventa 2010: 4). Fox, on the other hand, defines answerability as 'the fundamental right to call those in authority to justify their decisions' (2007: 668), showing the two-sided nature of this concept. Newell and Bellour confirm that, 'accountability can either be demanded from below or conferred from above by those from whom accountability is sought' (2002: 5). Malena refers to mechanisms originating 'from above' as top down accountability and classifies them as part of the supply side of governance (2004: 1). In public accountability, these originate within the state and are initiated by public officials and service providers. Malena (2004) differentiates these mechanisms from those initiated by the demand side or, in terms of public accountability, by citizens[14]. The overall study on accountability refers to such mechanisms as citizen engagement, 'the interaction of citizens with state actors, at national, district or local levels, to try to influence the way the state plays its roles in policy processes and budgeting or the

14 Although McGee and Gaventa argue that this distinction between demand and supply side, as well as between state and civil society is simplistic, the overall study on accountability differentiates public/downward from social/citizen-led accountability (McGee and Gaventa 2010: 41). This country study will apply this distinction and will be interested in both supply and demand side.

content of these' (HELVETAS 2011(b): 3). Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (2006) concentrate on mechanisms initiated by interested and organised sectors of civil society as well as by the media; mechanisms the authors group under the term 'social accountability'[15].

Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (2006) mention that social accountability mechanisms can use both non-institutional and institutional tools. On the one hand, the authors consider social mobilisation and mediatisation – actions that demand and enforce accountability – to be non-institutional tools or tools that produce symbolic actions. Newell and Bellour (2002) and Malena (2004) refer to such activities as 'soft sanctions' in that they respond to non-compliance to commitments. McGee and Gaventa (2010) also describe soft peer or reputational pressure, which can be applied when accountability claims fail to be answered. On the other hand, social accountability actors can apply institutional accountability tools that may activate legal actions. Newell and Bellour (2002) explain that such activities may also produce economic sanctions or use of force, classifying them as 'hard sanctions'. As a legal framework is required to activate legal responses, Peruzzotti and Smulovitz introduce the concept of 'legal accountability': 'a set of institutional mechanisms aimed at ensuring that the actions of public officials are legally and constitutionally framed' (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz 2006: 5). McGee and Gaventa add that accountability is mediated by formal institutions but not determined by them (McGee and Gaventa 2010: 5). In the arena of conflict in which accountability is situated, the authors make a distinction between 'what is set out in law or intent' or *de jure* accountability, and 'what occurs in practice' or *de facto* accountability: not all directions included in a legal framework are realised and not all actions have a legal base (*ibid.*).

This case study considers both bottom up and top down accountability, as well as accountability mechanisms initiated by the supply side and actions taken by citizens. It presents the legal framework for accountability in order to understand both informal mechanisms of pressure and the formal vision of accountability employed by local government in Bangladesh.

Newell and Bellour (2002) draw attention to an additional dimension to be considered in understanding accountability: time. The authors explain that accountability strategies go from 'one-time events', which draw attention to an abuse of power, to 'institutionalised mechanisms', such as elections and public hearings, which are part of democratic routine (Newell and Bellour 2002: 5). McGee and Gaventa (2010) and Malena (2004) clarify the moment in which accountability is exercised as either *ex ante* and *ex post*. The authors show that information can be displayed or requested, preferences can be presented and actions can be enforced during the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of government policies and programmes (Malena 2004: 3). This case study is interested in mechanisms of accountability employed in all stages of the programme implementation cycle.

Furthermore, this study addresses the spaces that allow accountability-related practices to take place. Cornwall (2002) and Gaventa (2006) investigate spaces in which participation is realised and distinguish between 'closed spaces', in which bureaucrats, experts or elected representatives take decisions within the state without consultation or involvement of the people; 'invited spaces', which are created by government, supranational agencies or NGOs and in which citizens are invited to participate under certain regulations; and 'claimed spaces', which can be created by non-power holders or claimed by them, pursuing a common concern or identification (Gaventa 2006: 27-28). This study considers these spaces to be opportunities for participation, as well as for transparency and accountability. Moreover, following Cornwall (2002), it considers how power relations shape spaces for accountability. A

15 Malena (2004) points out that these accountability mechanisms can also be initiated by state actors. Nevertheless, the overall study on accountability emphasises that mechanisms of social accountability often operate from the bottom-up and concentrates on citizen-led mechanisms when referring to this type of accountability (HELVETAS 2001(b): 3).

special emphasis will be given to who uses such spaces, applying the differentiation Gaventa (2006) makes between 'visible power' or formal rules and structures, 'hidden power', referring to the choice of participants and setting of agendas by powerful individuals, and 'invisible power', which defines what is seen as socially acceptable or unacceptable (Gaventa 2006: 29).

In their literature review, McGee and Gaventa (2010) point out a recurrent connection between accountability and transparency, as well as between accountability and participation. Research on accountability defines transparency as a state in which sufficient information on decisions is freely available and accessible to those they affect, and is in an easily understandable format (HELVETAS 2011(b): 3). Newell and Bellour (2002) add that transparency is sometimes considered as inseparable from accountability, whereas McGee and Gaventa (2010) and Fox (2007), consider transparency a necessary but not sufficient condition for accountability. This case study will follow the position Fox (2007) and McGee and Gaventa (2010) take on the connection between the concepts of transparency and accountability.

For the connection between accountability and participation, Barrett *et al*. (2010) present Blair (2000), highlighting that Blair refers to accountability and participation as core elements of democratic local governance – especially its democratic component. Blair defines participation as a process 'to give citizens a meaningful role in local government decisions that affect them' (2000: 22). Barrett *et al*. (2010) argue that Blair (2000) concentrates on the *responsiveness* of elected officials towards the preferences of citizens when studying the relation between participation, accountability and local governance in ten countries. The overall study on accountability refers to responsiveness as when a government or another public authority, 'makes some effort to identify and then meet the needs or wants of its people' (HELVETAS 2011(b): 3). This case study intends to consider both the available opportunities for participation and the responsiveness of local representatives to the needs and requests of citizens, within or outside these opportunities.

Beyond participation, McGee and Gaventa find assumptions in the literature that link accountability and transparency to broader goals such as the quality of governance or development effectiveness (2010: 7-8). The authors expose donors' assumptions about the contribution of citizen voice and accountability initiatives to the Millennium Development Goals (*ibid*.: 8). They also find evidence that transparency and accountability initiatives increase state responsiveness, build new democratic spaces for citizen engagement and empower local voices (*ibid*.: 20); results Devas and Grant (2003) confirm in their literature review on the effects of decentralisation, participation and accountability. Nevertheless, McGee and Gaventa point out limitations in the evidence base substantiating these relations, raise methodological challenges and explain how such challenges need to be taken into account before generalising results (2010: 35). The authors highlight the need for further research in this direction. This case study, by focusing on a programme that promotes citizen engagement and state responsiveness, aims to help address this need.

4 Fragility and fragile contexts

Policy discussions on fragile and failed states started in the 1990s in Europe and have connected security-focused activities, development and poverty reduction ever since (Canmack 2006). The notion of fragility remains a political concept, triggering strong debate, especially regarding the classification of a state as fragile or failed[16]. Unstable contexts have continued to create challenges in the implementation of the development agenda, leading the

16 Stewart and Brown (2010: 3) consider fragile states to be in risk of failing or in the process of failing. Their definition of state fragility, based on several development agencies, is very close to the definition Williams (2007) gives of failed states. This country study will however concentrate on fragile contexts rather than failed states.

OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) to create 'Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations' in 2007. These principles hope 'to complement the commitments set out in the Paris Declaration of Aid Effectiveness' (DFID 2010: 2), by indicating the current position of fragility in the development agenda. This connection is confirmed by the World Bank's illustration of the impact of conflict on development and the prevalence of aid volatility in fragile contexts[17].

Mentioning the title of this research, 'Accountability at the local level in fragile contexts', in reference to Bangladesh raised many eyebrows. How Bangladesh is classified in terms of fragility varies significantly between development organisations and agencies. Whereas the OECD does not include Bangladesh in its list of fragile states[18], the World Bank sees Bangladesh as a 'marginal fragile state' based on indicators used for an assessment of Bangladesh's policy and institutional framework (CPIA)[19]. DFID classifies Bangladesh as a fragile state, concentrating on political factors that are considered to be hindering the country's economic development, 'unstable politics (characterised by violence and confrontation), weak state capacity, and substantial fiduciary risk' (2011: 2). DFID adds that chronic energy shortages, inadequate infrastructure and bureaucratic barriers, as well as a loose monetary policy, poor regulation and a lack of alternative investment opportunities hamper the prospect of Bangladesh becoming a middle income country by 2021 (*ibid.*). DFID also mentions Bangladesh's physical fragility, based on its exposure to natural disasters and climate change (*ibid*: 3). SDC similarly highlights the challenge of political instability, adding revenue mobilisation difficulties, public financial management, corruption, limitations in the access to social services, discrimination of minorities and politicisation of the public sector as obstacles to development (SDC 2008(b): 4). Nevertheless, SDC points out, governance reforms and anti-corruption measures taken during the caretaker government, such as reforms separating the judiciary from the executive, measures promoting decentralisation, policies providing spaces for the development of civil society, voluntary collaboration with NGOs and the dynamic private sector, reduction of problematic population growth and a number of social indicators in which Bangladesh outscores other low income countries, are potential opportunities in the Bangladeshi context (*ibid.*: pp. 4-5).

While this study does not seek to determine if Bangladesh is a fragile state, it is interested in the context of HELVETAS' accountability initiative. This next section defines fragility for the purposes of the study and points out factors of fragility in the specific context in which the research has been realised.

4.1 Conceptualising fragility

Although different donors and development agencies have different definitions of fragility, Stewart and Brown (2010) find common elements in the definitions applied by DFID, OECD, USAID, CIDA and the World Bank and draw on them to create three dimensions of fragility:

- *Lack of authority*, leading to situations in which the state cannot protect its citizens from violence. Examples range from civil war to failure of the state to control all regions of a country. Stewart and Brown (2010) also classify periodic political or communal violence or high levels of criminality that cannot be controlled by state action as indicators of fragility.

- *Service failures*, leading to limited access by a part of or the entire population to basic services such as education, health services, water and sanitation, basic transport and energy infrastructure. These failures also lead to the inability of the

17http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/PROJECTS/STRATEGIES/EXTLICUS/0,,contentMDK:22934897~pagePK:64171531~piPK:64171507~theSitePK:511778,00.html, accessed on the 28 June 2012
18 www.oecd.org/infobycountry/0,3380,en_2649_33693550_1_1_1_1_1,00.html, visited on 10 July 2012
19 http://data.worldbank.org/indicator, accessed on 10 July 2012

state to reduce poverty.

- *Lack of legitimacy*, with the state having only limited support among its people, and not realising democratic practices such as free, fair and regular elections. Legitimacy failures also refer to situations in which the military has a strong role in government and cases in which the government has acquired power by force, the opposition is repressed, the media are controlled, significant groups of the population are excluded from power and in which civil and political liberties of the individual are hampered.

These dimensions will be used to capture relevant elements of the context of this study.

4.2 Fragility in the context of this study

Following these three dimensions of fragility, this section identifies elements of fragility that have been part of my experience in Bangladesh and elucidate these dimensions.

My time in Bangladesh was marked by unstable politics leading to violent confrontations. From February until June 2012 several *hartals* (enforced countrywide strikes) were organised. *Hartals* are enforced by *mastaana*, groups of muscle men or mafias which are also used by politicians and elites to enforce their patrons' decisions, beat up opponents and respond to complaints in a violent manner (Uzzaman 2010: 211). In the four months I was in Bangladesh, six days of *hartal* occurred, bringing traffic, production and business to a halt for more than one day per month. Based on comments of Sharique staff, this frequency is normal and is expected to rise until the next elections. On the days of *hartal* I experienced, traffic on roads and highways was stopped and violent confrontations erupted, accompanied by explosions and destruction of private property, and involving injury to at least 130 individuals and one death (Star National Desk, 24th April 2012). The first *hartals* I experienced were organised in response to the disappearance of a political leader from the current party in opposition (the BNP) and his driver. Subsequent *hartals* took place in protest against the detention of 33 high profile leaders of the BNP for arson (Sarkar 2012). This political leader's disappearance adds to 22 individuals registered as missing in the four first months of 2012 (Sarkar 2012), of which several are journalists. Protests and discussions surrounding limitations of press freedom also have taken place following the death of a journalist couple and harassments of several female journalists (BBC Monitoring South Asia, 26.05.2012). These events could be related to what Stewart and Brown (2010) identify as a *failure of authority*: the state does not protect its citizens from violence during *hartal*, nor from *mastaana* generally, creating a context of fear through periodic political violence which is not controlled by state action. Furthermore, the discussion around press freedom produced by these incidents could indicate the limitation of individual liberties, demonstrating a failure of legitimacy. This context of fear and the activity of *mastaana* is not limited to urban environments. Violence is very much present in rural areas, especially violence directed toward women (Farouk 2005). Further sections will explain and illustrate both the power relations that are at the origin of the *mastaana* activities and the context of political rivalries in rural Bangladesh.

Concerning the dimensions of *service failures*, this research underlines the limited access that citizens have to basic services and their dependency on local elites and political party members for the provision of such services. This possibly enhances discriminatory mechanisms in service distribution. Bangladesh's progress on MDGs also demonstrates inconsistent service delivery.

The first two dimensions of fragility that Stewart and Brown (2010) define seem to apply to the case of Bangladesh, and a first indication of the third dimension, *lack of legitimacy,* has been mentioned. Nonetheless, disagreement remains among development institutions over

whether to classify Bangladesh as fragile or not. In fact, the current government has reached power through free and fair elections and the military currently does not have an overpowering role in government, which may lead the reader to conclude that this third dimension is not present in the Bangladeshi context. My experience in Bangladesh has nevertheless shown that local representatives are highly criticised by the villagers they represent and that various mechanisms of exclusion based on class, gender and education intervene in the participation of citizens in local government, as well as in their access to positions of power. Furthermore, the results from my experience underline the strong influence political party affiliation has both on the decisions of power holders and on access of individuals to power. Yousuf (2010) explains that the influence of political affiliations is exercised through a top down orientation within the political parties, through patron–client relations between local and central members of these parties, and through the enforcement of decisions by *mastaana* taking direction from the heads of parties. I return to these elements when tackling the impact of party politics on local power relations.

5 Research objective and questions

Following the description of the context of this case study and the concepts that will be applied, this section presents the aims of the research as well as its specific objectives.

The overall study, ‘Accountability on local level in fragile contexts’, follows an objective to increase ‘learning on accountability initiatives in fragile contexts to increase understanding of successful practices and enabling factors’ (HELVETAS 2011(a): 1). This case study will add to this body of work by focusing on SDC’s local governance programme Sharique, through the integration of an outsider's perspective on the programme, experiences from localities that are not in the programmes’ reach, and the perceptions of Sharique’s indirect beneficiaries.

The study concentrates on the legal, social and political context in which Sharique is employed, and is interested in ‘formal, traditional, political and bureaucratic mechanisms’ (HELVETAS 2011(b): 2). Based on an exploration of how local governance actors conceive the interactions between citizen and local authorities, I argue that these mechanisms define the ‘conditions under which local representatives are accountable to citizen’ (*ibid.*) and that they have an impact on Sharique’s activities, defining the margins of its action. Local elites emerge as central actors of local government when identifying formal, traditional and bureaucratic mechanisms in this context. I therefore explore their role in the promotion of accountability, transparency and participation in local government and in one of Sharique's successful practices: the ward platform. I draw attention to Sharique's strategy when working with local elites and examine the effects that the integration of local elites in ward platforms can have. Moreover, I show that this strategy can be replicated in promising accountability initiatives and suggest that local elites should be taken into consideration for future programming by NGOs and development actors.

6 Methodological framework

The overall study, ‘Accountability at local level in fragile contexts’, is an interdisciplinary study shaped by theoretical and conceptual work from IDS’ ‘Participation, Power and Social Change’ team as well as by the work of the IDS Development Research Center on Participation and Accountability.

The case studies by three junior researchers follow a qualitative approach and are based on practical experience collected from HELVETAS programmes, which work with concepts of transparency and accountability in innovative ways. Although the three case studies share a

similar methodological approach, their contexts, the programmes studied and the liberty of the junior researchers to design their own case studies prevent the studies from being comparative. All three researchers received support from IDS and HELVETAS, as well as from their respective universities: the University of Zurich, the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich and the University of Lausanne.

6.1 Research Process

This project started in November 2011, during the last months of my involvement in a Master's degree at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland, with a start up meeting that included the entire research team. I had started a literature review on the socio-cultural, political and ecological conditions of Bangladesh, as well as the legal and practical context of local government, the Sharique programme and current concepts of accountability and fragility. The field research for this case study on Bangladesh started in February 2012, when I was introduced to the Sharique team and when I presented my preliminary research objectives to this team. Introductory field visits allowed me to make initial observations, to gain an understanding of the operation and objectives of the programme and the difficulties it encounters, and to open dialogue with different stakeholders of the programme. After this introduction, I selected case studies and prepared questions for first explorative interviews. A Skype discussion with the research team in the beginning of April launched my field study, which ended in mid-June. During this time, I carried out interviews, focus groups and expert interviews with targeted stakeholders, as well as workshops with Sharique staff in Rajshahi and Sunamganj. This period was also accompanied by the further work on the case study design and readings on different aspects encountered during the field research.

I started the final analysis of my interviews in mid-May, a period that was also marked by further Skype sessions and email exchanges with the research team. During this time I prepared a presentation of preliminary findings and discussions of these findings with the Sharique Head Office in Dhaka, the regional office in Sunamganj and the regional office in Rajshahi. These discussions created the base for a first draft of the case study. This draft was shared with Sharique staff, as well as with the research team and SDC, allowing comments and input from all sides. A presentation of the findings of all three junior researchers in Switzerland allowed further input from the research team and led to a restructuring and several modifications of this case study.

6.2 Methods applied

This research mainly draws on a literature review and an observational period, which was based on interviews and focus groups. The interviews were semi-structured and were conducted with key individuals, such as UP members, members of citizen groups, local experts and thematic experts. In localities represented by the interviewed UP members, focus groups were carried out with villagers. Participants were interviewed from citizen groups that cover the same area where these villages were located. Thus, the interviewed stakeholders and experts have allowed me to grasp different points of view on mechanisms that operate in the same area, allowing person triangulation (Mikkelsen 2005: 96) of information received, localities visited and issues discussed.

The semi-structured nature of these interviews allowed me to follow the reasoning of the interviewed actors and to gain particular insight into personal opinions, perceptions and practices concerning the interaction between citizens and the UP. Individual interviews with members of citizen groups supported by Sharique also provided me with information on Sharique’s position in the local governance context.

Focus group discussions with villagers introduced me to life in rural Bangladesh and confronted me with power relations between individual villagers, and between villagers and

their local representatives. Duchesne and Hägel (2005: 11) mention this as one of the main advantages of focus groups, noting that focus group discussions can lead a person to give more information than in individual interviews . Finally, as well as allowing me to gather extensive information on villagers' perceptions of their local government and local representatives, these focus group discussions presented me with interactions between citizens and representatives, and introduced to me the central needs and frustrations of these villages.

For these focus group discussions the strategy was not to pre-select participants, but to gather women or men upon arrival in the villages by going through the village and motivating people inside and outside their houses to join. This strategy did not allow me to gather a group who were representative of the entire village population. In the village Arbab in Pananagur Union, for example, many men were working in the fields when the focus group was conducted. Nevertheless, I would argue that the strategy allowed me to constitute groups of mixed age, class and occupation and to avoid meeting only the individuals who are usually in contact with NGO workers, as these discussions were not pre-announced.

Very different roles for women and men in rural villages in Bangladesh cause their contact with local government representatives to be very different. To study each group in detail, in one ward of each union I chose only female interviewees and focus group discussion participants, and in another ward of the same union chose only men. This choice was also based on Duchesne and Haegel, who suggest that gender homogeneity within focus groups can allow the discussion to overcome a concentration on social relations to access more information (Duchesne and Haegel 2005: 47).

At the beginning of each focus group, participants were invited to draw a map of their village, a method Mikkelsen (2005) terms 'participatory mapping'. This introduced me to the interviewees, as well as to the locality. During and after interviews and focus groups the method of 'thick description' (Mikkelsen 2005) was applied. I took notes on observations concerning the apparent economic status, class, age and social status of the participants, and paid attention to which participants interacted and how, as well as where we were invited or chose to sit. These details allowed me to gain further insights on the information received.

An inductive approach and 'matrix displays' were used to analyse the data received (Mikkelsen 2005). Tables were used to compile the information received during interviews, focus group discussions, expert interviews and general conversations. Sharique staff were then approached with the characteristics of groups of actors and localities to receive comments and input on the findings, on the context of the chosen areas and on the general Bangladeshi context. Having identified central elements through this process, a further literature review on elite capture, spaces for participation and the political context in Bangladesh was conducted. In the meantime, workshops with Sharique regional staff in Sunamganj and in Rajshahi were organised to collect information on Sharique's role in promoting accountability and to understand which mechanisms Sharique staff consider to be central in realising their activities.

6.3 Four case studies

In order to grasp issues relating to the local government context in Bangladesh, four UPs were selected as case studies. Following Mikkelsen (2005), case studies do not represent 'the typical or average case' and do not seek to be representative of the general context, but aim to give insight into grassroots narratives. In fact, the four case studies selected give four particular insights on the relation between UPs and citizens. This section presents the particularities of the four case studies selected, the criteria that make them of strategic

importance to this research (Mikkelsen 2005: 92)[20].

One UP, Sahapara, is located in the district of Gaibandha, situated in the north west of Bangladesh. This UP was presented as a star of local government in Bangladesh: its chairman had received an award for his performance. Sahapara UP is not under the Sharique area of activity, but collaborates with Samriddhi, an SDC programme aiming to create markets for the poor that is implemented by HELVETAS. Sharique and Samriddhi both support citizen groups but follow different methodologies. This research was conducted at the level of the UP, the citizen group and the village level. The UP's performance in relation to local government laws and the presence of a project investing in a citizen group gives insights into the interaction of UP and citizens groups outside of Sharique.

The second UP is located in the district of Sunamganj in the north east of Bangladesh. Sunamganj is located on the floodplains of north east Bangladesh and is submerged by water every year during the monsoon season, which has an impact on the contact between UP representatives and citizens. This UP falls under the Sharique area of activity. It is classified as a poor performer by this programme and has high poverty rates and extremely low literacy rates. Sharique's rating of UPs in its areas of activity is based on 17 criteria drawn from a Government of Bangladesh evaluation form, which evaluates the compliance of UPs with the law. Sharique has enhanced this evaluation sheet with elements based on their UP trainings. The enhanced evaluation incorporates the inclusion of women, poor and marginalised groups in events and decision processes, as well as the interaction of the UP with citizen groups supported by Sharique[21].

The two remaining UPs are located in Rajshahi and Chapai-Nawabganj districts; adjacent districts in the north west of Bangladesh. Sharique staff explained that Durgapur UP in Rajshahi is known for its political tensions, as well as for leaders who play an important role both inside local government and in general contact between the UP and citizens. Gomostapur UP in Chapai-Nawabganj, on the other hand, gives insights into family affiliation in local governments. One family has been a member of this *parishad* since military rule and donated the land for the UP complex and the local school.

6.4 Possible biases

Although measures have been taken to mitigate the influence of biases in the study, it seems relevant to draw the readers' attention to their limitations.

A first possible bias concerns my position as an outsider to the Bangladeshi context, which means I have taken a long time to study the context, as well as the historical, social and political background. This position has possibly led to a detailed recollection of what was observed and exposed elements that would not have been tackled by an insider.

My position as an outsider also created a certain dependency on interpreters, introducing a bias through literal and cultural interpretation, as well as through the intervention of a third party in discussions. All three interpreters had received an introduction to the semi-structured approach to interviews, to the research topic and to the questions to be tackled during the interviews and focus groups. Each interpreter reacted differently to this methodological and thematic introduction and adapted his or her own style. I tried to reduce the impact of this dependency on interpreters, as well as of their style of interviewing and translating, through the transcription of all interviews and focus groups. In fact, these translated transcriptions allowed me to understand the interventions and reactions of all actors, including parts that could not be translated during interviews.

20 A table showing the four UPs and the individuals interviewed in each UP can be found under Annex VI.
21 The list of questions allowing a UP to gather points for this evaluation can be found in Annex V.

My position as an outsider might have also had an impact on the way interviewees reacted and interacted. The presence of a person who is not able to speak their language might have put interviewees into a situation to which they did not know how to react. On the other hand, the presence of actors familiar to them might also have influenced their behaviour. Duchesne and Hägel (2005) point out that if participants of focus group discussions know each other, implicitly shared information within the village might be retained (Duchesne and Hägel 2005: 46). The applied interview strategy, which was to concentrate on the train of thought of the interviewees, asking for clarification when the information given was not understood, might nevertheless have allowed access to information which would have otherwise not been explained. Furthermore, the method of exploring the primary results with experts and Sharique staff contributed to a better understanding of the information received.

Further consideration has been given to my involvement with Sharique. Information from both localities and actors involved with this programme and localities and actors which are not was combined. Sharique staff were not present during interviews and focus groups, and the interpreters who collaborated with me on this study are not involved with Sharique. Nevertheless, a certain identification of me as a foreigner with NGO workers could not be avoided and might have led locals to conclude that they could receive a project if they participated in interviews or focus groups.

7 The legal framework for accountability

This chapter presents the Bangladesh legal framework for accountability in local government, drawing attention to its focus on invited spaces and a certain vagueness concerning activities for accountability and participation. Furthermore it tackles the power limitations of local government, which have an impact on accountability practices on local level. The following chapter examines power relations, which further affect these accountability practices, and leads on to a presentation of how Sharique faces its context.

7.1 The legal framework for accountability at the local level

This section is an attempt to assess the legal framework for accountability in the interaction between citizens and local government in Bangladesh. It is based on two main acts regulating local government in Bangladesh, the Local Government Act (Union Parishad) 2009 and the Right to Information Act 2009. The first of these acts sets out the rights and responsibilities of local government and is based on the Local Government Ordinance, which had been in effect for the lower tiers of government since the country's independence (Uzzaman 2011: pp. 74-75). The second act was created more recently, ensuring access to information for all Bangladesh citizens. The UP Act was modified in 2009 to refer to the Right to Information Act for activities related to transparency.

Concerning transparency, these acts require the proactive disclosure of information on current development plans, the UP budget and UP services by every Union Parishad at open budget sessions (Local Government (Union Parishad) Act: chapter 10, section 57), at citizen gatherings which are called ward *shava* or through the publication of a ‘citizen charter’. A citizen charter includes details on the services provided by UP, citizens' responsibilities for services and consequences for violation of commitments (*ibid.*: chapter 8, section 49). The Right to Information Act 2009 orders every authority to catalogue and preserve all information on decisions, procurements and activities executed or proposed and to proactively publicise this information through a countrywide network, guaranteeing equal access for all citizens (Right to Information Act 2009: chapter 2, section 5). The establishment of an Information Commission, also outlined in the Right to Information Act, demands that all authorities designate an officer from each unit responsible for the provision of the above-mentioned information (*ibid.*: chapter 3). The Right to Information Act 2009 includes the right of every

citizen of Bangladesh to obtain any information about a *parishad* upon demand in a prescribed form and the responsibility for duty bearers to provide this information. The Act applies a fine to an officer who does not make the requested information available to a citizen if he or she has followed the prescribed procedure (*ibid.*: chapter 7, section 27). This legal framework therefore grants citizens the possibility to apply hard sanctions. Nevertheless, the Act limits the range of information that has to be provided, excluding information which could cause harm or damage to Bangladesh or its relationship with any other country, international organisation, regional alliance or organisation, as well as any information that would violate the privacy of an individual or put any individual in danger (*ibid.*: chapter 2, section 7), possibly restricting the range of topics for which officials need to be answerable.

The UP Act also mentions possibilities for citizen engagement and participation, with a concentration on ward *shava* meetings. The ward *shava* is constituted of all individuals enlisted in the voter list of a ward, and consists of meetings chaired by the elected ward representative, who is a UP member. During these meetings, information on current development activities, financial affairs and schemes is provided to allow citizens to supervise, evaluate UP activities and make recommendations. Furthermore, the ward *shava* can propose projects, prioritise schemes and development programs to be implemented, review UP reports and identify shortcomings. Moreover, the ward *shava* participates in the realisation of development and health programmes and in raising public awareness related to health, environmental and social topics (Local Government (Union Parishad) Act 2009: chapter two). To ensure that the needs of all citizens are considered during such meetings, the ward meeting quorum is constituted of one twentieth of the total voters residing in the respective ward. The ward *shava* can take place only when that proportion of the ward population is present; in order to ensure the attendance of ward *shava* members, the UP must circulate a public notice at least seven days before the meeting takes place.

The UP Act obliges UP members to consider ward *shava* decisions. If any decision taken by the ward *shava* is not applied the UP must present justifications, ensuring its reaction to identified needs and thus responsiveness. The list of priorities received from the ward *shava* cannot be modified by the UP and constitutes the basis of the UP budget. This budget is prepared before the commencement of each financial year and presented to standing committees and local people in open budget sessions. Any UP spending that has not been approved by the ward *shava* cannot be considered public spending (*ibid.*: chapter 2, section 7). However, the approved budget may be revised by the UP and then approved by the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) – who acts as an advisor of the UZP, the higher tier of local government – or directly modified by him at any time before the end of the financial year (*ibid.*: chapter 10, section 57). This gives this centrally appointed bureaucrat considerable power over UP activities and ward *shava* decisions.

Another channel allowing citizens to participate in, monitor and evaluate UP decisions are the 13 thematic standing committees the UP must form on given topics[22] (*ibid.*: chapter 8, section 45), as well as subcommittees, which can be formed by the ward *shava*. Standing committees' role is to oversee and supervise UP activities concerning their topic of specialisation. Each committee is headed by one UP member (or the UP chairman) and comprises four to six local persons (and one expert member if needed), who should have specific qualifications for serving the committee. The head of the committee contacts possible members in order to invite them to participate; the invitation can be accepted or declined. UP Members are bound to consider standing committee propositions. However, as these committees are headed by a UP member, the possibilities for contradiction and critique in this

22 Standing Committees are to be constituted for the following topics: finance and establishment; audit and accounts; tax assessment and collection; education, health and family planning; agriculture, fisheries and livestock and economic development work; rural infrastructure development, protection and maintenance; maintenance of law and order; birth-death registration; sanitation, water supply and drainage; social welfare and disaster management; development and conservation of environment and tree plantation; resolution of family conflicts, women and children welfare, culture and sports.

space are limited[23]. Furthermore, the UP has the power to dissolve standing committees if they do not meet bimonthly, if they fail to advise the *parishad* or work beyond their ordinance (*ibid.*).

7.2 The spaces provided by the legal framework for accountability: an analysis

This legal framework for accountability ensures transparency from the supply side by allowing citizens to demand information and to enforce the provision of this information. Activities related to transparency are clearly formulated, even allowing enforcement of actions backed by this legal framework. This section will show that possibilities for participation, responsiveness, answerability are less clear. An analysis of spaces provided for accountability and participation show that these are either heavily regulated, allowing only very limited input, or described in a manner vague enough to allow hidden and invisible forms of power to select and channel input from citizen. This analysis will lead on to exploration of the role Sharique plays in promoting the use of these same spaces.

When considering citizen engagement and participation, the legal framework proposes two spaces: the ward *shava* and committees. Both of these spaces have been created and designed by government, which *invites* citizens to enter to give input and ask questions in accordance with established rules. The difference between the two lies in their duration and in the degree to which actions and actors are pre-defined by the legal framework . When looking at the latter point, committees seem to be more regulated invited spaces than the ward *shavas*, as participants are selected by the authority heading these Committees, and can only have an impact on one specified topic. They could be identified as spaces *formal by invitation* (Colombia, Pearce and Vela 2005 in Gaventa 2006: 27). As VeneKlasen and Miller describe such spaces, *power* is *visible*: participants and topics are defined (VeneKlasen and Miller 2002 in Gaventa 2006: 29). VeneKlasen and Miller's *invisible* forms of *power* may also intervene, not allowing participants to contradict the representative heading the committee.

The ward *shava* on the other hand is constituted of all citizens within the ward; a wider range of topics is discussed during these gatherings. This could be seen as a space *formal by right* (*ibid.*), since all citizens of a ward can take charge of ward *shava* activities. The experience gained through the field research for this study – elaborated in a subsequent chapter of this report – shows that VeneKlasen and Miller's *invisible* form of *power* also is evident in the context of these meetings (VeneKlasen and Miller 2002 in Gaventa 2006: 29). In fact, social hierarchies define who assists ward *shavas* and who really participates during these events. The final decision on plans elaborated by the ward *shava* is taken in a *closed space*, evident in the description of the legal framework.

An important difference appears when examining the *duration* of these processes. Most committees are standing, whereas the ward *shavas* must be organised only twice a year. Although the ward *shava* meets less often than the standing committees, it is attributed a list of activities that represent a range of possibilities for transparency, participation and accountability for citizens. However, many of these activities need important preparation, such as the review of reports, the identification of shortcomings, the preparation of project propositions. Other activities need follow up, such as the participation in the realisation of UP development activities. The legal framework does not indicate who out of the 2,000 to 4,000 citizens of a ward takes charge of these responsibilities, which can lead to citizens not taking charge of these activities and delegating this power to their representatives, or to some citizens, who already have more power than others and who might not be accountable to the entire population of the ward, taking charge. Mahmud (2007) shows that spaces at local level in Bangladesh can be captured by ‘existing hierarchical social relations of family, kin and

23 This comment is based on a discussion with Sharique staff in its National Coordination office on the 22 March 2012, during which the possible role of the ward platform as a review group of UP activities was discussed. The non-contradiction of authority had an essential place in this discussion and has led me to believe that within Standing Committees.

community' (Mahmud 2007: 65) due to a lack of regulation on the roles of their participants. This lack of regulation allows a form of *hidden power* **(**VeneKlasen and Miller 2002 in Gaventa 2006: 29) to emerge within the ward *shava*, as powerful individuals impact the decision-making process by setting their own agendas and influencing who takes on the responsibilities of the ward *shava*. This will be explored in the later chapter on social hierarchies.

This discussion shows that the legal framework does not allow claimed spaces to emerge or contribute to existing mechanisms for accountability. New spaces, such as (sub)committees, can be created, but they are always led and regulated by a local authority. Gaventa (2006) argues that claimed spaces are necessary for new demands to develop; demands which can then be defended in invited spaces (Gaventa 2006: 27). The lack of this possibility could lead to the repetition of pre-existing demands or demands presented by external actors; a phenomenon the Mid-Term Review team from Sharique pointed out when visiting ward *shavas* and ward development groups (personal discussion on the 11 April 2012).

The legal framework leaves final decisions to a centrally appointed bureaucrat, the UNO. This power allows the UNO to shortcut efforts for participation and accountability and to limit the impact of legal provisions set out at the local level. When the UNO revisits the UP budget, UP members can no longer justify decisions made on planning and budget, as those have been made at a higher level. If citizens expect answerability from the representative they turn to, they might prefer to address the UNO to ensure that their preferences are responded to and that the information they receive is final – rather than participating in ward *shavas* and open budget sessions, since decisions taken in these spaces are subject to the UNO's agreement. The UNO's power over UP budgets, only briefly mentioned in the UP Act, could present a motivation for citizens to bypass local representatives. The ex-chairman of Deluabari UP in Rajshahi district explained that UP members themselves realise this limitation of their position and that this hinders them from realising their role as a contact person for the ward they represent: 'the UP chairmen or members don't go to talk to the citizens because they're helpless;[...] when they go to any village the people will come up and talk about their problems and the chairmen cannot do anything about it.' Rahman (2002) argued ten years ago that local government responsibilities are of an administrative nature, whereas decisions are made in central government (Rahman 2002: 115). Although efforts to strengthen local government have been taken in these last ten years, the ex-chairman of Deluabari UP confirms that this tier of government does not have *de facto* power to realise the responsibilities attributed to it.

Rahman (2002) points out that descriptions of accountability measures in local government are vague, whereas centralised actions are clearly defined (Rahman 2002: 115). This section illustrates similar findings in today's setting. For instance, the ex-chairman of Deluabari UP explains how locally identified priorities are submitted to central authorities:

> ... there is meeting in the Upazila and all the chairmen go there and they can submit their problems [...] and whatever the Minister of Parliament says, that's what is going to happen, but it's not like the chairman asks for a project and then he will get it. (Ex-chairman of Deluabari Union Parishad, Rajshahi District).

8 Hierarchies, power, politics and elite capture

The legal framework for accountability, presented above, creates a base for the relationship between citizens and UPs. This section addresses what Cornwall and Coelho (2007) refer to as preconditions to enter into participatory spaces (Cornwall and Coelho 2007: 5) in which power holders are accountable to citizens. The overall study on accountability presents these as conditions for accountability (HELVETAS 2011(b): 2). Here, discussion concentrates on

the question of ‘who enters these spaces’ (Cornwall and Coelho 2007: 5) and under what conditions, taking into account formal as well as informal spaces.

8.1 Social hierarchies

During the interviews for this study, difference in interactions with the UP in formal or informal spaces was identified between citizens based on their gender, socio-economic status and educational background. Yousuf (2010) recognises these differentiations as characteristic of the hierarchical organisation of Bangladeshi society: ‘The traditional society of Bangladesh is based on hierarchy in terms of wealth, social position, educational background, seniority, and gender’ (Yousuf 2010: 429). This chapter explores these characteristics by presenting some of the results of field research and expert interviews carried out for this study.

8.1.1 Gender differences

A first difference among citizens when interacting with the UP results from their gender. Women who participated in focus groups stated that they do not proactively leave their village in order to talk to their local representatives and that they rely on their husbands and sons for such contact: ‘Don't we have male members in our family? They go, they tell them [the UP members]’ (Housewife from Nayani Sadekpur, Ward No. 4 in Sahapara Union, Gaibandha District). Men of the villages visited were often irritated by the request to talk to only women when a female focus group discussion was organised and even women mentioned that ‘only men can give exact information’ (Sobita from Durlovpur, Ward No. 5 of Gomostapur Union, Chapai-Nawabganj District). This *distinction of responsibilities* led to women often not knowing about ongoing UP development projects that concerned their ward or about meetings for all inhabitants of their ward. Their knowledge of UP activities concentrated on the administration of social safety net programmes. They complained about illicit activities in the distribution of these programmes, as well as the lack of will of their local representatives to respond to their needs. Although women participated in the open budget and open tax sharing meetings that were observed, the women interviewed showed a lack of knowledge about these accountability events. This suggests that these events only reach a small part of the ward population. The interviewed men and women made a clear distinction based on gender roles: women did not attend , and hence do not benefit from, spaces for accountability and participation that would allow them to interact with local government. This interaction is considered to be a male domain.

Maheen Sultan, Coordinator of the South Asia Hub of BRAC Research Programme on Pathways of Women's Empowerment who took part in the Mid-Term Review for Sharique, challenged this position, showing that women in rural Bangladesh know their local representatives and are aware basic information about their UP, especially concerning health issues. She claimed that the conceptions female interviewees presented were triggered by the positive social connotation of women not knowing about political issues and staying in their homes. Although social connotations certainly played a role in the results of these interviews, different levels of knowledge on current UP projects and priorities showed a clear distinction of roles between the two genders when interacting with local representatives. When a women pronounces a need, her demand first needs to be taken up by a husband or a son and so has to pass through more intermediaries before it reaches UP members. Women therefore might succeed in getting their needs answered less often than men.

This distinction of roles based on gender also exists within ward platforms, as well as within the UP. During an interview, a female member of Gomostapur UP (Chapai-Nawabganj District) explained that she, as a female UP member, is responsible for issues that were termed ‘silly’, such as family matters, sexual abuse and extramarital relationships. A female member of Uttar Bordal UP (Sunamganj District), a highly educated woman who worked with different NGOs before entering local government, asked during the interview why she

receives less respect than a male UP member and added: ‘I only see women empowerment in the documents, not in reality.’ The husband of a female representative of Uttar Bordal Union explained that he had put her forward for elections, as his chances to be elected were small. She is currently collaborating with her husband in serving as a UP member.

Female UP members who take on responsibilities considered to be less important than those taken charge of by men can only prove their engagement in local governance by answering their electorate's needs through actions which are likewise less valued. Female UP members represent three wards (around 9,000 individuals), whereas each ward has a direct male representative. Female UP members therefore need to collaborate with the male UP member of each ward, which provides an additional difficulty. This collaboration is necessary to them both to represent their electorate and to ensure their seat at the next elections. Interviews showed that female UP members often do not take charge of tasks within the UP. In fact, male UP members interviewed mentioned they 'round up' the village or villages they represent to be in contact with their electorate. The female UP members from Sahapara Union (Gaibandha District) , Pananagur Union (Rajshahi District) and from Gomostapur Union (Chapai-Nawabganj District) admitted that they visit the villages they represent only when their presence has been requested, and that they are usually updated on current issues through male UP members, ward platform members or, in the case of this Pananagur UP member, not at all. In fact, this female representative cried during the interview, explaining that she cannot afford to go to the villages she represents and stay in contact with her electorate as she is currently not receiving a salary. Sharique staff explained that UP members get reimbursed for their travel expenses, but often with a four month delay. This discriminates against individuals with a limited budget: they will not get re-elected if they do not manage to be in contact with their electorate and identify their needs. This difficulty certainly does not apply exclusively to women. Nevertheless, since women often have less power over the family income, this adds to other difficulties female UP representatives face in representing and being accountable to their electorate. These challenges are illustrated by Sharique statistics, which show remarkably low re-election figures for female UP members in 2011[24].

When describing women’s involvement in Indian *panchayats*, the Indian counterpart of the UP, Mohanty (2007) concludes: ‘The “politics” of representation in these invited spaces [Panchayats] is a combination of local dominance, cultural codes of patriarchy and the working of the local administrative bureaucracy’ (Mohanty 2007: 85). The results presented in this section show how parts of this statement could apply to UP. Questions of local administrative bureaucracy are presented in further sections.

8.1.2 Educational backgrounds and financial resources

In addition to gender, Yousuf (2010) mentions educational background as one of the elements on which the Bangladeshi hierarchy he describes is based. Frequent references to the illiteracy of individuals when divisions in the roles of citizens were explained confirmed that education plays a central role in this hierarchy. The female member from Pananagur UP (Rajshahi District), for instance, whose position was explained in the last chapter, was used as an example to show that people with low education should not be elected as local representatives. It was claimed that they cannot understand the necessary rules and regulations and are therefore easily be bypassed by other UP members, politicians and powerful elites. Uzzaman (2011: 149) was confronted with the same argument, that some individuals would not make useful contributions to UP decisions and should therefore not participate in those decisions. While problems understanding complex laws certainly might make it more difficult for some UP member to carry out their responsibilities, this study shows

24 In fact, in Sharique's area of activity 72 per cent of the 360 reserved seat UP members which are occupied by women stood for re-election, but only 7 per cent got re-elected; a percentage well below the general number of re-elected UP members, which is at 19 per cent in this same area (Sharique 2011 (c): pp. 6-8).

that the designation 'illiterate' is used to exclude individuals from spaces for participation, citizen groups and from direct discussions with local representatives. .

In fieldwork for this study, the idea that illiterate villagers ‘can't talk’ or are ‘too shy to talk’ to local representatives, and that they are unable to participate in deliberative spaces because they ‘don't understand’ the subject of discussion, emerged from many interviews and was defended by both interviewed representatives and villagers. The UP member who represents Ward No. 8 of Uttar Bordal Union (Sunamganj District) stated that the participants of the recently organised ward *shava* were, ‘elite people, leaders or people who have influence and people who are needed for a meeting’. A businessman from the same union confirms that, ‘most of them [the attendees of a ward planning event] are listeners, some of us spoke on behalf of everyone.’ The UP member representing Ward No. 3 of Gomostapur Union (Chapai-Nawabganj District) explained that when people come to him with problems, he asks them to contact their headmen, ‘so that we [the headman and the representative] can talk easily as they are considered representative of you [villagers].’ Finally, a disabled man who used to be a farmer from Chargau in Uttar Bordal Union (Sunamganj District) said ‘Not everyone has to go [to the UP]; he [the businessman sitting next to him] is enough to talk for us.’ Mahmud (2004) describes the mutual enforcement of powerlessness from the marginalised when discussing such self-censorship; Kabeer (2011) presents this as the ‘inner acceptance of inequality’. We have seen similar mechanisms in the previous section on gender differences. However, whereas discrimination based on gender concerns around 50 per cent of the population, illiteracy affects a far bigger population – in some unions 85 per cent of the population[25] – meaning that only a very small part of the population is considered ‘able’ to participate in UP decisions.

Literate individuals are not only believed to be capable of participating in discussions on ongoing or future projects. They are also considered to ‘know better’ than villagers whose needs are greatest, and are thus able to overpower their voices when they express an opinion. The individuals with this power are often teachers, businessmen, retired businessmen or students and so are not among the poorest populations. They are expected to have an enhanced connection to local representatives, and to have a budget and working hours which allow them to regularly reach UP grounds to establish such a connection. In rural Bangladesh, the price for the transport from a village to its UP grounds can be equal to a daily labourer’s salary. Furthermore, mobility can be a very dangerous endeavour, due to flooding and other environmental factors. This limits the mutual initiative for contact between UP members and their electorate, as well as the range of individuals able to take up such contact. What is referred to as literacy, therefore, is not only the ability to read. It also includes the ability to understand abstract laws and regulations and a certain social position, which seems to be connected to a particular level of wealth.

8.2 An interaction process based on a hierarchical division between individuals

We have seen that the role an individual can take when interacting with local authorities is defined by characteristics of gender and wealth, mobility and the capacity to understand certain mechanisms. From this, a process of interaction between citizens and UP representatives emerges. Men with low education and restricted financial resources and mobility address their demands for food or financial support to UP members in informal spaces such as homes, the market or the UP member's home. Hossain (2009) shows that basic demands –such as access to immediate relief or social safety net programmes – sometimes require active lobbying and therefore additional efforts to succeed; a reality which

25 In fact, in Uttar Bordal Union (Sunamganj District) only 15 per cent of female inhabitants are classified as literate by the National Bureau of Statistics (Union Profile downloaded from URL: http://203.112.218.65/RptPopCen.aspx?page=/PageReportLists.aspx?PARENTKEY=41 on the 8 April 2012). Who is classified as illiterate is neither explained on this website, nor in the Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh (BBS 2010). According to Sharique staff this number is based on the percentage of individuals who are able to read and write their name.

further limits the demands these men can realise.

Projects that require more significant financial resources and local priorities are discussed between UP representatives and men who, based on their financial and education background, are considered local elites[26]. These discussions take place in both informal and legally-defined spaces, such as ward *shavas* and ward planning events. Non-elite villagers who have needs that require significant financial resources turn to local elites as intermediaries between them and the local authority: these local elites they are considered to be 'able' to communicate and negotiate.

This interaction process is not only based on a division between those who can have an impact on UP priorities, exercise citizen engagement and demand responsiveness, and those who cannot, but also contributes to that division. Kabeer (2011) argues that the main characteristics respected are 'communities of birth', such as 'relationships of family, kinship, caste, and so on' (Kabeer 2011: 325) and that these communities create 'identity, affiliations and access to resources' (*ibid.*). Cornwall and Coelho (2007), drawing on chapters by Mahmud, Mohanty and Williams in their book, explain that these family ties are the reason individuals make use of the public spaces available (Cornwall and Coelho 2007: 9). We have seen that these affiliations and family ties define how these spaces are used. The division triggers the exercise of *invisible power*, which defines groups of individuals for whom it is appropriate to engage in accountability activities and groups for whom this is not possible, without consideration of their ability to understand rules and regulations. When the privileged positions from which individuals engage as citizens are considered, it is clear that categorisation itself gives rise to a social hierarchy, placing men from influential families with high education and important resources at the top and poor illiterate women at the very bottom. Looking in greater detail, it is evident that power relations based on political alliances, on the distribution of powers between tiers of government, and on relations between elected representatives and centrally appointed bureaucrats interact with the hierarchy.

8.3 Local elites and power relations

This section addresses power relations in the interactions between villagers and local representatives. It starts with the group of individuals who have the privilege to interact closely with the UP in discussions and local priorities – the *local elites* – by investigating their role in the villages and in local government decisions.

The question of who can qualify as a local elite first needs to be clarified. Based on a literature review, Wong (2010) describes elites as individuals who have access to economic resources, to important knowledge of political protocols and to higher education as well as individuals with high employment status and a certain religious affiliation. Interviewees described the local elites in a similar way: 'He [the local elite person] is older and richer and bigger in every part' (Shahida, housewife from Durlovpur in Gomostapur Union, Chapai-Nawabganj District) and '[The local elites are] some senior people who used to do job but [are] now retired and we respect them [...] they are [...] older than us and very powerful and very rich, we respect them and call them' (UP member of Sahapara Union in Gaibandha District). Wong (2010) shows that this categorisation awards elite individuals roles that allow them disproportionate influence over collective action. Thus, local elites find themselves at the top of the previously examined social hierarchy. This section illustrates the influence local elites can have and are expected to have in local government in Bangladesh.

26 This denomination is explained in detail in the following chapter.

8.3.1 The role of elites in their localities

Local elites intervene even before the first step of the interaction process described above. Through their contact with local authorities, elites receive information on current projects, unofficial information on the distribution of services, local priorities, current difficulties, internal UP functioning and responsibilities of each its members, which non-elite villagers do not receive. Official information is disseminated through legally-backed initiatives such as the publication of information on signboards, citizen charters, information centres and through the general villagers' attendance in ward *shavas*. These official channels of information are limited to official information, for example informing villagers about the list of services to obtain from UP. They do not explain which representative is the most receptive to requests for social safety nets or where to meet him in private. As local elites obtain unofficial but essential information, it is in their hands to spread it. This position, as well as further factors limiting the contact between locals and their representative, give them the power to decide who is informed and which information is made public. For example, a businessman from Gomostapur Union (Chapai-Nawabganj District) states that, 'people come to know after anything happens. It's easy to know. It's oral communication.' Nevertheless, he explains that he sits exclusively with five elite persons of this village after his meetings with the UP in order to discuss essential information, and does not consider disseminating this information further.

Villagers interviewed maintained that local elites also have an important role in the next step of the presented interaction process, the *direct appeal for immediate relief measures* to UP members:

> These things [rice and mosquito-nets which are part of social safety net programmes] go to the people who understand more and can talk to the chairman or have a good relation with him. The [UP] member is not from our village, so the chairman gives responsibilities to some elite people to make a list of the people who are in need, but those people put the names of their relatives on the list instead of ours.
> (Mursheda, a housewife from Amtoil in Uttar Bordal Union, Sunamganj District)

Sharique staff confirmed that local elites can be made responsible for the distribution of such social safety programmes if they are part of a local development group, because they are sometimes closer to the village than UP members and can easily identify who is in need of such programmes. Sharique emphasised that claims such as Mursheda's are often based on a lack of understanding of the involvement of elites in this process, as well as on the number of social safety net programmes available; an argument confirmed by Hossain (2009). Nonetheless, the UP thus hands over power to individuals who have no legal obligation to be responsive to all citizens' needs, possibly decreasing its own responsiveness. This handing over of power limits citizens' capacity to hold their representatives accountable for the distribution of social safety net programmes, as UP members are not responsible of the final selection. This can reinforce existing difficulties faced by the most marginalised in accessing basic services and lead to service failures**,** one of the indicators of fragility.

Villagers, as well as UP members, have openly admitted that demands for food or financial support are often answered with personal donations. These donations are made by UP members and local elites, allowing them to enhance their position in their village. UP members who use their own money to answer the villagers' needs were described as good, responsible and honest during the interviews. It seems that such practices are expected from UP members and so represent a difficulty for representatives with limited financial resources. The practice of personal donation also increases villagers' dependency on financially powerful local elites and has led villagers to believe that contacting their local elites and representatives is equivalent to begging. Focus group participants in Biar, in Pananagur Union (Rajshahi District) clearly stated that they refuse to contact their local representative, adding that they prefer to stay independent and be self-sufficient. This absence of contact

prevents the local representative from being informed about villagers' current needs, preventing him or her from being responsive.

Such personal donations seem to be expected not only from UP members, but also from wealthier citizens or individuals with important status. Thus, it is not only limitations in the power of local representatives that lead citizens to bypass them, but also local representatives' scarce financial resources. Local elites with personal contacts to political parties use them to show that they can answer the needs of villagers more effectively than the elected authority. The increased response to demands through these channels leads to a great dependency of villagers on people whom they cannot elect and who have no obligation to help or interact with all citizens, but can freely choose whom to include in a project and whom to exclude. Moreover, this process limits the impact local representatives can have on development projects in their regions, enhancing locals' belief that the representatives do not have the power to be responsive to their demands.

The case of Chargau in Uttar Bordal Union (Sunamganj District) confirms this: villagers mentioned that their most important need is a bridge; a need which is not being answered by the government. A businessman of this village then explained, 'as we are asking for a bridge but not getting one, we [local elites] collect money amongst us and started a boat service.' Elites of the village join every year to provide this boat service; an activity which gives them a central role in the development of their community and reinforces anger towards the local representative. Difficult relations between villagers and their representative have also led the representative of this ward to bypass his electorate. In fact, in this village no one seemed to know about the ward *shava*, which had been organised only months before and in a school very close to their homes. This lack of information prevented villagers and elites from presenting their demands to their local government and influencing priorities, which itself hindered local authorities in undertaking initiatives for citizen engagement.

Two wards in Sahapara Union (Gaibandha District) show that elites not only have an important position in the contact between villagers and representatives, but also in the development of their village. These two wards are marked by important differences: in one, most houses are connected to electricity lines, roads are in good condition and the UP member has been able to implement a number of projects in the few months he has had the position. In contrast, the road leading to the other ward was in disrepair, no houses in the area were connected to the electric grid and no development projects had been realised by UP in many years. Staff from Samriddhi, another HELVETAS project operating in this area, explained that this second ward is in a very remote and floodprone area which stops inhabitants working on their land all year and forces them to work as daily labourers during the months their land is flooded. These locals, who earn only little, are unable to implement projects by their own initiative. Samriddhi staff also mentioned that the ward with connection to the electrical grid and good roads benefits greatly from its concentration of elite villagers, as well as from the presence of different NGOs. The involvement of local elites in Chargau and the differences between these two wards in Sahapara Union clearly illustrate government service failures, which are compensated by powerful individuals, ensuring some access to these services but also reinforcing their influence in their localities.

The family of the UP chairman of Gomostapur Union (Chapai-Nawabganj District), who has been chairing the UP for the last thirty years, represents a further example of the role elites can play in the development of their locality. This family provided the grounds for schools and the UP complex and invested their money in many development projects. The current chairman is contributing to the installation of a computer training centre on UP grounds. These personal donations might contribute to the repeated election of subsequent family members as UP chairman; in fact, interviewees in this union all repeated that the chairman is a good person. This example also illustrates the powerful position local elites have in rural Bangladesh; a position which can enhance the development of a locality, but also undermine

efforts for accountability at local level.

8.3.2 The role of elites in local government

Local elites seem to not only have a role in local development through their own projects, depending on their financial resources, but also in local government decisions. Local representatives contact local elites when a project is to be implemented in their ward, as a UP member of Sahapara Union (Gaibandha District) says: ‘They can give me an idea about how it can be done and what is the best way’. This consultation process can have positive effects, as local elites often have extensive knowledge of their locality and its inhabitants. However, the distribution of social safety nets shows that the involvement of local elites can be a mixed blessing. A UP member of Uttar Bordal Union (Sunamganj District) presented an example in which a local elite reached a status of authority over local representatives. He explained that the ward platform member of this locality, who can be identified as an elite person, is the UP chairman's cousin and older than him, obliging the chairman and the local UP member to consider the ward platform member's opinion. The UP member also explained that he is subject to decisions of local elites and requested that the interview with him be carried out outside his village in order to avoid the elites’ presence, which, as he mentioned, would prevent him from speaking freely. Such involvement of local elites in local government affairs guarantees the responsiveness of local government to local elites’ preferences; whether these preferences correspond to the needs of all citizens remains an open question.

Local elites openly claim their influential positions in local governance: ‘We can contact *seniors*, so why would we go to a junior? We are brave, we go straight to the chairman. The member's post is below the chairman's’ (Businessman from Dakintola in Gomostapur Union, Chapai-Nawabganj District). The factor of age, highlighted in this citation, is often referred to and organises individuals in a clear hierarchy, superposing seniors to juniors. This hierarchy also exists within UPs: the newer a UP member is and the smaller his financial resources are, the weaker his power within UP and the easier it is for a local elite to elude his influence.

Finally, local elites might even implement projects in contact with government institutions, bypassing the entire UP and directly contacting the corresponding Member of Parliament, or using their contacts in political parties. In bypassing local government and local representatives, elites undermine the UP member's role as a representative of local people, his ability to be responsive and his influence on development projects in his ward.

8.4 Party politics in local government

This section focuses on the mutual interactions of political allegiances, social hierarchy and power relations resulting from this hierarchy. It demonstrates that political alliances are characterised by more than social hierarchy, as Yousuf (2010) explains. It also illustrates that they are a condition for the establishment of such hierarchies, and either allow or prevent local representatives to realise their roles and responsibilities.

A focus group discussion with male villagers in Pananagur Union, in which a local representative of the Awami League, an Awami League supporter and one representative of the BNP participated, highlighted the role of political parties in the realisation of development projects. These participants revealed that each political party has its own development projects in the union. A UP member of Uttar Bordal Union (Sunamganj District), who was an Awami Students League representative for the region before entering the UP, explained that he used to be involved in the distribution of social safety net programmes and in the construction of tubewells through his affiliation with the Awami League. These activities are officially implemented by the UP to guarantee a politically neutral selection of beneficiaries. Nevertheless, political parties seem to take over such projects and local elites become involved through their political alliances. Both the implementation of development projects by

political parties and realisation of government-run projects by the dominant political party politicise the selection of beneficiaries. This leads individuals to rely on their political contacts to address their basic needs, fostering the dependency of villagers on local elites described above.

Within the UP, the political affiliation of each member seems to either enhance or limit his or her power. As the ex-chairman of Deluabari UP, which is adjacent to Pananagur Union (Rajshahi District), explains:

> It's the normal nature of Bangladesh politics [...] if one government is in power, the other person who supports the other party, they won't get any work. […] You will get the same impression everywhere you go, it's the same everywhere.

If the UP chairman, UP member and the local elites all support the same political party, the interaction process described earlier should apply, as well as the hierarchy based on wealth, social position, educational background, seniority and gender described by Yousuf (2010). However, if one or several of these individuals support a different party, especially the party in opposition, he or she will be bypassed and will need to use his own political party contacts, inside or outside government, to realise development projects and prove that he or she is responsive to the electorate.

An example from this same union further illustrates the result, and is echoed by Sharique staff comments about the union being part of a very politicised *upazila*. A female UP member of Pananagur Union mentioned that she is bypassed by local politicians, who directly negotiate with higher powers because she is a member of the current opposition party. She does not therefore have any influence on projects realised by the current government. In addition to being bypassed by citizens engaged with political parties, she explained that she cannot execute her power as a local representative because central government ignores her when planning development projects. She described being forced to sign financial statements and decisions to which she does not agree: ‘I support BNP and they support Awami League and they make me silent and do whatever they want.’ The chairman of the union confirmed the central government’s intervention, complaining about the influence their assigned Member of Parliament takes on the project distribution in union without consideration of the UP member's intervention and citizens’ needs. A local representative of the BNP, who participated in a focus group discussion in Pananagur Union, reinforced these statements, stating that the Member of Parliament should stop impacting local affairs as he has no knowledge of the life of a farmer. The political allegiances of this female UP member, combined with her financial situation and social status as an illiterate individual, seem to prevent her from enacting the responsibilities she was given on election to the UP and from acting in an accountable manner.

The dependency of local representatives, local elites and villagers on their political allegiances shows the central role that party politics play in both the social hierarchy and the functioning of local government in Bangladesh. The distinction between individuals allied with the party in power and individuals who support the opposition party leads the former to use unofficial channels to get their needs addressed, creating a lack of responsiveness of local government to the citizens. This distinction and the process of bypassing also prevents local representatives from being accountable to all individuals in the locality they represent. The situation raises questions about the legitimacy of the current system, as a part of the population seems to be unable to participate in local government decisions and take advantage of their rights as citizens.

8.5 Empty spaces, citizenship and clientelism

Some of the different processes presented above have been shown to exclude segments of

the population from engaging as citizens, demanding answerability and exercising power. Others drive local government to limit the range of individuals to which it is responsive. The legally-defined invited spaces that were presented earlier have only seldom been referenced. Whilst a range of informal spaces had a central role in the narratives of interviewees, most did not seem to make use of legally-defined spaces. This section shows how clientelism takes root in this context, leading to differentiation in the realisation of different citizens' rights.

Mentions of *ward shavas* were limited to local elites, who use these spaces to lobby for the needs they consider essential for their localities. Comments about villagers who are not considered elite show that they can attend such events, but do not generally intervene. A similar pattern appears with standing committees: only elites mentioned that they have been part of such committees. Therefore only elites have access to sufficient information about ongoing projects to be able to monitor and evaluate them. However, the participation of local elites in standing committees did not always seem to be of great advantage to them. Sharique staff stated that the legislation does not clearly define the roles of standing committees. One local elite from Uttar Bordal Union mentioned that he was informed about his membership in a standing committee after he had already been officially made a member. He did not have the choice to accept or refuse the position, nor was he informed about the remit of this standing committee or his particular role in it. The supervisory function of a standing committee and thus its role in the promotion of accountability is therefore lost.

Existing power relations seem to penetrate legally-defined invited spaces for accountability. This development, according to Cornwall (2002), limits the agency of people without confidence, family ties or status (7). Local elites' predominance in legally-defined invited spaces also reveals the notion of *empty spaces*:

> a subcategory of invited spaces, denoting contexts where a marginalized group fails to populate a official invited space. The procedures and structures are there; also in some cases formal membership of [members of marginalised groups] can be found. Yet all these do not translate into meaningful political participation.
> (Mohanty 2007: 81)

Not all procedures and structures are clearly defined in the spaces presented so far; nonetheless, there seems to be a lack of meaningful political participation for different marginalised groups. This situation of exclusion also reflects a *lack of legitimacy* in local government, or as Mahmud (2004) argues when describing the Bangladesh context, a denial of the rights of certain parts of the population. The belief of certain groups that they are a 'lesser citizen', as Mahmud (2004) calls it, makes marginalised individuals perceive their relation with the UP as one in which they are clients, exchanging favours with patrons – rather than citizen with rights, who can demand their government allow them to realise these rights. Cornwall and Coelho (2007) further argue that it is necessary for the individual to recognise himself or herself as a citizen, rather than a beneficiary or a client, in order to engage in 'participatory spheres'.

A small part of the population emerges with the capacity to participate in and take advantage of spaces provided for accountability and to benefit from their rights as citizens. The inequality of resources between different parts of the population means that those who benefit from their position as full citizens are requested to give charitable donations. This causes dependency relationships, reinforcing the inequality of rights: 'Strong dependency relationships hinder individual agency and action in claiming even legitimate and formally recognized rights, because the poor and marginalized are very risk-averse and unlikely to violate common practices of allegiance and submission' (Mahmud 2007: 58).

This section has shown that dependency relationships make clients emerge, who concentrate on pragmatic interests and basic demands, rather than engaging for their rights.

The interaction process described shows that villagers mostly contact local representatives for basic demands and depend on favouritism, based on family ties and political allegiances, to benefit from different services.

Individualisation can be seen on both those that benefit and those that provide: elites provide for the basic needs of villagers, which connects basic services with an individual in the minds of those who benefit. Briquet (1995) identifies this individualisation of collective goods, as well as the concentration on basic demands, as one of the main features of *clientelism*. He also refers to a lack of differentiation between political relations and other social connections, such as family and friendship ties or sociability, as clientelistic features (Briquet 1995: 83). Ultimately, this chapter has shown that clientelism has an important impact on the relationships between citizens and local government in Bangladesh, making the general population dependent on the charity of few and limiting 'clients'' capacity to take advantage of accountability initiatives.

9 Sharique and accountability in their context

After an examination of the social and political context with which the legally-defined spaces for accountability interact, this section discusses the role of the Sharique local governance programme in that context. It first argues that training-related activities, which aim to promote and realise Bangladesh's legal framework for accountability, take a central role in programme activities. Then, it investigates the interaction of Sharique with the hierarchical structure that marks Bangladeshi society, a condition which Sharique openly presents as an important challenge for its implementation (Sharique 2011(a): 1). It explores the interaction of the ward platform with local elites, examines the role played by the ward platform in promoting accountability and encouraging and supporting networks, and looks at how these networks relate to social hierarchies and political alliances.

After this examination of the interaction between Sharique and its context, the chapter returns to the concepts of transparency, participation and accountability and explores the ties the programme's activities have with these three concepts.

9.1 Sharique and the legal framework for accountability

Based on a review of Sharique documentation, as well as observations and workshops with Sharique staff, the programme's emphasis on training-related activities for different stakeholders, awareness raising and on the promotion of the legal framework for accountability became apparent. This training aims to raise awareness about the roles and responsibilities of different local governance actors. Sharique's activities also include different support tools, which allow participants to give input on current development activities, promote discussion between local governance actors and result in the identification of priorities and the establishment of development plans, such as Local Governance Self-Assessments and open budget meetings. However, Sharique staff stated that trainings remain their central activity: 'training is the main intervention I think. Training and accompaniment support also' (Workshop in Rajshahi on the 13 May 2012).

Sharique's approach is, 'to empower the poor and marginalised […] to claim their rights and entitlements from local government'. Its staff train local government representatives – especially female representatives – so they can realise their legally-defined roles and responsibilities by forming standing committees, organising ward *shavas* and open budget sessions, applying dispositions for the right to information and collecting taxes (Arnold, Fendrich, Byrne and Mejia Acosta 2011: 14). Furthermore, the programme trains citizens on their own – as well as their representatives' – legally-defined roles and responsibilities. Citizens are made aware of their right to demand and obtain information from government

instances, their right and duty to participate in planning events such as ward *shava* and open budget meetings and their duty to pay taxes. These trainings inform citizen of possible ways to supervise and influence the functioning of their local government, allowing them to gain confidence, to take better advantage of these mechanism, and to benefit from the legal framework on transparency, participation and accountability. Trainings on how to establish such meetings both allow UP members to realise the potential of these events and satisfy citizens' expectations. As the ex-UNO of Gomostapur UZP, a government official who collaborates closely with Sharique, puts it:

> Someone has to go and tell them their roles, their responsibilities, their power. People are more powerful than elite. If you put this message to that locality I think for the time they will be more aware. [...] We need time.

Sharique has been making villagers aware of open budget meetings in which the planned UP budget is presented and discussed. The UP Act mandates the announcement of such events though invitation letters given to literate persons (which make up between 20 to 60 per cent of inhabitants of the wards included in this research)[27]. Sharique uses microphone announcements about these events to inform a greater part of the population. Sharique partner NGO staff explained that the villagers did not feel concerned by these announcements, suggesting that such meetings are for literate and elite individuals only, illustrating the elitist image villagers have of such gatheringsDiscussions between Sharique partner NGO staff and locals helped villagers understand that these events are meant for everyone. Many references to microphone announcements in interviews show the range of contact this tool can have and the potential for change it comprises. Maheen Sultan likewise explained that elite people, who receive invitations to such events, have started inviting others to participate. This practice however extends the influence elite people have over the participants in such events, counter to the aim of microphone announcements. The open budget meetings observed during field research for this study were well attended. It seems that the population is not only becoming aware of the existence of newly created spaces for participation, citizen engagement and answerability, but that explanations of the functions of such spaces have awakened the interest of many locals.

Sharique not only directly raises awareness and trains stakeholders on the legal framework; it also trains members of citizen groups and UP members on topics such as the Right to Information Act, so they themselves can transfer knowledge. Many ward platform members, who inform citizen of their rights and responsibilities, explained their work in this study. However, many of these members are women who stated that their awareness-raising activities concentrate on the topics of dowry and early marriage[28] but only seldom mention the right to information. Raising awareness on topics related to the family might be more suited to women's social role than promoting the citizen's application to UP for information; an activity which is identified with political interests and is part of the male domain, as Maheen Sultan mentioned. Furthermore, the Sharique training module on the Right to Information Act states a 'possibility of conflict because of application submission', a danger which might prevent individuals from including this topic in their awareness-raising activities and thus from contributing to the promotion of transparency (Intercooperation n.d.: 33). This raising of awareness can also have other negative consequences. One ward platform member of Bazarpara in Gomostapur Union (Chapai-Nawabganj District) mentioned getting called names when she crosses the village because she prevented early marriages from happening, creating great financial burden for the families who had organised these events.

Although difficulties exist and are acknowledged by Sharique, an enhanced understanding of

27 These numbers are based on the data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics on each union, downloaded from URL: http://203.112.218.65/RptPopCen.aspx?page=/PageReportLists.aspx?PARENTKEY=41 on the 8th of April 2012.
28 Dowry and early marriage, although common, are illegal in Bangladesh. In fact, early marriage is prohibited by the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 and the payment of dowry has been illegal since the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1980.

the legal framework and mechanisms of decision-making can motivate citizens to *engage*, to *resist* clientelistic practices in service provision, and to *enforce* the application of the legal framework, thus creating conditions for accountability. Many ward platform members interviewed who are engaged in awareness-raising activities mentioned being contacted by local citizens about enforcement measures. A female ward platform member from Pananagur UP in Rajshahi District explained that she was contacted by a member of her village, who had been asked by the local representative to pay for access to a social safety net programme. She reacted by mobilising the ward platform she is part of to confront the local representative. This reaction forced the local representative to reimburse the money he had received for a service he is meant to provide free.

Mahmud (2007) shows that trainings and awareness-building activities allow individuals to gain experience in participation and deliberation, enable the engagement of poor and marginalised individuals in public protest and lead to the growth of participatory spaces as legitimate and meaningful tools (Mahmud 2007: 72). Citizens of the UPs studied, which are classified as good and average performers by Sharique, benefit from proactive awareness-raising activities, which, following Mahmud (2007), represent important potential for participation and accountability. The fieldwork for this study found no awareness-raising activities in unions where Sharique does not grant support to UP members or has only recently started to do so. The presence of Sharique in a UP promotes such proactive awareness raising and can thus enhance the knowledge of citizens and representatives about the legal possibilities for transparency, accountability and participation. Citizens in unions with Sharique support have greater potential to know how to take advantage of spaces for participation and deliberation. Hence, the Sharique engagement in training and building awareness of the legal framework represents a factor in realising the potential of legally-defined spaces for accountability.

Uzzaman, based on his study of people's participation in rural Bangladesh, however, argues that raising people's awareness of the possibilities for participation in local government decisions does not automatically stimulate their participation, as their involvement is not valued by their local representatives (2011: pp. 157-158). Past chapters have shown that the promotion of knowledge on the roles and responsibilities of all local governance actors is not the only factor that determines the engagement of the local population in accountability spaces. The next section investigates how Sharique faces the main factor identified in this study – power relations – through the tool of the ward platform.

9.2 The ward platform

Sharique presents the ward platform as ‘a local development catalyst at ward level that aims at creating a local enabling environment for social, economic development and good local governance’ (2012: 13). Individuals from all populations and regions in the locality form this group on an informal basis. Its objectives can be divided into three main points[29]:

- Uniting citizens and citizen groups with different interests in one platform, in order to represent and incorporate the interests of all citizens of a locality in the development of the concerned ward. This is realised through the ward platform's role of as interlocutor for and negotiator between different of local development actors (ward representatives, UP, line agencies and other groups), as well as through its involvement in all stages of the project cycle:
    - The ward platform is involved in the identification of priorities**,** collaborating with local development actors, as well as with the citizens of the ward. It also presents identified priorities at the ward *shava* for discussion and approval

29 These roles are mainly based on the description of activities in Sharique 2012: 13.

and to the Union Parishad for execution.

- Ward platform members supervise ongoing UP activities through their regular contact with actors of local development and UP, are consulted for feedback, evaluations and inputs for the execution of projects and for future plannin,g and present inputs on their own initiative.

- As an entity in charge of ensuring access to resources for producer groups, the ward platform participates in the implementation of development schemes.

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- Enhancing the inclusion and representation of women and marginalised populations through promotion of their participation in UP committees.

- Assisting and supporting UP in the preparation of beneficiary lists for social safety net programmes and the organisation of ward *shavas*, as well as other social events.

Sharique supports the formation of ward platforms, as well as the development of existing groups. Ward platform members benefit from the programme's training on facilitation, leadership, negotiation and advocacy skills and on awareness-raising activities; trainings which allow them to benefit from and implement the legal framework for accountability at local level. Furthermore, these active citizens receive instructions for and participate in different Sharique tools, such as participatory gender analysis, women leadership trainings, disaster risk management and Local Governance Self-Assessments. These tools allow ward platform members to incorporate Sharique objectives, such as reaching out to marginalised populations, into the realisation of the legal framework for accountability.

9.3 The ward platform and social hierarchies

This section examines how the ward platform emerges from a context of social hierarchy, while attempting to have an impact on this same context. The following chapters illustrate the interaction between networks of elites and individual elites, who find themselves at the top of this hierarchy, with the ward platform. This section shows also that by aiming to ensure the participation of different interest groups in local development, this citizen group can affect power relations at the local level. It then draws on this impact to present ward platform achievements that relate to accountability at the local level.

9.3.1 Elites capturing the ward platform

The inclusion of citizen of all groups and regions in the ward platform is one of the main features of this mechanism, which attempts to ensure responsiveness to the needs of the entire population and not only privileged elites. Sharique trains all ward platform members so they can participate actively in this group and effectively represent all population groups. The programme optimises its trainings so all members of the ward platform can take advantage of the information given, using a simple language and examples from the daily lives of participants and limiting the use of writing and reading. It also stimulates ward platform members to assist each other to maximise the effect of the training.

Interviews with members of ward platform have however indicated difficulties in guaranteeing the activity of members from all social classes. This concerns both activities within the group and activities connecting ward platform with other development actors. Power relations prevent individuals who are attributed a lower position within the social hierarchy from contradicting individuals with a higher position. Furthermore, only elites of the ward platform

seem to be considered as *full members* in some citizen groups:

> the point of making members is, those who are wise and educated should only stay [in meetings] […]; the illiterate people, they can't be members as they can't talk properly. They just need to be informed, so we inform them all the good and bad news.
> (Ward platform member from Satani Sadekpur, Sahapara Union, Gaibandha District)

This quotation shows that the role of an important part of the population and even of the ward platform is limited to receiving information on decisions which have already been taken, not allowing them to participate actively in such decisions or to enforce actions. It illustrates the emergence of elites as gatekeepers (Cornwall 2002) of this accountability space. The position of individuals who are 'full' ward platform members within the social hierarchy has led to villagers to regard the ward platform as an elite group.

Interviews with members of ward platforms have also illustrated difficulties in the representation of all regions of a ward, as mobility between villages is restricted, expensive and sometimes rather adventurous. Especially in floodprone areas, distances between villages are overcome only with difficulty: bridges are flooded, rivers need to be crossed by boat and boat rides are subject to charges. Moreover, in the transition from the dry period to monsoon season, mud roads are in bad condition, making the movement of buses, trucks and cars impossible and the movement of motorcycles difficult and dangerous. No public transport is available in rural areas and rental of the few vehicles available is expensive. Geographically secluded groups of the population therefore face great difficulties not only in contacting the UP or being contacted by their representative, but also in participating in ward platforms. They cannot benefit from the opportunities the ward platform offers to make their voices heard, possibly further excluding them from efforts for accountability at local level.

Difficulties in the representation of all groups and geographic zones within a ward platform trigger the described exclusionary tendencies, hierarchical organisation and forms of elite capture. This report has presented this phenomenon as a product of powerful individuals limiting the advantages of legally-defined spaces and informal groups to themselves. By connecting powerful individuals, some ward platforms have given rise to networks of elites which employ new forms of capturing the mentioned advantages. Ward platforms are assigned the task of presenting identified development priorities for the entire ward to discuss . Some of these networks collectively speak for the citizen of a locality in spaces such as the ward *shava* since 'they know better', and do not allow such discussion. A ward platform member of Uttar Bordal Union (Sunamganj District) illustrates such a case: 'Most of them [participants in the Ward Shava] are listeners, some of us [local elites] spoke on behalf of everyone.' A ward platform member of Bazarpara in Gomostapur Union (Chapai-Nawabganj District) described how Ward Platform members joined together after a ward *shava* in order to modify the priorities identified during this participatory event. Hence, the ward platform not only can be captured by elites, but can also produce a network of gatekeepers (Cornwall 2002). The question thus arises to what extent a group , which may integrate unequal power relations and even promote them, can have an impact on the hierarchical context in order to promote accountability. This question is at the heart of the following section.

9.3.2 The ward platform capturing elites

When comparing unions in which Sharique intervenes and unions where Sharique is either absent or where citizen groups have only recently started taking up their role as a ward platform, a clear difference in the role and functioning of ward platforms emerged. In Uttar Bordal Union (Sunamganj District), where citizen groups have only recently started acting as ward platforms, and in Sahapara Union (Gaibandha District), which is not under Sharique's area of activity, ward platform and citizen group activities mainly concentrate on livelihood-

related topics. The involvement of members of these groups in UP planning and projects is limited; their main objective seems to be the promotion of production and selling of their agricultural items.

During visits in both unions powerful individuals presented themselves as involved in the definition of local development priorities. A businessman, a ward platform member of Ward No. 9 in Uttar Bordal Union, is one such individual. Although he is a ward platform member, his membership in this group seemed relevant only for the production of medicinal plants, a target topic of this specific ward platform. He stated that his involvement with local development activities beyond those involving medicinal plants is not discussed with other ward platform members and is thus realised on an individual basis. Ward platform members of Gomostapur Union (Chapai-Nawabganj District) on the other hand, a union with a long tradition of Sharique involvement, mentioned having frequent meetings to discuss local needs and stated examples when they supported villagers in contacting the UP for a specific need. They also referred to ward *shavas* as moments in which local priorities are defined and during which they can contribute to this process.

Another clear difference between Gomostapur Union and Uttar Bordal Union emerged in the supervisory or watchdog function of the ward platform. Ward platform members of Gomostapur clearly stated that it is their role to supervise the realisation of UP projects, whereas a UP member of Uttar Bordal Union explained that this supervisory role is taken by UP members. A ward platform member of Sahapara Union mentioned ‘The officers who are providing money will look after it [the project] and the Upazila will have an eye on it.’ The supervisory role of the ward platform would however allow individuals who are not part of the government nor co-opted by UP members to participate in standing committees and to supervise the implementation of development projects; an opportunity that citizen groups with little or no Sharique support miss.

It seems that citizen groups who have benefitted from Sharique trainings for longer take on a supervisory role and work closely together to impact on all aspects of ward development, whereas other citizen groups concentrate on market-related activities, but are not interested in engaging in the general development of their ward. Sharique's involvement seems to have contributed to the emergence of a group which takes a central role in the identification of local priorities, access of villagers to services and supervision of project implementation. In unions in which Sharique is not yet established, these functions are realised either by powerful individuals or the authorities themselves. The role that ward platforms take in unions with a long tradition of Sharique involvement even seems to be central enough to encourage powerful elites to act from within this group, rather than meeting with local representatives individually. By connecting elites in a group, Sharique can play a role in reducing the impact of the individual local elite as a gatekeeper between citizens and UP.

The previous section has shown that the connection of elites through ward platforms can emerge as collective elite capture, and that this evolution can continue to prevent all individuals of a ward from taking advantage of spaces for accountability. Nevertheless, in ward platforms where there are both elites who are concerned about the needs of the local population ('benevolent elites', as Wong (2010) calls them) and elites who concentrate on the needs of their relatives, the latter might be overpowered by the former. In this case accountability could be increased. Finally, the ward platform integrates elites while challenging their individual power; a solution Wong (2010) suggests when implementing community-based development projects and challenging elite domination (Wong 2010: 15).

Finally, if elites choose ward platforms to realise their power and if efforts are undertaken to include and promote the active participation of marginalised populations, two of the conditions of success Kabeer (2004) identifies for associations are achieved:

> Associations are most likely to promote personal transformation and democratic practice when they are 'chosen' rather than 'given' by one's place in the social order; when they are inclusive (open) rather than exclusionary (closed) in their membership; when they draw on horizontal rather than hierarchal loyalties; when they embody democratic rather than autocratic principles of operation; and when they seek to challenge the arbitrary exercise of power rather than to bolster the status quo. (Kabeer 2004: 327).

However, with this citation Kabeer (2004) also indicates a central factor of the ward platform's success, which is still missing: democratic practice within the association, allowing individuals of different social classes to have an equal impact on decisions on local development and to overcome dependency relations based on charity.

9.4 Transparency, participation, accountability and Sharique

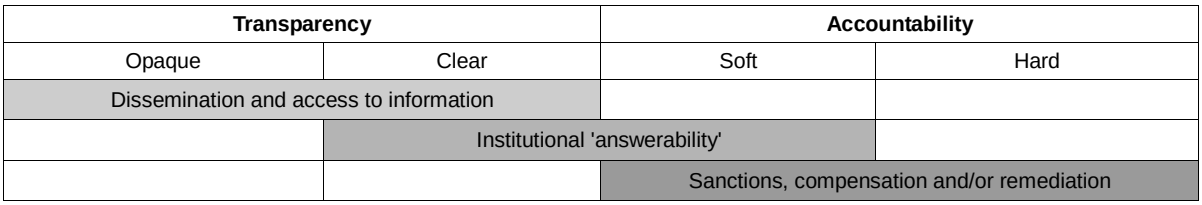
Having examined the interaction between the local governance programme Sharique, the legal framework for accountability and local elites, this section explores the programme's relations to the different concepts which are at the heart of this study: transparency, participation and accountability.

We have seen that individuals who are not considered elites more often only assist in deliberative meetings and ward platforms rather than participate. There is a concern to inform these individuals about decisions that have been taken, but their input and reactions are often not valued. It seems that transparency reaches out to the general population more than participation, whilst answerability and enforceability stay the tools of elites. This distinction has not only emerged from the invited spaces defined by the legal framework and ward platforms, but also marks the legal framework itself. I have pointed out that the legal framework clearly defines opportunities for transparency, whereas actions for participation and accountability are rather vague. Raising awareness about legal sanction, such as the Right to Information Act, presents difficulties: trainings that could lead to enforcement of these laws may entail risks and are confronted by strong relations of power .

SDC sees Sharique as an 'effective contribution to poverty reduction through participatory and accountable local governance' (SDC 2008(a): 29) and describes its strategy as, 'to promote efficient, transparent [and] accountable local governance' (*ibid.*). The workshop with Sharique staff in Rajshahi confirmed that Sharique promotes awareness raising and trains different local governance stakeholders to use the knowledge for citizen engagement and enforceability. However, during this workshop citizen engagement and enforceability seemed to be steps to be taken in future; the current focus is on stakeholders' understanding of their rights and responsibilities: 'So this is accountability: share what is happening, why I am not implementing or what I have implemented, how I have implemented, why I have implemented. So this sharing is accountability' (Workshop in Rajshahi on the 13 May 2012).

The joint mention of transparency and accountability in Sharique's strategy of action and the connections between these two concepts leads us back to our earlier discussion, which concluded that 'the relationship of transparency to accountability is as a necessary but insufficient condition' for accountability (McGee and Gaventa, 2010: 13). The authors explain that answerability – the provision of information and justification of actions – needs to be accompanied with enforceability, or hard sanctions, in order to be classified as accountability. The question of whether Sharique can be considered to be promoting accountability thus emerges (Newell and Bellour 2002; Malena 2004). Fox (2007)'s differentiation between opaque transparency, clear transparency, soft accountability and hard accountability when investigating the supposed connection between transparency and accountability is helpful in responding to this question:

Figure 9.1 Differentiation of transparency and accountability



Source: Fox 2007: 669

The difference Fox (2007) draws between opaque and clear transparency is based on the reliability of the information provided. If the information allows actors who receive it to understand the institutional functioning, the concerned institution is not only transparent, but to a certain degree accountable: '*clear transparency is a form of soft accountability*' (Fox 2007: 668). Clear transparency and soft accountability thus seem to correspond to what the overall study on accountability defines as transparency. Fox shows that order to achieve hard accountability, other public sector actors must intervene and couple sanctions, compensation and/or remediation with the institution's practice of transparency.

The training of different local government actors on their rights and responsibilities, as well as the support of ward *shavas*, open budget meetings and UDCC meetings mainly promote the dissemination of reliable information, the asking and answering of questions and lead to justifications of decision makers. These activities allow what the overall study on accountability defines as *transparency*, what Malena (2004) and Newell and Bellour (2002) refer to as *soft sanctions* and what McGee and Gaventa (2010) define as *answerability*. We saw an example of a ward platform member enforcing the distribution of social safety programmes free of charge. Similarly, community volunteers, who assist Sharique's partner NGOs, support villagers in their application for information from the government. However, these elements of enforcement do not seem to be at the core of Sharique activities, as shown by the programme's explanation of what accountability is:

> Accountability mechanisms work in two directions. In the case of Union Parishads, downward accountability entails elected representatives being answerable to citizens for their commitments and actions. At the same time there is a need for upward accountability – of citizens, for example, voting for suitable representatives (persons who are perceived to be honest and capable of fulfilling their tasks correctly), checking that commitments have been fulfilled, and demanding reasons if they have not.
> (Sharique 2011(a): 3)

Ultimately, Sharique seems not to want to confront social hierarchies directly; their use of the hard accountability described by Fox (2007) continues to turn away from this challenge. This may be part of Sharique's strategy to co-opt local elites, and not to exclude or directly confront them.

10 Conclusion

The general objective of this research was to increase 'learning on accountability initiatives in fragile contexts' and 'to increase understanding of successful practices and enabling factors' (HELVETAS 2011(a): 1). This case study has explored the relation between citizens and the lowest tier of local government in Bangladesh, the Union Parishad. Building on interviews, focus group discussions, visits, observations and an examination of the legal framework for

accountability, it has explored the social and political factors that impact in the relation between citizens and the UP. The reader has been invited to consider the four unions selected for this study, each representing a different region of the country and illustrating one central feature for this research: a geographically fragile context in Sunamganj, the presence of party politics in Rajshahi, the dominance of a central elite family in Chapai-Nawabganj and the role of individual elites in Gaibandha. These unions have made it possible to expose power relations and a social hierarchy, which defines the possibilities for individuals to realise accountability based on their gender, education, wealth, family ties and political alliances.

Local elites have emerged as central actors in this relationship, taking ownership of activities related to answerability, participation, citizen engagement and responsiveness, and leaving others 'owning' only issues of immediate need, such as the production, sourcing and selling of foods Moreover, local elites act as gatekeepers of newly created spaces for accountability (Cornwall 2002); spaces which have been created through a renewal of the legal grounds for transparency and accountability in Bangladesh. Community gatherings for the joint planning, supervision and implementation of local development projects and clear regulation for transparency are part of these newly introduced measures.

SDC's Sharique local governance programme, which promotes 'efficient, transparent [and] accountable local governance' (SDC 2008: 29), has identified the potential represented by these new spaces for accountability and has developed various activities to reach out to populations in environments that are physically, socially and politically fragile, empowering actors to take advantage of these new spaces.

Drawing on this context, the study has addressed Sharique's support of citizen groups – ward platforms – and has shown that they have the potential to emerge as central actors in local governance and make all sectors of the locality benefit from new possibilities for accountability. In fact, this study has shown that Sharique's ward platforms have been able to connect with local elites, allowing this group to gain importance and mitigating the role of powerful individuals in discussions on local priorities, the participatory planning of local activities and the supervision of current projects.

The success of the Sharique ward platform model is based on the effective identification of local actors and their active integration and participation in its initiatives. The strategy to have an impact on the power of local elites by working with instead of against them – applying the 'co-opt elite' option presented by Wong (2010) – has allowed this initiative to start taking effect. Nevertheless, this strategy might make it hard for Sharique to proceed from the promotion of soft accountability to the support of activities for hard accountability (Fox 2007). Furthermore, Sharique's 'co-opt elite' strategy is treads a fine line between impacting the power of elites and elites capturing the activities. As Cornwall puts it: 'it is all too easy for old rules of the game to be reproduced within spaces such as committees or consultations' (Cornwall 2002: 7).

Fox (2007) and McGee and Gaventa (2010) show that there is no automatic progression from transparency to accountability; Uzzaman (2011) claims that there is no spontaneous connection between awareness raising and participation; and Devas and Grant (2003) demonstrate that decentralisation does not guarantee the inclusion of the poor. All three studies reveal the need for continuous efforts to reach these respective goals. If the connections between these processes are not automatically causal, the question of what needs to be done to go from one to the other seems central. How can activities be programmed to overcome bureaucratic limitations of local government, the influence political parties can have on local development, the lack of legal grounds for accountability and social hierarchies based on a long tradition of family ties, all of which eliminate the expected step from transparency to accountability? And how can the solution of countervailing pressures described by Devas and Grant (2003) be realised?

This study has shown that, especially in a context with features of fragility, it is not sufficient for development actors to examine comprehensively the context in which a project will be implemented to understand which activities can work and which cannot. The example of the Sharique ward platform has shown that a clear strategy and continuous efforts to understand, integrate and collaborate with local actors are necessary to reach a programme's objective. This strategy needs to follow a precise aim, supporting its activities at every stage and not allowing activities to stop at any of the envisioned steps.

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Annex 1: Evolution of tiers of local government*Sources: Uzzaman (2011); Van Schendel (2009);*

Period	**British rule (1761-1947)**	**Pakistan Period (1947-1970)**	**AL parliamentary democracy (1971-1975)**	**BNP single party rule (1975- 1981)**	**Ershad military autocracy (1982-1990)**	**BNP parliamentary democracy (1991-1996)**	**AL parli democr 2001)**
Acts	Village Choukidery Act 1870 Bengal Local Self-Government Act 1885/ 1919	Basic Democracy Order 1959	Constitution of Bangladesh 1972	Local Government Ordinance 1976	Local Government Ordinance 1982, 1983 and 1987	Local Government Ordinance 1992	Local G Act 199
Local Governme nt Units	District Board	Divisional Council	Zila Parishad	Zila Parishad	Zila Parishad	Zila Parishad	Zila Par
		District Council					
	Local Board	Thana Council		Thana Parishad	Upazila Parishad	Thana Development Coordination Committee (UDCC)	Upazila
	Union Committee/ Board	Union Council	Union Parishad	Union Parishad	Union Parishad	Union Parishad	Union P

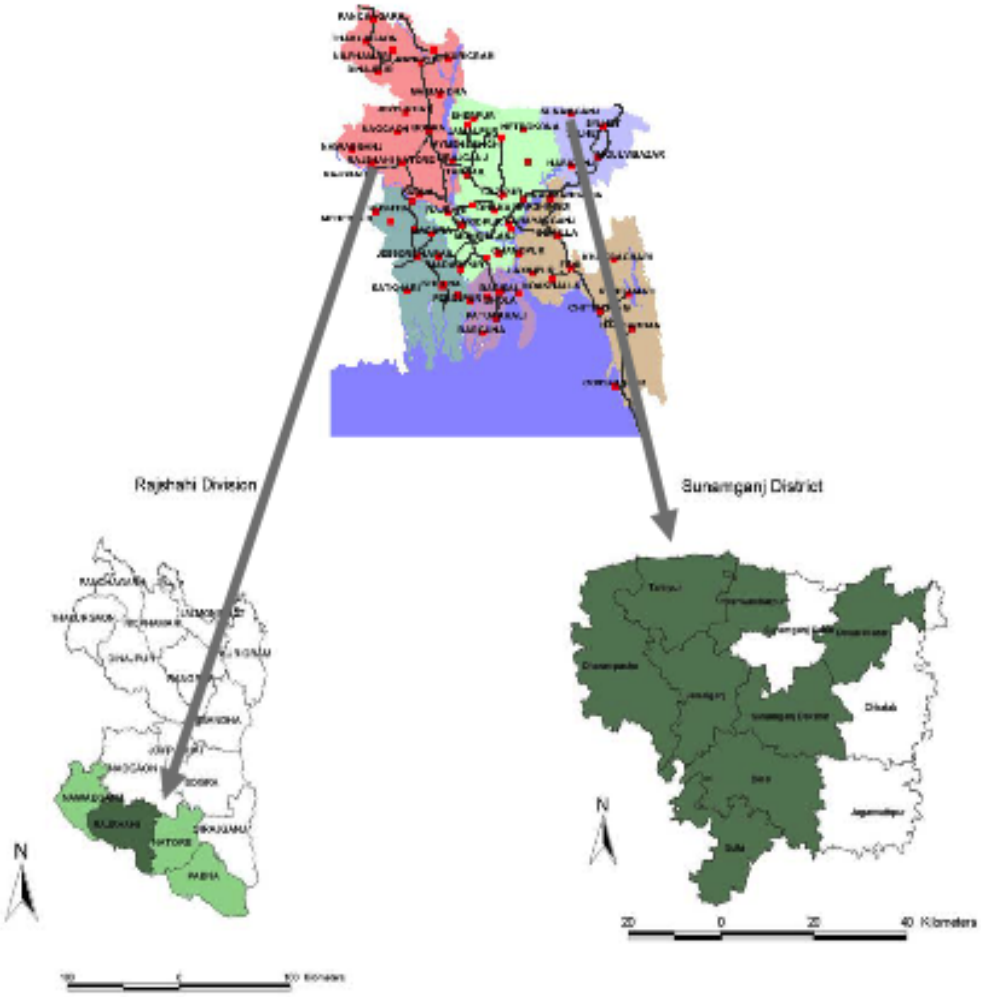
www.banglapedia.org/httpdocs/HT/L_0122.HTM, accessed on the 25 April 2012

Annex II: Tiers of local government in rural areas of Bangladesh

Tires of local government in rural areas of Bangladesh				
Level	**Number** (BBS 2010: 32)	**Population** (BBS 2010: XX)	**Administrative Unit**	**Representatives**
National	1	142.3 million	Parliament	345 seats: 300 directly elected seats 45 reserved seats for women
Division	7	8-40 million	-	-
Zila/ District	64	100'000- 8 million	-	-
Upazila/ Sub-District	508	8 000- 2 million	Council/ Upazila Parishad (UZP)	13 members: 1 UZP chairman 2 UZP Vice-chairmen 9 UP chairmen 1 Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO)
Union/ Community	4466	25-30'000	Council/ Union Parishad (UP)	13 members: 1 UP chairman 9 UP members (each representing one ward) 3 reserved seats for women (each representing three wards)
Ward/ Unit of several villages	40 194	ca. 3000	-	-
Grams and paras/ Villages	87 362	ca. 800	-	-

The numbers are based on the 2001 census to which the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2010) refers.

Annex III: Illustration of Sharique's area of activity



Source: Sharique 2009: 18

Annex IV: Sharique at a glance

Box 1: Sharique at a glance

Goal: To contribute to effective pro-poor local governance

Duration Phase I: 2006 – 2009

Phase II: 2010 – 2013

Working with: 130 Union Parishads (UPs)

21 Upazilla Parishads (UZPs)

in 3 districts (Rajshahi, Sunamganj and more recently Chapainwabganj)

Number of persons impacted: Some 295,000 (Official figures give female:103,257 male: 191,764)

Field implementing partners: Sachetan, MSP, SNKS, CNRS, SNS and ERA

Strategic partners: NILGLG, MMC

Total budget: Phase I CHF 4,950,000; Phase II CHF 8,990,000

Source: Sharique 2011(a): 2

Annex V: List of criteria for Sharique UP evaluation

1	Access to the Union Parishad
1.1	Is the UP Office located and functioning within the Union boundaries?(yes: 1;No: 0)
1.2	Have UP office hours been maintained? (open 75% - 100% of the time: 4; open 50 - 74% of the time: 3; open 25 - 49 % of the time: 2; open 1 - 24% of the time: 1; Never open : 0)
1.3	How well has been the attendance of the UP secretary (present 75% - 100% of the time: 4; present 50 - 74% of the time: 3; present 25 - 49 % of the time: 2; present 1 - 24% of the time: 1; Never present : 0)
2	Public information
2.1	Degree to which UP notice boards are updated and accessible to citizens (updated within the last two weeks: 4; updated within the last month: 3; updated within the last two months: 2; updated within the last three months: 1; not updated for more than thr
2.2	Updated UP budget board with detailed information (Yes: 1; No: 0)
2.3	Updated UP project information monitoring) board is displayed at UP level (updated within the last one month 4; updated within the two months: 3; updated within the last three months: 2; updated within the last six months: 1; not updated for more than six
2.4	Percentage of projects completed during the past 12 months (which require information boards) with onsite board
2.5	Percentage of projects on-site information boards exist for past 12 months (including details)
2.6	Number of wards with updated UP ward-level project information boards (including details like budget, project specification, timeline, beneficiaries etc.)
2.7	UP detailed income and expenditure of last fiscal year displayed? (Yes: 1; None: 0)
2.8	How many types of other relevant UP information displayed? (0) No types 1) citizens charter, 2) list of SCs incl contact number, 3) list of UP members incl. contact number, 4) office hours, 4) information on number of beneficiaries of safety net programm
2.9	How many types of Government Line Agency information displayed 0) no types 1) list of services, 2) contact person incl contact number, 3) office hours, 4) others - please specify
2.10	How many types of NGO information displayed 0) no types 1) list of services, 2) contact person incl contact number, 3) office hours, 4) others - please specify
3	UP internal decision-making process
3.1	Number of monthly UP meetings held
3.2	Average number of male participants per UP meeting
3.3	Average number of female participants per UP meeting
3.4	Level of participation of UP women members in decision-making (very high: 4; high: 3; moderate: 2; low: 1; none: 0)

3.5	Have decisions of the UP monthly meetings been executed? (75% - 100%: 4; 50 - 74%: 3; 25 - 49 %: 2; 1 - 24%: 1; 0% : 0)
4	Standing Committees (SCs)
4.1	Have Standing committees been formed/reorganized according to guideline? (Yes-1, No-0)
4.2	Total number of SCs that have conducted activities (apart from meetings)
4.3	Total number of women Standing Committee members who do not belong to the UP
4.4	Total number of poor Standing Committee members who do not belong to the UP (poor means belonging to the lowest 43 % socio-economic strata of that locality)
4.5	How effective are the Standing Committees in fulfilling their responsibilities (fully: 4; mostly: 3; some 2; hardly: 1; none: 0)
5	Public Meetings organized by UPs
5.1	Number of ward level UP planning meetings conducted
5.2	Number of ward level UP planning meetings conducted without support from Sharique
5.3	Total number of citizens participating in UP ward planning conducted
5.4	Total number of women participants in ward level UP planning meetings conducted
5.5	Total number of extreme poor (bottom 25%)participants in ward level UP planning meetings conducted
5.6	Total number of adivshi and disabled participants in ward level UP planning meeting
5.7	Degree to which the women have been able to have their rational demands considered in ward planning meetings? (75% - 100%: 4; 50 - 74%: 3; 25 - 49 %: 2; 1 - 24%: 1; 0% : 0)
5.8	Degree to which the adivasis have been able to have their rational demands considered in ward planning meetings? (75% - 100%: 4; 50 - 74%: 3; 25 - 49 %: 2; 1 - 24%: 1; 0% : 0)
5.9	Degree to which the extreme poor (bottom 25%) have been able to have their rational demands considered in ward planning meetings? (75% - 100%: 4; 50 - 74%: 3; 25 - 49 %: 2; 1 - 24%: 1; 0% : 0)
5.10	UP level open budget sharing meeting held? (yes: 1; no: 0)
5.11	UP level open budget sharing meeting held without support from Sharique? (yes: 1; no: 0)
5.12	Total number of participants in UP level open budget sharing meeting
5.13	Total number of women participants in UP open budget sharing meeting
5.14	Total number of extreme poor (bottom 25%)participants in UP open budget sharing meeting
5.15	Total number of adivshi participants in UP open budget sharing meeting
5.16	Percentage of projects in UP budget that were suggested by citizens in ward planning meetings

5.17	Percentage of projects in UP budget that were suggested by women in ward planning meetings
5.18	Number of Ward meetings held to share approved budget
5.19	Total of citizens participating in ward level budget sharing meeting
5.20	Total number of women participating in ward level budget sharing meeting
5.21	Total number of extreme poor participating in ward level budget sharing meeting
5.22	Total number of adivashi participating in ward level budget sharing meeting
5.23	UP level open budget review meeting held? (yes: 1; No: 0)
5.24	UP level open budget review meeting held without support of Sharique? (yes: 1; No: 0)
5.25	Total number of participants in UP level open budget review meetings
5.26	Total number of women participants in UP level open budget review meetings
5.27	Total number of extreme poor participants in UP level open budget review meetings
5.28	Total number of adivashi participants in UP level open budget review meetings
5.29	Number of other public meetings, if any (specify in comments column) organized by UP
6	Citizens actions
6.1	Number of Public hearing meeting for UP organized by citizens groups (community groups/ cluster platforms)
6.2	Number of UP elected/Non elected representative attended in Public hearing meeting
6.3	Number of citizen attended in Public hearing meeting
6.4	Number of cultural programmes organized by citizens groups to build awareness on local governance
6.5	Number of citizens attended in those cultural programmes
7	Coordination meetings
7.1	Number of Union Coordination Committee (GO-NGO) meetings held
7.2	Number of Union Coordination Committee (GO-NGO) meetings held without support of Sharique?
7.3	Average number of LAs present in each GO - UP - NGO meeting
7.4	Average number of NGOs present in each GO - UP - NGO meeting
7.5	Average number of representatives from community groups (except private sector)
7.6	Average number of representatives from private sector
7.7	Number of LAs with regular presence in the Union (regular meaning being at least once a week present in Union and providing services to the people)
7.8	Regular attendance of UP chairman in Upazila Parishad meeting (Fully: 2; Some: 1; None: 0)

8	Project Implementation Committees
8.1	Number of existing PICs
8.2	Are the PICs composed according to the guidelines? (75% - 100%: 4; 50 - 74%: 3; 25 - 49 %: 2; 1 - 24%: 1; 0% : 0)
8.3	Total number of PIC members
8.4	Total number of PIC members from civil society (community members, non-UP members, non-gov. officials)
8.5	Total number of women PIC members
8.6	Total number of extreme poor PIC members
8.7	Total number of adivshi PIC members
8.8	Degree to which the PICs function properly (according to GoB guideline) (75% - 100%: 4; 50 - 74%: 3; 25 - 49 %: 2; 1 - 24%: 1; 0% : 0)
9	Project Supervision Committees
9.1	Number of PSCs operational in reporting quarter
9.2	Composition of PSCs according to guidelines? (75% - 100%: 4; 50 - 74%: 3; 25 - 49 %: 2; 1 - 24%: 1; 0% : 0)
9.3	Total number of PSC members
9.4	Total number of PSCs from civil society (community members, non-UP members, non-gov. officials)
9.5	Total number of women PSC members
9.6	Total number of extreme poor PSC members
9.7	Total number of adivshi PSC members
9.8	Do the PSCs function properly (e.g. hold regular meeting etc.) (75% - 100%: 4; 50 - 74%: 3; 25 - 49 %: 2; 1 - 24%: 1; 0% : 0)
10	Record keeping and financial management
10.1	Number of essential financial registers kept
10.2	Financial transactions handled according to guidelines? (75% - 100%: 4; 50 - 74%: 3; 25 - 49 %: 2; 1 - 24%: 1; 0% : 0)
10.3	Is cash in hand within the limit of TK 500? (yes:1; no: 0)
11	Procurement
11.1	Are PIC/SIC or Tender evaluation committee procuring according to guideline to implement UP projects (75% - 100%: 4; 50 - 74%: 3; 25 - 49 %: 2; 1 - 24%: 1; 0% : 0)
11.2	Transparency in the Procurement process (75% - 100%: 4; 50 - 74%: 3; 25 - 49 %: 2; 1 - 24%: 1; 0% : 0)
12	Audits

12.1	Number of external audits performed
12.2	Number of audits by SC on audit and accounts performed
13	Union Parishad Taxes
13.1	How much holding tax assessment was completed according to guidelines (cumulative figure)? (in all nine wards: 4, in seven wards: 3, in four wards: 2, in two wards: 1, in no wards: 0)
13.2	How much people informed regarding their assessed holding tax? (91-100% of the households: 4; 71-90% % of the households: 3; 41--70% of the households 2; 11-40% of the households 1; 0-10%: 0)
13.3	Total amount of UP holding taxes assessed to date (cumulative figure)
13.4	Total amount of holding taxes collected by UP to date (cumulative figure for fiscal year)
13.5	Percentage of households that have paid their holding taxes to date (cumulative figure for fiscal year)
13.6	Records kept and updated regarding holding taxes collected (75% - 100%: 4; 50 - 74%: 3; 25 - 49 %: 2; 1 - 24%: 1; 0% : 0)
13.7	Total amount of non-holding taxes collected by UP to date
13.8	Records kept and updated regarding non-holding taxes collected (75% - 100%: 4; 50 - 74%: 3; 25 - 49 %: 2; 1 - 24%: 1; 0% : 0)
14	Access to UP administrative services
14.1	Are certificates (birth, death, succession, nationality etc.) easy to obtain? (yes: 2; somewhat: 1; no: 0)
14.2	Are certificates that are supposed to be free issued free of cost? (Always: 2; sometimes: 1; never: 0)
15	Safety net measures (VGD, VGF, Old Age Pension, Widow etc.)
15.1	Are beneficiaries VGD selected objectively (75% - 100%: 4; 50 - 74%: 3; 25 - 49 %: 2; 1 - 24%: 1; 0% : 0)
15.2	How many current VGD card holders are included in the Union VGD committee?
15.3	Are beneficiaries VGF selected objectively (75% - 100%: 4; 50 - 74%: 3; 25 - 49 %: 2; 1 - 24%: 1; 0% : 0)
15.4	How many representative form the civil society are included in the Union VGF committee?
15.5	Have the Ward level Old Age Pension committees been formed according to guidelines? (yes 1/no 0)
15.6	Are Old Age Pension beneficiaries selected objectively (75% - 100%: 4; 50 - 74%: 3; 25 - 49 %: 2; 1 - 24%: 1; 0% : 0)
15.7	What is the total of all civil society representatives that are included in th Ward level Old Age Pension committees?
15.8	Has the Union Widow allowance committee been formed according to guidelines? (yes 1/ no 0)
15.9	Are Widow allowance beneficiaries selected objectively (75% - 100%: 4; 50 - 74%: 3; 25 - 49 %: 2; 1 - 24%: 1; 0% : 0)

15.10	What is the total of all civil society representatives that are included in th Ward level Widow allowance committees?
15.11	Are other safety net beneficiaries selected objectively? (75% - 100%: 4; 50 - 74%: 3; 25 - 49 %: 2; 1 - 24%: 1; 0% : 0)
15.12	Total number of women members in the safety net committees (VGD,VGF,Old age pension, Widow allowance
15.13	Total number of poor members in the safety net committees (VGD,VGF,Old age pension, Widow allowance)
16	Village court
16.1	Does the Village court hold regularly? (weekly-1, Fortnightly-2, Monthly-3, Sometimes-4, never-5)
16.2	Are Village court procedures followed according to law? written Judgment/Verdict-5; Hearing-4; Formation of Judicial bord-3; Notice-2; written Application-1 salish-0 (Put number 0-5 depending on how many steps followed)
17	UP plans
17.1	Level of progress of GIP implementation (75% - 100%: 4; 50 - 74%: 3; 25 - 49 %: 2; 1 - 24%: 1; 0% : 0)
17.2	Level of progress of UP budget implementation (75% - 100%: 4; 50 - 74%: 3; 25 - 49 %: 2; 1 - 24%: 1; 0% : 0)
17.3	Percentage of money in the UP budget allocated to projects benefiting the extreme poor
17.4	Are certificates (birth, death, succession, nationality etc.) easy to obtain? (yes: 2; somewhat: 1; no: 0)

Source: Sharique Outcome Monitoring Sheet 2011

Annex VI: Table showing the selected Union Parishads as well as interviews conducted

District	Upazila	UP	Ward	Person to conduct interview with on UP level	Person to conduct interview with from WP	Type of focus group discussion	Villages in each ward	Local expert interviewed for each UP
Rajshahi	Durgapur	Panaganur (old, non-Samriddhi, B)	Ward 4	Female UP member 04.04.2012	Female WP member 12.03.2012	Men FGD 05.04.2012	Narayanpur *Arbab*	Ex-UP chairman of adjacent UP to Pananagur UP (Deluabari), who ran for UZP chairman 23.05.2012 UP chairman of Pananagur 12.03.2012
			Ward 9	Male UP member 12.03.2012	Male WP member 05.04.2012	Women FGD 04.04.2012	Kashkamar Gopinathur *Biar*	
Chapai-Nawabganj	Gomostapur	Gomostapur (new, non-Samriddhi, A)	Ward 5	Female UP member 12.04.2012	Female WP member 09.04.2012	Women FGD 09.04.2012	Bazarpara Kashipur Miapur *Dunlovpur*	Ex-UNO of Gomostapur UZP 27.05.2012 UP chairman of Gomostapur UP 12.04.2012
			Ward 3	Male UP member 12.04.2012	Male WP member 10.04.2012	Men FGD 10.04.2012	*Dakindola* Balugram Rajarampur Balugram Uportula	
Gaibandha	Gaibandha Sadar	Sahapara UP (Samriddhi, non-Sharique)	Ward 4	Female UP member 18.04.2012	Female WP member 16.04.2012	Women FGD 16.04.2012	*Boulerpara* Nayani Sadekpur Mirpur	Two UP members who have been re-elected two and three times, not representing the included wards 03.05.2012
			Ward 8	Male UP member 18.04.2012	Male WP member 17.04.2012	Men FGD 17.04.2012	Bhabanipur *Satani Sadekpur*	
Sunamganj	Taherpur	Uttar Bordal UP (old, Samriddhi, C)	Ward 2	Female UP member 06.05.2012	Female WP member 01.05.2012	Women FGD 01.05.2012	Rajoniline *Amtoil*	UNO of Taherpur UZP and of Sripur UZP 10.05.2012 Uttar Bordal UP chairman 06.05.2012
			Ward 9	Male UP member 06.05.2012	Male WP member 02.05.2012	Men FGD 02.05.2012	Kastal *Chargau* Fakirnagar	
TOTAL				*8 UP members*	*8 WP members*	*8 FGD*		*9 local expert interviews*

In addition to these interviews one interview with a thematic expert, Maheen Sultan, who carried out a mid-term review of Sharique's programme in April 2012, provided particular insights into local and programme dynamics during the analysis phase of this research. This interview took on 30 May 2012.

Several discussions with Sharique staff, who have been working with local government, its laws and regulations and the regions chosen for this research since 2006, have provided valuable information for this study.

Recordings and transcriptions of all interviews with UP members, ward platform members, all focus group discussions as well as the expert interviews with the ex-chairman of Deluabari UP, with the ex-UNO of Gomostapur UZP and the workshops with Sharique staff can be obtained by contacting the author at daniela.c.buchmann@gmail.com.