

SHIKHON: Horizontal Learning Programme in Bangladesh

Midterm Review

*Commissioned by
SDC Bangladesh*

27 September 2021

Prepared by

Jens Peter Christensen, Team Leader
Swapan Kumar Sarkar, National Consultant

Acronyms and Abbreviations

BDT	Bangladesh Taka
CapDev	Capacity Development
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
DP	Development Partner
DDLG	Deputy Director of Local Government
EALG	Efficient and Accountable Local Governance Project
ERD	Economic Relations Division
FYP	Five Year Plan
GEMP	Gender Equality Mainstreaming Plan
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
HYSAWA	Hygiene, Sanitation and Water Supply Company
HLP	Horizontal Learning Programme
IMED	Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LG	Local Government
LGD	Local Government Division
LGHL	Local Government Hotline
LGI	Local Government Institution
LGSP	Local Governance Support Project
MGSP	Municipal Governance Support Project
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MOLGRD&C	Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MTR	Mid-term Review
NILG	National Institute of Local Government
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PD	Project Director
PFM	Public Financial Management
PMU	Project Management Unit
PSC	Project Steering Committee
PIC	Project Implementation Committee
TAPP	Technical Assistance Project Proforma
TOR	Terms of Reference
TOT	Training of Trainers
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi (Executive) Officer
UP	Union Parishad
UGDP	Upazila Governance Development Project
UPGP	Union Parishad Governance Project
URT	Upazila Resource Team
UZGP	Upazil Governance Project
UZP	Upazila Parishad
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WB	World Bank
WDF	Women's Development Forum

List of Content

Acknowledgement.....	4
Executive Summary	5
1. Introduction	10
2. The HLP Project in brief	10
3. MTR purpose and approach.....	11
4. Findings and observations	13
4.1 Relevance	13
4.2 Progress and results	14
4.3 Institutional arrangements	18
4.4 Project management.....	19
5. Lessons learned.....	20
6. Conclusion.....	21
7. Recommendations	22
Annex 1. Terms of Reference	26
Annex 2. References.....	34
Annex 3. List of persons met	35
Annex 4. Review design matrix	36
Annex 5. Meeting schedule	42
Annex 6. Midterm achievements against the HLP Log frame (July 2021)	43
Annex 7. Midterm achievements reported by the HLP Project (March and July 2021)	46
Annex 8. Debriefing slides	47

Acknowledgement

The midterm review (MTR) would not have been possible without the contribution of many individuals who offered their knowledge, time, and support. The MTR team would like to thank all participants for openly sharing their insights and suggestions to us, including Mr. Saleh Ahmed Mujaffor, Director General (Additional Secretary), and the Project Management Unit of the National Institute of Local Government, the five partner NGOs, and Local Government Institutions (LGIs) and community members in the districts of Satkhira, Rajshahi and Tangail. Despite the fact that a good part of the consultations had to be conducted online, all engagements were positively embraced, and made the team able to complete the review.

The MTR team would also like to extend a special thank you to all HLP partners who took the time to share their experience and suggestions with us. This includes Mrs Aroma Dutta, Hon. Member of Parliament, Dr Akira Munakata and Mr Kiohey Yamamoto Mamun from JICA, Mr Shafiqul Islam, President of the HLP Foundation, Mr Md. Atiqur Rahaman, Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Bangladesh Railways, Mr Enamul Habib, Project Director and Mr Md. Aminul Islam, Senior Local Government Specialist at LGSP III, Mr Md. Shariful Hoque, Project Coordinator at the EALG Project, Mr Md. Amin Sharif, Senior Assistant Secretary at the Ministry of Finance and Mr Santanu Lahiri, HLP consultant.

Finally, the MTR team would like to thank the PMU for extending logistical support to organise the stakeholder meetings and the field visits, and for responding to additional requests for reports etc. at short notice.

The MTR team has done its best to reflect and accurately present the opinions of all stakeholders it met. However, the findings and recommendations in this report ultimately present the views of the team and should be subject to further review and discussions among the stakeholders.

Executive Summary

The midterm review (MTR) of the support to SHIKHON: Horizontal Learning Programme (HLP) in Bangladesh, was commissioned by the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), and it was conducted from 09 August – 25 September 2021.

The HLP enables local government institutions (LGIs) to identify and exchange their good practices for replication, whilst a national process managed by the National Institute of Local Government (NILG) aims to disseminate good practises nationwide and provide policy advice for the Local Government Division (LGD). The project support - the HLP Project - is implemented by the Project Management Unit (PMU) at NILG. It has a duration of four years from 01 October 2018 to 30 September 2022 and an expected SDC budget of CHF 3'140'000.

The MTR covered the implementation period from December 2018 to June 2021 and included stakeholder consultations in Dhaka and in the districts of Rajshahi, Satkhira and Tangail. Stakeholder consultations were partly conducted online, as the Team Leader could not enter Bangladesh due to the Covid-19 restrictions. The MTR was outlined by the six OECD-DAC evaluation criteria and assessed the overall performance of the HLP Project and the likelihood of achieving the project objective of a full institutionalisation of the HLP within NILG and the LGIs. The objective entails an exit strategy with two institutionalisation outcomes:

- 1) At the local level, the HLP will be embedded with LGI procedures and driven by HLP hubs with assistance from the Deputy Director of Local Government's (DDLG's) office, Upazila Resource Teams (URTs), HLP network partners and local HLP champions. Since NILG does not command of any organizational presence at the local level, the rollout of the HLP through this project, is outsourced to five 'Supporting Agencies', i.e., five sub-contracted NGOs with a long-term background in the HLP.
- 2) At central level, NILG will absorb the HLP within its organization, while gradually resuming the funding responsibility as SDC phases out its support.

Key Findings

The HLP Project remains relevant to decentralisation in Bangladesh and to the capacity challenges of LGIs. The HLP fits well within NILG's CapDev Framework, in which Horizontal Learning complements supply-driven training delivery and increases the outreach of capacity development measures for LGIs. The benefits of Horizontal Learning correspond well with the global experience in local government capacity development, although the approach in Bangladesh stands out, being result-based and linked to a structured process of nationwide replication and policy advocacy. Over the years, a strong network of HLP champions has emerged among government officials, NGOs and development partners. They act as advisors/resources for the HLP Project and some of them are also leaders of the Supporting Agencies. All HLP champions met confirmed their commitment to the HLP Project and some have even introduced the approach to other branches of government.

Relevance and commitment notwithstanding, it is evident, that the HLP Project has not performed as expected. Results achievements are still limited and the adverse impact of Covid-19 contributed a lot to this situation. Two prolonged government lock downs delayed recruitments and procurements and created a near impossible working situation in the field, which prevented the achievement of higher order outputs and outcomes such as best practise disseminations and policy advocacy. Project management issues further aggravated this situation, including a wrongly applied modality in the Technical Assistance Project Proforma (TAPP) and turnovers among project management and staff.

NILG made limited progress in some of the critical aspects of the institutionalising process. Institutionalisation requires careful preparation with a transition from project implementation to full institutional absorption at the centre and at local level. Such a process is not reflected in the project workplan, even though there is provision for this in the TAPP. A project extension is considered essential by NILG to achieve the institutionalisation outcomes, although this may not be enough to accomplish the full institutionalising envisioned by the project document.

Given these constraints, a suitable model is needed to accommodate NILG's request for more time, while avoiding an open-ended project implementation, and achieving a sufficient level of sustainability after the exit of SDC support. A way forward may include the development a fully transparent timeline for the HLP institutionalisation within NILG. This would involve the official appointment of a HLP focal person and formal process where PMU functions are transferred to the Research Wing before the end of the HLP Project. Further institutionalisation priorities include the completion of the operational manual for the LGIs with due attention to women's participation, since this focal area did not get much attention so far. Another key priority is the processing of LGD circulars to make HLP an official responsibility of UPs, Pourashavas, districts and Upazilas. Moreover, attention is also needed to the training of NGO field workers and to their cooperation with the Upazila and district administrations. The long-term sustainability of the HLP may also be enhanced, if the LGI associations and JICA are formally involved in the HLP Project.

The MTR also highlighted urgent project management issues in need of attention. This includes the project workplan, which needs a comprehensive upgrade to become a strategic management tool. The development of the HLP Tracker is another imminent priority. It needs updating to cover all HLP steps in order to serve as a M&E tool for NILG and a reference for the next annual budget cycle.

Recommendations

In order to achieve HLP institutionalization, the MTR identified the following recommendations:

Recommendation #1: The HLP Project should be granted a no-cost extension of twelve months, provided a process is initiated with the aim to transfer all PMU responsibilities to the Research Wing. This process should be completed well before the project terminates.

Rationale: NILG has not yet started planning for the institutionalizing process within NILG. To succeed in this, a transparent transition process needs to be initiated at the earliest with the aim to fully absorb the HLP into NILG's organization before the project is completed.

This recommendation is conditional of the following measures:

- NILG will officially appointment a HLP Focal Person in the Research Wing. SDC will receive a confirmation letter from NILG about the appointment
- NILG will initiate a process for the formal transition of the PMU functions to the Research Wing.
- The transition process will be completed well before the end of the HLP project and it will be incorporated into the workplan with milestone achievements and presented for endorsement at the next PSC meeting
- All other MTR recommendations endorsed are also included in the workplan (see *Recommendation #8*).

Recommendation #2: The MTR calls on LGD and NILG to retain the next Project Director for the entire duration of the HLP Project

Rationale: The project has been subject to frequent turnovers of Project Directors. The fourth is expected to start in October 2021 or later. The Project Director is key to the progress of the project and for leveraging support to the institutionalisation. The frequent turnovers undermine the achievement of the project objectives.

Recommendation #3: The MTR calls on LGD to establish a HLP cell in order to underpin the institutionalisation of HLP

Rationale: At present, NILG and LGD liaise through an ad hoc focal person in LGD. As an additional institutionalisation measure, the establishment of a permanent HLP cell could accelerate LGD's response to the institutionalisation of the HLP processes and to the policy advice extended from NILG.

Recommendation #4: The Bangladesh Union Parishad Forum (BUPF), the Upazila Parishad Foundation of Bangladesh (UPFB), the Municipal Association of Bangladesh (MAB) should be invited to attend the meetings of the Project Steering Committee and the Project Implementation Committee as observers

Rationale: The three LGI associations have a vested long-term interest in Horizontal Learning and are relevant partners for NILG and LGD in the development of the HLP approach and in the upscale of relevant policy advice derived from the HLP. Their participation will also empower them as representatives of the LGIs.

Recommendation #5: JICA should be invited to attend the meetings of the Project Implementation Committee as observer

Rationale: JICA's participation in PIC meetings could further enhance its long-term engagement and support to HLP. Over the years, JICA has been a key partner in local governance and in the development of the HLP. This partnership continued into the present project phase, and JICA is active in NILG workshops, promoting HLP institutionalisation and synergies with UGDP and other JICA supported projects. UGDP is also likely to be extended with a new two-year phase, and the HLP approach is needed to spearhead horizontal learning at Upazila level.

Recommendation #6: The operational manual for LGIs, which is currently in process, should include safeguards for the participation of female Union Parishad members in horizontal learning

Rationale: The HLP Project has not yet achieved much on women's empowerment, compared to the ambitions in the TAPP and the project document to further women, children and vulnerable persons. The operational manual, which is being processed, is a good entry point for improving the attention to women's empowerment. The draft operational manual being circulated, should attend more explicitly to measures promoting the participation of female Union Parishad members, including the involvement of the WDFs.

Recommendation #7: More guidance is needed for NGO field workers to underpin the upscale of the HLP and to safeguard a shared and comprehensive approach

Rationale: NGOs do not employ staff exclusively for HLP activities. Field workers work for their own projects, whereas Horizontal Learning is an additional responsibility. Moreover, field workers met during the field visits, did not have past experience with Horizontal Learning, nor were they trained in

the HLP. This can undermine a shared HLP approach and create a bias towards the technical working areas of the NGOs.

This recommendation could be implemented through the following measures:

- NILG and the supporting agencies should assess the training needs for the field workers with the aim to draft a Training of Trainers (TOT) course on HLP
- NILG should supplement the TOT course with a guideline for the field workers, explaining the HLP approach with due attention to the entire LGI mandate. The guideline could be processed as part of the LGI operational manual development to save time and resources.
- The good practise fact sheet format is basic and generic. A field workers guideline should provide sufficient detail to ensure that lay persons with limited technical expertise are able to collect adequate information on any good practise. NILG may consult the formats used by other LGI programmes, including details on human resources, budget, material, and timelines, in addition to checklists. Additional information on micro financing and other innovative measures may also be captured on the fact sheet.
- NILG and LGD should expedite the appointment of HLP focal persons in Upazila and district administrations to facilitate a smooth cooperation with the NGO field workers
- To further this recommendation, Mr Swapan Sarkar from the MTR team is available to present his field findings in a workshop with NILG and the supporting agencies.

Recommendation #8: The Project Management Unit should develop a results-based workplan to enhance the strategic management and accountability of the HLP Project.

Rationale: The workplan mainly consists of project activities and TAPP financial codes. It does not link these to the strategic objectives of the HLP Project and to a timeline for output, outcomes and milestone achievements. This prevents NILG, the PSC and the PIC from gaining a strategic overview of the overall direction and progress of the project.

This recommendation should be implemented through the following measures:

- The workplan should cover the remaining project duration
- The workplan should link activities with outputs and outcomes and incorporate a timeline for milestone achievements
- The workplan should include timelines for any output recommended by this report, even if they are not mentioned in the log frame (e.g. the operational manual)
- The workplan will also incorporate a timeline for the processing LGD circulars, to make discussions with the LGD on this issue transparent.
- The new workplan is presented in the next Project Steering Committee meeting

Recommendation #9: NILG and SDC should go through the project log frame, and mutually agree if there is need for specific changes before the TAPP revision is completed.

Rationale: The log frame of the HLP Project has started to deviate somewhat from the original project document. The draft revised TAPP contains further changes to the log frame to enhance the institutionalisation focus. In general, deviations from log frames should be avoided once a project have started, especially at outcome level as proposed in the new draft TAPP. Any changes, if relevant, should be mutually agreed before the revised TAPP is completed and submitted to the Planning Commission.

Recommendation #10: The development of the HLP Tracker needs to be accomplished before the launch in October 2021.

Rationale: The HLP Tracker needs more development to cover the full HLP process. It is critical to attend to this immediately in order for the Tracker to serve as a M&E tool for the upcoming annual budget cycle.

Recommendation #11: The recommendations of the MTR should be discussed in a workshop attended by NILG, LGD, SDC and JICA

1. Introduction

The midterm review (MTR) of the SHIKHON: Horizontal Learning Programme (HLP) in Bangladesh was commissioned by the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and it was conducted from 09 August – 25 September 2021. This report presents the findings and recommendations of the MTR and it includes a series of annexes, such as the Terms of Reference (TOR), a list of references, the list of persons met, and the midterm achievements against the log frame results.

With a reference to its objective, the current project phase is also known as the ‘Institutionalization of Horizontal Learning Programme (HLP) in Bangladesh Project’. Henceforth, it is referred to as the HLP Project in the report. The HLP Project is implemented by the Project Management Unit (PMU) at the National Institute of Local Government (NILG). It has a duration of four years from 01 October 2018 to 30 September 2022 with an expected SDC budget of CHF 3’140’000.

2. The HLP Project in brief

The HLP Project enables LGIs to identify, exchange and replicate their good practises, while good practises are scaled up nationally by NILG, and embedded in national trainings and policy advocacy. Once a good practice is replicated more than 50 times, NILG identifies the best practises according to a list of 15 best practice validation criteria, and disseminates them nationwide. Policy advocacy based on NILG’s good practise research is shared with the Local Government Division (LGD) with the aim to issue guidelines, circulars etc. The overall division of roles and responsibilities is clear: the LGIs themselves are responsible for identifying, sharing, funding and implementing good practises, while sub-national government levels above together with NILG and LGD facilitate the process and the wider dissemination.

The HLP approach in Bangladesh is an offspring of the ‘Water and Sanitation Programme (WSP)’ implemented by the World Bank, and the HLP approach was piloted within the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector in 2007. It was subsequently scaled up by NILG and LGD during the first phase of the HLP Project from 2011 – 2015 in partnership with a network of local and international NGOs, whereas partner NGOs and other development projects maintained the approach in the interim phase up to the launch of the present HLP Project in 2018. The present phase marks the exit of SDC support, and a full HLP institutionalisation within NILG and the LGIs is envisioned by end of the project.

Textbox 1. The objectives of the second project phase

The **Overall Goal** is to ensure that 2000 Union Parishads, 150 Pourashavas, and 200 Upazila Parishads in 25 districts in Bangladesh will contribute to the improved wellbeing of at least 50 million people including women, poor, and disadvantaged people through wider replication of good practices.

The project has three **Outcomes**:

Outcome 1: NILG institutionalizes the Horizontal Learning Program (HLP) for Union Parishads and introduce HLP to the Pourashavas and Upazilas to contribute to the improvement of well-being for all, particularly for women, poor and disadvantaged.

Outcome 2: Local government institutions (LGIs) implement their mandates more effectively, accountably, transparently, and in an inclusive manner (LGI level).

Outcome 3: NILG creates an institutional learning and advocacy culture (National level).

The Outcomes will be achieved by accomplishment of a number of **Outputs**, including:

- (i) Five good practices are successfully replicated in at least 2000 LGIs.
- (ii) 200 champions from citizens emerged through the HLP Project, demonstrate, promote, and advocate gender-based development.
- (iii) 2000 LGIs allocated their own funds for replication of good practices.
- (iv) 10 good practices are integrated within NILG's regular course curricula and training sessions.
- (v) Three policy amendments completed by LGD based on HLP Policy Advocacy Notes.

The log frame is found in Annex 6. Notably, the institutionalisation of the HLP process is only partially reflected at output level. Moreover, some outputs have changed somewhat during implementation (see Annex 7), and it is not clear when this was agreed upon with SDC.

The exit strategy

The exit strategy leading towards full institutionalisation of the HLP pivots on a local and a central level achievement at the completion of the project:

1) Locally, the HLP process will be sustained by 'HLP hubs', entailing the absorption of HLP into regular LGI procedures (Union Parishad (UP) monthly meetings, ward and open budget meetings, URT meetings etc.) and driven by LGIs with support from the Deputy Director of Local Government's (DDLG's) office, the Upazila Resource Team (URT), HLP network partners and local HLP champions. Since NILG does not command of any organizational presence at the local level, the rollout through the HLP Project is outsourced to five 'Supporting Agencies', i.e., five sub-contracted NGOs with a longterm background within the HLP.

2) At central level, NILG will integrate the HLP within organization, while gradually resuming the funding responsibility as SDC phases out its support. This entails the official appointment of HLP focal persons in NILG and the transition of all PMU functions to a regular NILG wing within the duration of the project. LGD will issue the necessary regulations to permit the LGI administrations to engage in the HLP.

3. MTR purpose and approach

The MTR covered the implementation period from December 2018 to June 2021. It was guided by the TOR (see Annex 1) with the aim to conduct a 'pulse check' of the project implementation, assess if the current approach was fit for purpose and if modifications were required to achieve the project objectives - especially in view of the Covid-19 pandemic. Textbox 2 presents the evaluation questions.

Textbox 2. The MTR evaluation questions

The TOR outlined the following evaluation questions for the MTR:

- **Relevance/Coherence:** (i) Assess to identify the relevance of the HLP programme, within the current context of local governance reform, Switzerland's portfolio and other donor initiatives. (ii) Assess the relevance and effectiveness of the programme's strategy and approaches for the achievement of the objectives;
- **Effectiveness:** Assess to what extent the objectives of HLP have been achieved or are likely to be achieved?
- **Efficiency:** Critically review the programme i) structures and resources (management, monitoring, steering, coordination); (ii) systems and policies and (iii) monitoring system;
- **Sustainability:** Assess to what extent the positive results will be continued beyond the end of the external support;
- **Impact:** What are the intended and unintended effects of HLP, including the effects on the beneficiaries and others?

MTR Approach

The review design matrix is found in Annex 4. The MTR was a mainly qualitative exercise, combining a desk review with selected stakeholder consultations and taking point of departure in the results achievements. It entailed three phases: Desk phase, Field phase and Synthesis phase.

Table 1. MTR tools

Phase	Tools
Desk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Document review<input type="checkbox"/> Gaps analysis<input type="checkbox"/> Review design and workplan preparation<input type="checkbox"/> Roadmap workshop observation
Field	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> SDC in-brief<input type="checkbox"/> Interviews of key informants<input type="checkbox"/> Focus group discussions<input type="checkbox"/> Field consultations in Satkhira, Rajshahi and Tangail<input type="checkbox"/> Workshop observations<input type="checkbox"/> SDC out-brief
Synthesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Data synthesis<input type="checkbox"/> Report drafting<input type="checkbox"/> Validation and final report

The stakeholder consultations consisted of semi-structured key-informant interviews and focus group discussions in Dhaka and the districts of Rajshahi, Satkhira and Tangail. Stakeholder consultations in Dhaka were mainly conducted online since the Team Leader could not enter Bangladesh due to travel restrictions. Prior to most online consultations, the MTR team shared a list of discussion points with the interviewees to ensure all information gaps were covered. The MTR team also observed four HLP workshops aimed at the development of a roadmap for the HLP Project and NGO workplans for the field activities.

The main limitations of the methodology could be divided into four aspects: Firstly, the Covid-19 pandemic prevented Team Leader from entering Bangladesh, and the national consultant had to cover the field visits on his own. However, the team previously worked together and was used to online cooperation. Secondly, the selection of field visits could bias field findings towards more positive views, so the field visits were based on progress and accessibility, and conducted without the participation of the PMU. Thirdly, time limitations only allowed for selected spot checks and engagements with the target groups, beneficiaries and field workers. The MTR team therefore also obtained second opinions from HLP partners, who knew about the HLP for a long time. Fourthly, the long duration of the HLP could mean that some results were achieved during previous phases or by other development programmes, which could blur the effectiveness of the current HLP Project. The MTR team therefore took care to identify results from the current project phase in all stakeholder consultations.

4. Findings and observations

4.1 Relevance

The HLP was conceived as a response to capacity challenges in the LGIs. Piloted and upscaled since 2007, Horizontal Learning is regarded as a complementary capacity development measure to the more traditional, supply-driven trainings delivered by NILG and other government actors.

Overall, the government is committed to decentralisation, and the 8th Five-Year Plan (FYP) outlines three objectives: i) Improve governance at local level; ii) Resource mobilization and coordination between national and local level; and iii) Delivery of necessary services to the urban and rural people. NILG's CapDev Framework from 2012 - the National Basic Capacity Building Program for UPs, is a contribution towards the achievement of the FYP objectives. Horizontal Learning is an integrated part of the CapDev Framework where it complements supply- and demand-driven training pillars. The development of the CapDev Framework was supported by SDC, whereas the HLP Project now constitutes the exit of SDC's governance support, as Bangladesh approaches LDC graduation.

The capacity challenges of LGIs are illustrated by the limited resources available compared to the 38 mandatory functions outlined by the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009, and LGIs find it difficult to deliver on their mandate. The government promoted decentralisation in consecutive FYPs, and various local government support programmes have rendered technical and financial support to the LGIs (LGSP, MGSP, UGDP, EALG, former UPGP and UZGP, etc.). To this end, the HLP serves as a catalyst for upscaling any good LGI practises, including those derived from the local government support programmes, which again fund the basic block grants that enables good practise replications. The HLP also improves the outreach of NILG's own capacity development services. Its basic training delivery struggles to reach all LGIs and to keep up with the flow of newly elected officials every five years. The HLP on the other hand, is a bottom-up initiative driven by the LGIs themselves, and hence much better positioned to reach all of the LGIs. The value added of local government peer learning is globally recognized, although the HLP in Bangladesh stand out as being results-based, and linked to a structured government -driven mechanism for national replication and policy advocacy. This makes the HLP approach innovative and unique, but also complex.

Presently, there does not appear to be a common capacity development approach among LGD projects. Each of them still maintains their own capacity development programs, and sometimes they even contradict the CapDev Framework. However, the catalytic nature of the HLP makes it suited for the upscaling of any good practises emerging from LGD's projects. The HLP does not deliver technical or financial support to the LGIs, but through the facilitation of workshops and exposure visits it creates a space where LGIs can share and replicate good practises on a voluntary basis. Previous HLP phases demonstrated the value added of HLP, and the approach has been embraced by LGIs and HLP partners. Tangible improvements for the beneficiaries based on good practise replications and own-fund mobilisation among UPs and Pourashavas, were also documented.

4.2 Progress and results

It is generally recognized, that the HLP Project is not where it was planned to be at the midterm stage. A number of factors including the Covid-19 pandemic (see below), caused significant delay in the project implementation. The institutionalisation of the HLP approach is also likely to undergo further adaptations in the coming years due to its innovative and somewhat complex nature.

Annex 6 presents the midterm project achievements against the log frame results matrix in the project document. Notably, the project identified 275 good practises through 57 Upazila workshops, and completed 12 orientation workshops for district officers and URT members, but exposure visits could not be conducted. 12 best practises within WASH were compiled in a compendium and they based on good practises identified and replicated prior to the present HLP Project. So far, none of it has yet been widely shared, and they only cover UPs, as Pourashavas have not been targeted so far.

As mentioned, the graduation of good practises into best practises is done through a screening process in which a good practise replicated more than 50 times is assessed according to a list of 15 good practise validation criteria developed by the PMU. The rationale of the 15 validation criteria is not clear or explained in detail, and they haven't been validated among stakeholders yet. Moreover, the validation ratings are almost identical in the best practise compendium, whereas each of the 12 best practises actually refer to other more technical indicators in the text. Indeed, it is the UPs own voting and selection of good practises that is the key vetting mechanism in the HLP approach. UPs will only replicate good practises that add value to their communities since they have to fund them by their own budget. The stakeholder consultations confirmed the potential of good practise replications. For example, a former UNO described how the collection of UP holding tax was multiplied ten times as a result of UPs exposure visits within his Upazila. This corresponds with the results documented in previous project phases.

To date, 30 local HLP champions were also identified, which corresponds to 25 % of the end target. The MTR team could not meet with them during the field visit to assess their involvement and value addition in the project. However, they are key to sustaining Horizontal Learning beyond the lifetime of the project and there is a process to increase the number of local champions.

At the national level, NILG made some progress towards the HLP institutionalisation. Five good practises were integrated into NILG's course curricula against the end target of at least 30 good practices, whereas one dedicated session on HLP has been included in NILG's training courses for LGIs, and one foundation course for UP Secretaries was completed with an exposure visit to see good practices.

Otherwise, many outputs contributing towards the institutionalisation outcomes have not yet been achieved or even started, partly because of the stall in the field work. This includes the preparation of policy notes and amendment of LGI policies based on policy advocacy. An update of the CapDev Framework is also envisioned, but this is not reflected in the log frame

Invariably, the log frame does not present a complete picture of the institutionalisation process and the transition that needs to take place from project stage to full absorption of the horizontal learning process into the LGI framework and NILGs own organisation. The narrative of the project document and the Technical Assistance Project Proforma (TAPP), as well as the documents from the interim phase are somewhat clearer in this regard: A NILG wing/unit will assume responsibility of the HLP when the HLP Project is completed, whereas local HLP hubs (with the involvement of the DDLG office

and the URTs) will support the process at local level, based on HLP procedures embedded in the formal LGI framework. Meanwhile, the more specific outline of the hubs, and the steps and timeline to accomplish full institutionalisation of the HLP approach within the duration of the project, are not yet defined.

The institutionalization process requires preparation both at the centre and in the field, including preparation of LGD circulars on district and Upazilas administrations responsibilities along with implementation guidelines. As of now, the DG of NILG assigned the responsibility of HLP to the Research Wing as a temporary measure. A timeline for the official appointment of a HLP focal person in the Research Wing, let alone a process for the transition of the PMU functions to the Research Wing, is not reflected in the present workplan 2021-2022. This is also the case for the processing of LGD circulars.

NILG is still contemplating how the HLP hubs will operate. At UP level, HLP will become part of the monthly meetings, the ward meetings and the open budget sessions, and the HLP process of good practise identification and exposure visits would be sustained by the UP secretaries and the URTs (who can brief newly elected officials on HLP), assisted by local HLP champions and NILG's resource pool. Further upscale and dissemination of good practises will be the responsibility of the Upazilas, districts, NILG and LGD. The CapDev Framework provides a general outline of how the hubs model could operate, with the hub coordination nested in the DDLG office with the possibility to tap into the resources of LGSP, MGSP, District Facilitators, etc. and this line of thinking has since been refined by the first and interim project phase.

The Supporting Agencies will ensure that the HLP process is scaled up and internalised by UPs (and Pourashavas) and the subnational government institutions above them, but the specific steps to make the HLP hubs operational, integrate HLP into LGI procedures, assign HLP focal persons, etc. are not reflected in the present workplan. It is generally acknowledged by NILG and HLP stakeholders, that an operational manual is required, explaining each step of the HLP, how they are integrated into LGI operational procedures, focal persons responsible for driving the process, etc. The drafting of an operational manual is in progress, although the process to complete and implement the manual is not reflected in the present workplan. It is important that the operational manual becomes more than a project tool. It should aim to become a tool for the LGIs which they can also use once the HLP has been institutionalised.

LGD took ownership in the preparation of the current HLP Project, and was instrumental to the appointment of NILG as focal point for the institutionalisation process. reportedly, this was further underpinned by a circular from the Prime Minister's Office in 2017, commissioning NILG to allocate resources and staff for HLP. Overall, the backing from the Ministry of Local Government and LGD seems to be maintained. However, as an additional institutionalisation measure, it was suggested by several interviewees, that LGD should establish a permanent HLP cell to accelerate LGD's response to the institutionalisation of the HLP as well as the policy advocacy feedback. Currently, the LGD Planning Section is maintaining the liaison with HLP as an ad hoc responsibility. Although technically outside the TAPP, a permanent HLP cell in LGD makes good sense. To illustrate the challenge of ad hoc arrangements, the current focal person in LGD did not have any insights to share with the MTR team, whereas the predecessor, who knew about HLP and met with the MTR team, had already been transferred to the Ministry of Finance.

Factors impeding project implementation

The primary reason for the delay of the project implementation is the adverse impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic, with two prolonged government lock-downs over the last eighteen months. Whilst field activities were carried out according to plan in 2019, they were severely disrupted in 2020 and again this year due to the lockdowns. Overall, this has affected the workplan negatively, and only now has the second lockdown started to ease. In turn, the whole 'food chain' of good practise identifications and upscaling suffered, and prevented further rollout in the field. Moreover, local elections scheduled from March, 2021 onwards also meant that UP staffs were busy with election activities. However, NILG still considers a full rollout achievable, pending the endorsement of a project extension.

Internal factors also contributed to the delay:

- The TAPP applied the wrong project funding modality, ie. Reimbursement Project Aid (RPA) instead of Direct Project Aid (DPA). This caused a delay in the release of funds transfers. The wrong modality was applied by mistake, which NILG attributes to inexperience with government procedures. A solution was found back in May 2019¹, but only implementable from the financial year of 2019-2020 onwards. A draft revision of the TAPP is formally addressing this and other issues, including a project extension for one year. Subject to SDC endorsement, NILG expects a quick approval of the revised TAPP by the Planning Commission.
- The implementation has been affected by turnovers at staff and management level. A new DG was appointed to NILG by January 2021 and needed time to become familiar with the HLP Project. On the positive side, this coincided with the backstopping support to NILG, which facilitated a quick introduction to the project, and the DG is now actively engaged in the project implementation. The project has also been affected by the frequent turnovers of Project Directors (PDs), with a new - and fourth - PD expected to start soon. A frequent change of PDs is not in line with the Planning Commission circular for appointment of PDs, but it happens often and the project design made an effort to mitigate the impact by also assigning a Deputy Project Director to the project. Notwithstanding, the frequent turnovers are unfortunate since the PD is critical to the progress and to leverage support for the institutionalisation. There is no process to select the next PD, who will only be appointed after the retirement of the current PD by the end of September 2021.
- As a sum of the above, the project has also been affected by delays in recruitments and procurements, while a low level of remuneration may have contributed to project staff turnovers.

Backstopping support

Through the backstopping support, the institutionalisation approach was revisited in order to bring more focus on the institutionalisation process. As a result, a clearer separation was worked out between the UP level and upward replication through the local government system, and how to apply the 15 validation criteria for the selection of best practises. The backstopping support also addressed the need for a comprehensive M&E system, allowing for a more transparent and participatory monitoring of the HLP implementation. This led to the introduction of the HLP Tracker, which is still under development, see below.

The Supporting Agencies

The five supporting agencies – Helvetas, Shushilan, PRIP Trust, Breaking the Silence, and WaterAid Bangladesh - were recruited through a public tender process, and they are all long-term partners of

¹ HLP Operational and Financial Report Oct 18 - Nov 19.

the HLP. They were contracted on 30 December 2019, and barely started their field activities before the first government lock down was effected.

The MTR coincided with the development of new NGO workplans for the field work, which include new assignments of 37 LGI workshops, 7 network workshops and 65 exchange visits. The workplan development was facilitated by NILG at online workshops, although the outcome could not be assessed. The performance of the supporting agencies is regularly rated by NILG, and NILG recognizes a need for more backup support and supervision from the PMU in order to guide the field work properly. This is also the view of the supporting agencies, who among others called for appointments of focal persons within the Upazila and district administrations to improve their access to the LGIs and overcome frequent transfers of government officials. The NGOs also concur with NILG's plan to develop an operational manual for the LGIs, and to incorporate HLP into NILG's regular training curriculum. At least some of the NGO field workers already saw an early draft of the operation manual, introduced to them during an online briefing, but a proper manual is critical for the NGO field workers along with a training of trainers (TOT) initiative.

Since Covid-19 has impacted severely on all field activities of the HLP Project, the findings from the field visit need be assessed with some care. However, most of the UPs visited still had little or no knowledge about Horizontal Learning, although UPs met in Satkhira District did engage in one Good Practice Identification Workshop (Step 1), while good practices had been disseminated in a workshop at Upazila level, and all UPs in Sadar Upazila claim to implement them. In Tangail and Rajshahi, however, no workshops had yet been conducted or at least evidence of such workshops could not be confirmed.

One important finding from the field was that the NGOs do not employ staff exclusively for HLP activities. The field workers work for their own projects, whereas Horizontal Learning is an additional responsibility to them. Field workers are also not subject to direct supervision by NILG, although they do engage with their own HQ. Moreover, almost all field workers met did not have past experience with Horizontal Learning, and appear not to have been briefed prior to commencing the field work. These findings confirm, that the NGO field workers need more support. If not forthcoming, the scaling up of the HLP approach could be distorted or become biased towards the specific working area of the NGOs at the cost of a wider and shared approach.

Women's participation

The HLP project document and the TAPP include an ambition to further women's empowerment and participation in HLP processes. Indeed, the log frame indicators include women, poor and disadvantaged and a reference to female leader priorities. The project document mentions that the HLP will develop gender specific criteria for selecting good practices on women empowerment and inclusive decision making in all LGI activities and ensure the effective role of women in the selection and replication of good practices at all levels. It also states that the existing Women's Development Forum (WDF) at Upazila-level will be activated to promote peer learning for female UP members to meet, exchange views, and learn from each other. The TAPP also mention the ambition to develop a Gender Equality Mainstreaming Plan (GEMP) to steer the gender interventions of the HLP Project. So far, few of these ambitions were attended to.

In general, the HLP is a catalyst for the replication of good practises, which are based on LGI regulations and guidelines. These include women's participation. However, the active promotion of women's participation in the HLP is not very visible. The GEMP – including baseline indicators - was not developed at the beginning of the project, and the list of local HLP champions, whilst referring to

women, does not entail a specific target. The draft operational manual, which is currently circulated, makes broad references to include women in HLP, but it does not contain specific measures to further women's participation, and the WDFs are not mentioned at all. Moreover, the 15 validation criteria developed for the best practise selection is gender blind, and only refer broadly to inclusiveness, social acceptance etc. The ongoing drafting of the operational manual is now a good opportunity to institutionalise the gender perspective of the HLP approach, and provide more specific guidance on this dimension.

Unintended results and emerging impact

The MTR assignment also included an assessment of emerging impacts and unintended results – good or bad – achieved by the HLP Project. With the project delay, it is still early to assess both unintended results and emerging impact. However, one remarkable and possibly unintended result of the HLP approach since 2007, is the replication of Horizontal Learning in other branches of government such as the Ministry of Bangladesh Railways, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Public Administration. Horizontal Learning is becoming widely acknowledged as a value added and effective capacity development approach for the public sector per se. Key to this development has been the transfer of government officials from the Ministry of Local Government and subnational governments to other government branches. With a background in local government and exposure to Horizontal Learning, government officials became HLP champions in their new government ministries. Many of them also continue to participate in HLP workshops as resource persons along with HLP champions from the NGO network.

4.3 Institutional arrangements

The MTR team reviewed the institutional arrangements of the project and the outputs of the Project Steering Committee (PSC), the Project Implementation Committee (PIC) and the Project Coordination Committee (PCC) meetings. Apart from the disruptions caused by the government lockdowns, the committees conducted meetings on a regular basis and were able to remedy the TAPP modality issue.

The HLP approach involves many actors within government, partner NGOs and development partners, and there could be potential for more coherence and synergies. JICA is a long-term HLP partner and was also involved in the design of the present HLP Project. JICA participates in PCC meetings and in NILG's workshops and continues to promote the HLP approach and to seek synergies with the Upazila Governance Development Project (UGDP). The implementation of the UGDP has reached a stage, where the HLP approach would benefit Upazila development, although Upazilas still hesitate to embrace exposure visits and good practise exchanges. The HLP Project may assist in this matter. JICA is also likely to remain within the Bangladesh governance sector in the coming years. A new phase of the UGDP is already being discussed, and other JICA projects such as the C4C may also benefit from the HLP approach. Henceforth, there is scope for a more formal partnership relation to enhance JICA's long-term engagement and support to HLP. This could include JICA's participation as observer of the PIC meetings.

During the design of the current HLP Project, discussions reportedly took place about involving the LGI associations – the Bangladesh Union Parishad Forum (BUPF), the Upazila Parishad Foundation of Bangladesh (UPFB) and the Municipal Association of Bangladesh (MAB). Eventually, this idea has not been realised, and there is no mentioning of it in the document references. However, the idea of involving the associations came up again during the MTR consultations and it makes good sense. Globally, local government associations are driving peer learning among their members, and the associations in Bangladesh could also be relevant strategic partners for NILG and LGD in the long-term development of the HLP approach. Inviting the associations as observers of the PSC and PIC meetings

could be one important step in this direction. This would also underpin their long-term empowerment as LGI representatives.

4.4 Project management

The log frame

Overall, the project has deviated somewhat from the original log frame as illustrated by the indicators and results presented in the backstopping report (March 2021) and the roadmap workshop on 14 July 2021, see Annex 7. It is not clear if or when the log frame changes were agreed, but discussions between NILG and the backstopping consultant resulted in some realigning of the outputs (focus on replication of good and best practises) and the outcomes (focus on HLP institutionalisation). Accordingly, the revision of the TAPP is also addressing the log frame. In general, such changes, especially at outcome level are not permitted halfway into the project implementation, and there is a need for NILG and SDC to go through the original log frame again and agree on the need for changes, if any, before the revised TAPP is submitted.

Budget spending

Overall, the cumulative project spending up to June 2021 budget was BDT 587.49 lakh (app. CHF 638,000). This corresponds to 25.45% of the total budget and reflects the delays faced by the project. This also means that there is room in the budget for a no-cost extension. Due to the delays and the stop-and-go implementation process caused by the Covid-19 restrictions, it is difficult to assess the cost-effectiveness and cost-efficiency of the project implementation. However, the project has been good at embracing online platforms for project coordination, even if there are limits to this approach at the field level, see below.

Workplan

The MTR team went through the current workplan for the FY 2021-2022, which is using a RACI chart format. The workplan is referring to project activities and TAPP financial codes, which is relevant for activity planning, work allocation and procurements. However, the workplan does not refer to the strategic objectives of the HLP Project and it does not include a timeline with strategic milestones, in which project activities are linked to the outputs and outcomes of the project. Hence, it does not present an overview of the strategic direction of the implementation process and how activities are leading towards higher order results and, indeed HLP institutionalisation. Moving forward, the workplan should be improved in order to serve as a strategic asset for the PMU, the PSC and the PIC. Pending endorsement of a no-cost extension, the workplan should cover the new duration of the project, and link project activities to outputs, outcomes and milestone achievements. This also includes the responses to the recommendations in this report, pending their endorsement.

Tools

[The HLP Tracker](#) was conceived as an online M&E tool, which will enable all project stakeholders to monitor the progress of the project through an online map. Indeed, the HLP Tracker may also become a key platform for sharing good practises beyond the current project phase. The Tracker can be accessed online, but in order to become operational, it urgently needs more work to reflect all steps of the HLP process. As of now, it presents an overall picture of good practise numbers, sectors, number of workshops, reference to supporting agencies and the titles of the good practises at district and Upazila level, but only up to step two. There is not yet any access to details of good practises or information on participation in hubs activities, workshops which cover all steps of the HLP approach. It is now critical to complete the HLP Tracker. Otherwise, it cannot be a M&E reference for the next annual budget cycle or serve as a tool to monitor HLP hubs activities in the field. The factsheet format

may also benefit from more detail, such as costing and alternative funding options beyond the Basic Block Grant. HYSAWA for example (not involved in this project phase) documented suitable microfinance options for WASH schemes in hard-to-reach areas, and such innovations deserve more publicity, if deemed relevant by the UPs. JICA and other development partners may also assist in how to capture and disseminate good and best practises.

The pandemic triggered more use of ICT platforms for meetings, coordination and e-learning. The HLP Project is actively using Zoom and WhatsApp groups for project meetings, and the HLP Tracker is emerging as a key tool for M&E and wider disseminations. The HLP Project also makes good use of Facebook and online videos. Whilst not a substitute for exposure visits and workshops, more emphasis on e-learning in the field has been suggested (through mobiles, social media or even TV programmes as practised within the agricultural sector). This suggestion is worth more consideration, as it may contribute to the digital empowerment and resilience of UPs and Pourashavas. However, a basic ICT infrastructure is a pre-condition for more inroads on e-learning. Local facilities like union digital centres may not be sufficient and NILG may need to enter into a cooperation with the ICT Ministry to make some progress in this regard. Unfortunately, the Local Government Hotline (LGHL) has been discontinued by NILG. It was anticipated as a FAQ facility for the HLP Project, and NILG and the PMU now need to find alternative measures to the LGHL. Websites and the HLP Tracker may go some way to substitute the LGHL, but there is a need to assess what measures are needed and this work is in progress.

5. Lessons learned

It's difficult to draw clear lessons learned, given the considerable delay and the impact of Covid-19. However, some are emerging and may further assessed by upcoming evaluations.

Institutionalization takes long time

The HLP approach is relevant, but innovative and complex in what it is trying to achieve. Despite previous piloting and upscale phases, the institutionalisation process proves challenging and subject to implementation by many newcomers in NILG and LGD, who may not have the institutional memory from past achievements. The challenge to transition from project modality to institutionalisation is shared with other development programmes in support of the local government reform in Bangladesh. The LGSP already went through three phases, the MGSP two, whereas HYSAWA has been promoting local WASH support for as long as the HLP has been around, but struggled to make inroads on WASH mainstreaming. On a grander scale, the time-consuming processes needed to implement new innovations tallies with the international experience on local government reforms. Comprehensive reforms may take even decades to complete, only to be succeeded by new reforms in order to keep up with the development of society.

TAPP and the need for an adaptive approach

The challenge to transition from project to institutionalisation may question if sufficient attention was directed towards change management aspects of the HLP project design. Based on the written documentation, and discussions with stakeholders involved in the project design, it would seem that a lot of effort was actually invested during the interim phase to define institutionalisation components and outcomes, and to ensure that government funding was allocated to NILG for the institutionalisation purposes. Given the limitations of the TAPP format and a regular arrival of new people to implement the project, it seems the project strategy did contain as much detail as possible from the onset. This was also the views shared by HLP observers. However, once the implementation

starts, it is important to balance the need for an adaptive approach with the need to achieve tangible institutionalisation results and, as in this case, to revise the TAPP based on the progress and learnings.

Backstopping support

The exit strategy envisions full institutionalisation and absorption of the HLP process into the subnational government framework. To increase ownership and sustainability, only limited technical assistance was foreseen for the final phase with a smaller budget line allocated for backstopping support. The modality seems to work well. Until now, it has supported the institutionalisation process without harming NILG's ownership and internalisation of the HLP. This assessment is based on the fact that not all the backstopping advice was accepted by NILG, but it always stimulated discussions on the way forward. The backstopping support has been particularly useful to safeguard the core values of HLP and to maintain a strategic focus on the institutionalisation aspects. In particular, it made the project implementation more robust in a situation with frequent staff turnovers and major disruptions caused by Covid-19. With a central government caretaker of the HLP, there is always an inherent risk of top-down interference in the selection and replication of good practises at local level, but through the backstopping support, the ownership and independence of the UPs was ringfenced, whereas process support and good practise documentation was referred to the Upazila and district level. The backstopping support was also instrumental for the introduction of the HLP Tracker. This tool is essential as NILG doesn't have a local presence and needs to monitor the cascading rollout of the HLP.

6. Conclusion

The HLP Project remains relevant to decentralisation in Bangladesh and to the capacity challenges of LGIs. The HLP fits well within NILG's CapDev Framework, where it complements supply-driven training delivery and increases the outreach of capacity development measures for LGIs. The benefits of Horizontal Learning correspond well with the global experience in local government capacity development, although the approach in Bangladesh is focused on results and linked to a structured process of nationwide replication and policy advocacy. Over the years, a strong network of HLP champions has emerged among government officials, NGOs and development partners. All HLP champions met confirmed their commitment to the HLP Project and some have even introduced the approach to other branches of government.

Relevance and commitment notwithstanding, it is also evident, that the HLP Project has not performed as planned and that results achievements are limited. As expected, the impact of Covid-19 contributed a lot to this situation. Two prolonged government lock downs delayed recruitments and procurements, created a near impossible working situation in the field and prevented the achievement of higher order outputs and outcomes such as best practise disseminations and policy advocacy. Project management issues further aggravated this situation, including a wrongly applied TAPP modality and turnovers among project management and staff at NILG.

NILG considers a project extension essential to achieve the institutionalisation outcomes, but even with an extension, the HLP Project may not accomplish the full institutionalising envisioned by the project document, i.e. the nationwide rollout of self-sustained HLP hubs and processes, and the full absorption of the HLP into NILG. Limited progress is achieved in some of the critical aspects of the institutionalising process. Institutionalisation requires careful preparation and well-defined steps to transition from project implementation to full institutional absorption at the centre and at local level. Such a process is not reflected in the project workplan, even though there is provision for this in the TAPP. This still questions the overall strategic direction of the project and the time needed to accomplish full institutionalisation. The concern about the time needed to accomplish the objectives

of the HLP Project is shared by NILG, and the potential need for an additional phase has been hinted in order to sort out all institutionalisation issues and market the HLP approach.

Given these constraints, a suitable model is needed to accommodate NILG's request for more time, while avoiding an open-ended project implementation, and achieving a sufficient level of sustainability after the exit of SDC support. A way forward which is acceptable to all parties may include the development a fully transparent timeline for the institutionalisation of HLP within NILG. This would involve the official appointment of a HLP focal person in addition to initiating a transparent process where PMU functions are formally transferred to the Research Wing well before the end of the HLP Project.

Further institutionalisation priorities include the completion of the operational manual for the LGIs with due attention to women's participation, since the latter did not get much attention so far. Another key priority is the processing of LGD circulars to make HLP an official responsibility of UPs, Pourashavas, districts and Upazilas. Moreover, attention is also needed to the training of NGO field workers and to their cooperation with the Upazila and district administrations. The long-term sustainability of the HLP may also be enhanced, if the LGI associations and JICA becomes formally involved in the HLP Project.

The MTR also highlighted urgent project management issues in need of attention. This includes the project workplan, which needs a comprehensive upgrade to become a strategic and transparent management tool. The development of the HLP Tracker is another imminent priority. It needs to be completed in order to cover all HLP steps and become a M&E tool for NILG and a project reference for the next annual budget cycle.

7. Recommendations

In order to achieve HLP institutionalization, the MTR identified the following recommendations:

Recommendation #1: The HLP Project should be granted a no-cost extension of twelve months, provided a process is initiated with the aim to transfer all PMU responsibilities to the Research Wing. This process should be completed well before the project terminates.

Rationale: NILG has not yet started planning for the institutionalizing process within NILG. To succeed in this, a transparent transition process needs to be initiated at the earliest with the aim to fully absorb the HLP into NILG's organization before the project is completed.

This recommendation is conditional of the following measures:

- NILG will officially appointment a HLP Focal Person in the Research Wing. SDC will receive a confirmation letter from NILG about the appointment
- NILG will initiate a process for the formal transition of the PMU functions to the Research Wing.
- The transition process will be completed well before the end of the HLP project and it will be incorporated into the workplan with milestone achievements and presented for endorsement at the next PSC meeting
- All other MTR recommendations endorsed are also included in the workplan (see *Recommendation #8*).

Recommendation #2: The MTR calls on LGD and NILG to retain the next Project Director for the entire duration of the HLP Project

Rationale: The project has been subject to frequent turnovers of Project Directors. The fourth is expected to start in October 2021 or later. The Project Director is key to the progress of the project and for leveraging support to the institutionalisation. The frequent turnovers undermine the achievement of the project objectives.

Recommendation #3: The MTR calls on LGD to establish a HLP cell in order to underpin the institutionalisation of HLP

Rationale: At present, NILG and LGD liaise through an ad hoc focal person in LGD. As an additional institutionalisation measure, the establishment of a permanent HLP cell could accelerate LGD's response to the institutionalisation of the HLP processes and to the policy advice extended from NILG.

Recommendation #4: The Bangladesh Union Parishad Forum (BUPF), the Upazila Parishad Foundation of Bangladesh (UPFB), the Municipal Association of Bangladesh (MAB) should be invited to attend the meetings of the Project Steering Committee and the Project Implementation Committee as observers

Rationale: The three LGI associations have a vested long-term interest in Horizontal Learning and are relevant partners for NILG and LGD in the development of the HLP approach and in the upscale of relevant policy advice derived from the HLP. Their participation will also empower them as representatives of the LGIs.

Recommendation #5: JICA should be invited to attend the meetings of the Project Implementation Committee as observer

Rationale: JICA's participation in PIC meetings could further enhance its long-term engagement and support to HLP. Over the years, JICA has been a key partner in local governance and in the development of the HLP. This partnership continued into the present project phase, and JICA is active in NILG workshops, promoting HLP institutionalisation and synergies with UGDP and other JICA supported projects. UGDP is also likely to be extended with a new two-year phase, and the HLP approach is needed to spearhead horizontal learning at Upazila level.

Recommendation #6: The operational manual for LGIs, which is currently in process, should include safeguards for the participation of female Union Parishad members in horizontal learning

Rationale: The HLP Project has not yet achieved much on women's empowerment, compared to the ambitions in the TAPP and the project document to further women, children and vulnerable persons. The operational manual, which is being processed, is a good entry point for improving the attention to women's empowerment. The draft operational manual being circulated, should attend more explicitly to measures promoting the participation of female Union Parishad members, including the involvement of the WDFs.

Recommendation #7: More guidance is needed for NGO field workers to underpin the upscale of the HLP and to safeguard a shared and comprehensive approach

Rationale: NGOs do not employ staff exclusively for HLP activities. Field workers work for their own projects, whereas Horizontal Learning is an additional responsibility. Moreover, field workers met

during the field visits, did not have past experience with Horizontal Learning, nor were they trained in the HLP. This can undermine a shared HLP approach and create a bias towards the technical working areas of the NGOs.

This recommendation could be implemented through the following measures:

- NILG and the supporting agencies should assess the training needs for the field workers with the aim to draft a Training of Trainers (TOT) course on HLP
- NILG should supplement the TOT course with a guideline for the field workers, explaining the HLP approach with due attention to the entire LGI mandate. The guideline could be processed as part of the LGI operational manual development to save time and resources.
- The good practise fact sheet format is basic and generic. A field workers guideline should provide sufficient detail to ensure that lay persons with limited technical expertise are able to collect adequate information on any good practise. NILG may consult the formats used by other LGI programmes, including details on human resources, budget, material, and timelines, in addition to checklists. Additional information on micro financing and other innovative measures may also be captured on the fact sheet.
- NILG and LGD should expedite the appointment of HLP focal persons in Upazila and district administrations to facilitate a smooth cooperation with the NGO field workers
- To further this recommendation, Mr Swapan Sarkar from the MTR team is available to present his field findings in a workshop with NILG and the supporting agencies.

Recommendation #8: The Project Management Unit should develop a results-based workplan to enhance the strategic management and accountability of the HLP Project.

Rationale: The workplan mainly consists of project activities and TAPP financial codes. It does not link these to the strategic objectives of the HLP Project and to a timeline for output, outcomes and milestone achievements. This prevents NILG, the PSC and the PIC from gaining a strategic overview of the overall direction and progress of the project.

This recommendation should be implemented through the following measures:

- The workplan should cover the remaining project duration
- The workplan should link activities with outputs and outcomes and incorporate a timeline for milestone achievements
- The workplan should include timelines for any output recommended by this report, even if they are not mentioned in the log frame (e.g. the operational manual)
- The workplan will also incorporate a timeline for the processing LGD circulars, to make discussions with the LGD on this issue transparent.
- The new workplan is presented in the next Project Steering Committee meeting

Recommendation #9: NILG and SDC should go through the project log frame, and mutually agree if there is need for specific changes before the TAPP revision is completed.

Rationale: The log frame of the HLP Project has started to deviate somewhat from the original project document. The draft revised TAPP contains further changes to the log frame to enhance the institutionalisation focus. In general, deviations from log frames should be avoided once a project have started, especially at outcome level as proposed in the new draft TAPP. Any changes, if relevant, should be mutually agreed before the revised TAPP is completed and submitted to the Planning Commission.

Recommendation #10: The development of the HLP Tracker needs to be accomplished before the launch in October 2021.

Rationale: The HLP Tracker needs more development to cover the full HLP process. It is critical to attend to this immediately in order for the Tracker to serve as a M&E tool for the upcoming annual budget cycle.

Recommendation #11: The recommendations of the MTR should be discussed in a workshop attended by NILG, LGD, SDC and JICA

Annex 1. Terms of Reference

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Midterm Review of the SHIKHON - Horizontal Learning Programme (HLP) in Bangladesh Programme Number: 7F-07982.02

1.0 Background

SHIKHON - Horizontal Learning Programme (HLP) in Bangladesh is a Local Government Institution (LGI) led and outcome based peer to peer learning programme facilitated by the National Institute of Local Government (NILG), under the guidance of Local Government Division (LGD) of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (MoLGRD&C) and supported by the Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh and other relevant network partners. HLP has been designed to help LGIs to identify and replicate their good practices, through policy advocacy engaging the Ministry of Local Government, in order for the LGIs to improve their basic service delivery functions. Although the programme started in 2018, there has been limited progress due to complex implementation process using the Technical Assistance Project Proforma (TAPP) modality, frequent changes of Government of Bangladesh (GoB) counterparts, delay in recruitment processes and procurement of goods and services, weakness in the TAPP. In addition, the first and second waves of the COVID-19 pandemic have further adversely affected the implementation. NILG has received backstopping support from a consultant, supported by the Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh, so that that NILG understands the project goal and process properly.

The overall goal of SHIKHON - Horizontal Learning Programme (HLP) is *'the LGIs (2000 Union Parishads, 150 Pourashavas and 200 UpazillaParishads) in 33 districts in Bangladesh will contribute to the improvement of well-being of at least 50 million people including women, poor and disadvantaged through wider replication of good practices'*.

As NILG is taking the lead role in capacity development of all kinds of LGIs such as Union Parishad, Upazilla Parishad, Municipality and Zila Parishad, it is expected that it will take steps to mainstream the programme, by orienting all local government officials through capacity development initiatives.

The three outcomes of the programme:

Outcome 1: The NILG institutionalises the programme for Union Parishads and introduces it to the Pourashavas and Upazillas to the improvement of well-being for all, particularly for women, poor and disadvantaged.

Outcome 2: LGIs implement their mandates more effectively, accountably, transparently and in an inclusive manner.

Outcome 3: The NILG creates an institutional learning and advocacy culture.

The three outcomes will be achieved through the following outputs:

- (vi) Five good practices are successfully replicated in at least 2'000 LGIs.
- (vii) 120 champions from citizens emerged through HLP demonstrate, promote, and advocate on gender based development.
- (viii) 1700 LGIs allocated their own funds for replication of good practices.
- (ix) 10 good practices are integrated within NILG's regular course curricula and training sessions.
- (x) Three policy amendments completed by LGD based on HLP Policy Advocacy Notes.

Switzerland support the NILG through a contribution agreement of CHF 3.14 million for a timeframe of three years. The programme is scheduled to end in September 2022.

The programme has a well-structured monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system which includes regular field visit and bilateral meeting with implementing partners. As part of this process, an externally commissioned midterm review will be conducted to track progress to date and also advice on how the

programme can move forward with a prioritised approach, in the current pandemic context. The midterm review will cover the programme progress from December 2018 to June 2021.

2.0 Objective

The objective of the midterm review is to provide a pulse check of how the programme is tracking with implementation, especially considering the current pandemic context and reaffirming whether the current approach is fit for purpose or requires modifications to achieve the desired goal of the programme.

3.0 Approach and Methodology

A team of two consultants (one international team leader and one national consultant) will carry out the midterm review. The international consultant will lead the assignment and have the overall responsibility for ensuring the overall quality of the assignment and submitting all deliverables. The national consultant will assist the international consultant with the data collection from the field, through interviews and document reviews, be responsible for gathering all the country specific information and support the international consultant, with the overall analysis and preparing all the deliverables.

Both consultants will be contracted by the Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh. The consultants will report to the Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh. All reports and documents prepared, during the assignment, will be treated as the property of the Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh. The reports and/or documents or any part, therefore, cannot be sold, used /shared and reproduced in any manner without prior approval of the Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh.

The assignment will be conducted through document reviews, virtual meetings and in-person consultations and field visits. The national consultant will make the field visits, under the supervision of team leader, undertaking all necessary precautions that are necessary under the COVID-19 pandemic context. The team of consultants will use qualitative and quantitative methods to gather relevant information to address the scope of work. The HLP will assist the consultants to organise the in-person and virtual meetings for consultations, field visits and provide all relevant documents.

The midterm review should be guided by the OECD/DAC Criteria² for evaluations:

- **Relevance:** (i) Assess to identify the relevance of the HLP programme, within the current context of local governance reform, Switzerland's portfolio and other donor initiatives. (ii) Assess the relevance and effectiveness of the programme's strategy and approaches for the achievement of the objectives;
- **Effectiveness:** Assess to what extent were the objectives of HLP have been achieved or are likely to be achieved?
- **Efficiency:** Critically review the programme (i) structures and resources (management, monitoring, steering, coordination); (ii) systems and policies and (iii) monitoring system;
- **Sustainability:** Assess to what extent the positive results will be continued beyond the end of the external support.
- **Impact:** What are the intended and unintended effects of HLP, including the effects on the beneficiaries and others?

4.0 Scope of Work

The review will assess how the programme is tracking against the defined outcomes in the current context, identify the key bottlenecks and challenges, provide recommendations for overcoming these challenges and document the key lessons learned that may be used to adjust and improve the implementation approach going forward. The review will provide concrete, actionable and prioritised recommendations, with action points, covering all the required scope of work. The scope of work includes, but is not limited to:

² OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation: [Better Criteria for Better Evaluation. Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use](#) (2019).

- A desk review of all programme information to date, including the key documents such as the programme document, TAPP, all operational and financial progress reports, internal and external audit reports, and any analyses and/or studies;
- Interview the backstopping consultant and review the outputs delivered by the consultant;
- Interviews with the HLP team to collect information on programme management and implementation aspects;
- Interviews with the key stakeholders and other response actors to assess the degree to which the programme has had the intended impact; and what could have been done differently or better, so that the lessons learned can be documented;
- Interview relevant personnel from GoB counterparts such as the LGD staff, which includes the Senior Secretary, Director General (Monitoring, Investigation and Evaluation Wing), Member Secretary of Programme Steering Committee, and the relevant Deputy Directors - Local Government (DDLG) from different districts;
- Interview of partners from Civil Society Organisations/Non-Government Organisations, who are implementing activities;
- Interview any other stakeholder(s) and/or relevant actors, if required;
- Critically review the institutional strength and capacity to implement such a programme, including recommendations on institutional rearrangement or reform(s), if required; and
- Assess the current relationships with MoLGRD&C and analyse the coordination/relation with other programmes and project within the Ministry such as the Local Governance Project.

5.0 Timeline

The assignment will be for a total of up to 40 input days (20 input days per consultant), within the timeframe of July 2021 to August 2021.

Tasks	Number of Input Days Allocated	
	International	National
Kick-off meeting with the Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh	0.25 day	0.25 day
Preparatory tasks, development of the workplan and document review	2.75 days	2.75 days
Consultations	9 days	9 days
Debriefing with the Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh (includes preparation)	1 day	1 day
Analysis and drafting the report	5 days	5 days
Revisions and submission of the final report	2 days	2 days
TOTAL	20 days	20 days

6.0 Deliverables

- A kick-off meeting with the Embassy of Switzerland to discuss expectations and present the planned approach of the assignment;
- A detailed work plan which highlights the key milestones and deliverables, including the methodology and processes to be undertaken. If a team of consultants implement the assignment, then one joint work plan and individual work plans, per consultant, need to be submitted;
- Tools and defined techniques used for primary information and data collection. These tools and techniques must be approved by the Embassy, before usage;
- Submission of the final report as specified in the scope of work, including up to at least two feedback loops with revisions. The report should be a maximum of 15 pages (A4, Normal margin, Arial 11, single space) with an executive summary of a maximum of three pages, which reads as a standalone document. All other information should be annexed;
- The Assessment Grid of the DAC Criteria (Annex 1) must be completed and attached to the final report;

- List of persons interviewed, minutes of workshops and meetings, summary of the discussions in the focus group discussions, leaflets, case studies, etc., must be annexed to the final report;
- Analysis of the LogFrame: extent to which objectives have been achieved, must be annexed to the final report;
- Presentation of the final report to the broader Embassy team that highlights key preliminary findings and recommendations. The MS PowerPoint slides must be annexed to the final report; and
- Recommend additional and/or supporting analyses and follow up actions, if required.

7.0 Profiles of the Team of Consultant(s) The required profiles are as follows:

International Consultant

- Minimum 10 years of relevant professional work experience on local governance interventions;
- Demonstrate professional experience and skills in robust evaluation methodologies and in evaluating local governance programmes and projects, especially of programmes or interventions using innovative partnership approaches and working with partner government systems;
- Demonstrated experience and ability to apply the OECD DAC³ evaluation standards;
- Sensitivity at enhancing learning processes;
- Strong analytical skills, sound judgement, the capacity to think strategically, including the ability to produce high quality policy materials, high level strategic documents and advice for development implementation;
- Good understanding of multilateral and/or bilateral donor programmes and management procedures relating to programme management cycle;
- Demonstrate understanding of partnership modalities and institutional strengthening;
- Ability to steer complex processes involving a multiplicity of stakeholders through participatory methods;
- Competency with gender, social inclusion and ‘Leave no one behind (LNOB)’ issues;
- Appropriate academic qualifications in relevant field of expertise;
- Excellent analytical, research and writing skills;
- Demonstrate ability to identify what areas need particular attention and where development partners can (and cannot) add value;
- High level oral communication skills, including representation and liaison skills;
- Social competence including intercultural sensitivity and ability to work with varied stakeholders;
- Track record of successful consultancies on developing high level strategic documents, including conducting monitoring and evaluation related analyses and reviews of programmes and projects;
- Knowledge of SDC’s working principles and methods is highly desirable; and
- Knowledge of South Asia and/or Bangladesh development issues is highly desirable.

National Consultant

- Minimum 08 years of relevant professional work experience of relevant professional work experience on local governance interventions in Bangladesh;
- Demonstrate professional experience and skills in robust evaluation methodologies and in evaluating local governance programmes and projects, especially of programmes or interventions using innovative partnership approaches and working with partner government systems;
- Demonstrated knowledge and ability to apply the OECD DAC⁴ evaluation standards. Hands-on experience in applying the standards will be an added advantage;
- Sensitivity at enhancing learning processes;
- Good understanding of multilateral and/or bilateral donor programmes and management procedures relating to programme management cycle;
- Demonstrate understanding of partnership modalities and institutional strengthening;
- Ability to steer complex processes involving a multiplicity of stakeholders through participatory methods;
- Competency with gender, social inclusion and ‘Leave no one behind (LNOB)’ issues;

³ <https://www.oecd.org/development/evaluation/qualitystandards.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.oecd.org/development/evaluation/qualitystandards.pdf>

- Appropriate academic qualifications in relevant field of expertise;
- Excellent analytical, research and writing skills;
- High level oral communication skills, including representation and liaison skills;
- Excellent computer literacy in MS Office programmes;
- Track record of successful consultancies on developing high level strategic documents, including conducting monitoring and evaluation related analyses and reviews of programmes and projects; and
- Knowledge of SDC's working principles and methods is highly desirable.

Assessment Grid for Project/Programme Evaluations of the SDC interventions

Note: this assessment grid is used for evaluations of SDC financed projects and programmes (hereinafter jointly referred to as an 'intervention'). It is based on the OECD Development Assistance Committee evaluation criteria.⁵ In mid-term evaluations, the assessment requires analysing the likelihood of achieving impact and sustainability. All applicable sub-criteria should be scored and a short explanation should be provided.

Please add the corresponding number (0-4) representing your rating of the sub-criteria in the column 'score': 0

- = not assessed
- 1 = highly satisfactory
- 2 = satisfactory
- 3 = unsatisfactory
- 4 = highly unsatisfactory

Key aspects based on DAC Criteria	Score (put only integers: 0, 1, 2, 3 or 4)	Justification (please provide a short explanation for your score or why a criterion was not assessed)
<p>Relevance</p> <p>Note: the assessment here captures the relevance of objectives and design <i>at the time of evaluation</i>. In the evaluation report, both relevance at the design stage as well as relevance at the time of evaluation should be discussed.</p>		
1. The extent to which the objectives of the intervention respond to the needs and priorities of the target group.		Click here to enter text.
2. The extent to which the objectives of the intervention respond to the needs and priorities of indirectly affected stakeholders (not included in target group, e.g. government, civil society, etc.) in the country of the intervention.		Click here to enter text.

⁵ For information on the 2019 revisions of the evaluation framework see: Better Criteria for Better Evaluations. Revised Evaluation Criteria. Definitions and Principles for Use, OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, 2019.

3. The extent to which core design elements of the intervention (such as the theory of change, structure of the project components, choice of services and intervention partners) adequately reflect the needs and priorities of the target group.		Click here to enter text.
--	--	---------------------------

Coherence		
4. Internal coherence: the extent to which the intervention is compatible with other interventions of Swiss development cooperation in the same country and thematic field (consistency, complementarity and synergies).		Click here to enter text.
5. External coherence: the extent to which the intervention is compatible with interventions of other actors in the country and thematic field (complementarity and synergies).		Click here to enter text.
Effectiveness		
6. The extent to which approaches/strategies during implementation are adequate to achieve the intended results.		Click here to enter text.
7. The extent to which the intervention achieved or is expected to achieve its intended objectives (outputs and outcomes).		Click here to enter text.
8. The extent to which the intervention achieved or is expected to achieve its intended results related to transversal themes.		Click here to enter text.
Efficiency		
9. The extent to which the intervention delivers the results (outputs, outcomes) cost-effectively.		Click here to enter text.
10. The extent to which the intervention delivers the results (outputs, outcome) in a timely manner (within the intended timeframe or reasonably adjusted timeframe).		Click here to enter text.
11. The extent to which management, monitoring and steering mechanisms support efficient implementation.		Click here to enter text.

Impact		
<p>12. The extent to which the intervention generated or is expected to generate 'higher-level effects' as defined in the design document of the intervention.</p> <p>Note: when assessing this criterion, the primary focus is the intended 'higher-level effects'. In the event that <i>significant</i> unintended negative or positive effects can be discerned, they must be specified in the justification column, especially if they influence the score.</p>		Click here to enter text.
Sustainability		
<p>13. The extent to which partners are capable and motivated (technical capacity, ownership) to continue activities contributing to achieving the outcomes.</p>		Click here to enter text.
<p>14. The extent to which partners have the financial resources to continue activities contributing to achieving the outcomes.</p>		Click here to enter text.
<p>15. The extent to which contextual factors (e.g. legislation, politics, economic situation, social demands) is conducive to continuing activities leading to outcomes.</p>		Click here to enter text.

Additional information (if needed): [Click here to enter text.](#)

Title of the intervention: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Assessor(s): [Click here to enter text.](#)

Date: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Annex 2. References

- HLP Credit proposal signed 08.11.2018
- MOU signed by SDC and ERD 13.02.2019
- HLP Operational Report Dec 18 - May 19
- HLP Operational and Financial Report Oct 18 - Nov 19
- HLP Backstopping Report Sept 2020 - March 2021
- 1st PIC meeting minutes (Bengali)
- 2nd PIC meeting minutes (Bengali)
- 3rd PIC meeting minutes 08.03.2021
- 4th PIC meeting minutes 25.03.2021 and working paper
- 1st PSC meeting minutes (Bengali)
- 2nd PSC Meeting Minutes 11.05.2021 and working paper
- 3rd PSC Meeting Minutes 28.07.2021 and working paper
- Co-ordination Meeting Minutes of HLP on 30 June 2021
- Final Coordination Meeting Minutes 25-08-2020 (Bengali)
- HLP activities between PMU & SA 06.06.2021
- HLP Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division Report 2019-20 (June 2020)
- HLP Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division Report 2020-21 (28.07.2021)
- HLP Project's Supporting Agencies (NGOs) Activities Committee Meeting Minutes 08.03.2021
- HLP Project's Supporting Agencies (NGOs) Activities Committee Meeting Minutes 05.05.2021
- HLP Project's Supporting Agencies (NGOs) Activities Committee Meeting Minutes 27.07.2021
- Minutes of the Virtual Meeting with SDC on Backstopping Support to HLP and Other Issues 05.05.2021
- NGO selection 3rd meeting
- Revised Technical Assistance Project Proforma meeting with SDC 25.05.2021
- Technical Assistance Project Proforma, 29.01.2018
- Revised Technical Assistance Project Proforma, Final Draft 05.09.2021
- HLP Workplan 2021-2022
- Workshop Report on Institutionalization of HLP (Tangail), March 2021
- HLP Institutionalization Workshop Report 14.07.2021
- Union Parishad Best Practice Compendium on Water Supply, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH), NILG, March 2021
- Institutionalizing Horizontal Learning Program, NILG Brochure
- HLP Fact Sheet Template o The HLP Framework 2011-2015
- Co-Creation 2 - Success Stories of JICA Governance Program
- NILG, Strategy for Engagement Guideline 2014
- UNDP, Capacity Development Framework for Local Government Institutions in Bangladesh, 2016 o The 8th Five Year Plan of Bangladesh
- Concept notes and project reports from the interim phase 2017-2018
- CapDev Framework 2012 (UP National basic capacity program)
- Draft HLP operational manual, 11th version
- <http://www.hlp.gov.bd/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/hlpbd>

~~Annex 3. List of persons met~~

Annex 4. Review design matrix

Criterion/Evaluation Question	Sub-questions	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods
Relevance/Coherence			
(i) Assess the relevance of the HLP programme, within the current context of local governance reform, Switzerland's portfolio and other donor initiatives.	<p>Is the HLP relevant and aligned with to the GoB strategic priorities of the</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - FYP - local government reform - National Basic Capacity Building Program for Union Parishads? - NILG strategic plan <p>Is the HLP relevant to the needs and priorities of the target groups (LGIs/UPs). Is the HLP relevant to the needs and priorities of beneficiaries (citizens). How does the target groups (LGIs) and the beneficiaries (citizens) perceive the HLP approach and achievements?</p> <p>Is the HLP relevant to and coherent with SDCs portfolio, including HYSAWA</p> <p>Is the HLP relevant to and coherent with LGSP III, MGSP II, EALG, JICA portfolio</p>	<p>GoB policy papers, 8FYP</p> <p>NILG strategy, organogram</p> <p>Prodoc and progress reports</p> <p>Independent evaluation reports and institutional assessments</p> <p>SDC, development partner portfolios</p> <p>Stakeholder consultations</p>	<p>Desk review</p> <p>Semi-structured Key Informant Interviews/Focal Group Discussions – partially online through Zoom or similar application</p> <p>Field visits to and consultations with selected LGIs (national consultant)</p> <p>Triangulation</p>
(ii) Assess the relevance and effectiveness of the programme's strategy and approaches for the achievement of the objectives	<p>Are project strategy and interventions relevant and effective for the achievement of the stated objectives?</p> <p>Is the institutional absorption capacity of NILG correctly addressed by the project design?</p> <p>Was the outcome of the exit strategy (HLP institutionalization) sufficiently defined and understood at the design stage?</p>		

Criterion/Evaluation Question	Sub-questions	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods
	<p>Is the HLP exit phase piloted from scratch, disregarding previous experience (pilot areas)?</p> <p>Is the support rendered coherent and focused?</p> <p>Do interventions contribute towards the stated outcomes?</p> <p>Is there a balance between targets, project design and the resource envelope (supply/demand driven, TA, funding, time)?</p> <p>Any realignment of support or changes in approach, which could improve the relevance and design of the HLP project</p> <p>Are there missed opportunities, gaps in the present support?</p>		
Effectiveness			
<p>Assess to what extent the objectives of HLP have been achieved or are likely to be achieved?</p>	<p>Which results have been achieved? Are the eight best practises a result of the present phase?</p> <p>Were they achieved according to plan?</p> <p>Is the project effective in achieving results related to transversal themes?</p> <p>Are main objectives likely to be achieved within the present duration of the HLP project? Any need for extension?</p> <p>To what extent have HLP promoted peer learning, LGI peer cooperation and participation</p> <p>Has HLP achieved significant innovation and changes in LGI capacity development?</p> <p>Does NILGs absorption capacity warrant a sustained role as promoter of the HLP approach and national advocacy?</p>	<p>GoB policy papers</p> <p>Prodoc and progress reports</p> <p>M&E systems and data tracking</p> <p>Independent evaluation report and institutional assessments</p> <p>Stakeholder consultations</p>	<p>Desk review</p> <p>Establishment of results, results chains and causality links based on consensus on the log frame version</p> <p>Semi-structured Key Informant Interviews/Focal Group Discussions – partially online through Zoom or similar application</p> <p>Field visits to and consultations with selected LGIs (national consultant)</p> <p>Triangulation</p>

Criterion/Evaluation Question	Sub-questions	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods
	<p>Has HLP succeeded - or is likely to succeed – in changing overall LGI policy development?</p> <p>To what extent is HLP contributing to poverty reduction, inclusion and reduction of vulnerabilities?</p> <p>To what extent is women’s participation targeted and enhanced? Does the HLP Project apply gender-aggregated data/monitoring, which can document the gender dimension of the evaluation?</p> <p>Do HLP achievements complement relevant GoB and DP support?</p> <p>Which external factors facilitated and/or impeded the progress in achieving the outcomes, including the Covid-19 pandemic</p>		
Efficiency			
<p>Critically review the programme (i) structures and resources (management, monitoring, steering, coordination);</p>	<p>Do the PSC and the PIC function and provide proper guidance?</p> <p>Are the issues with TAPP solved?</p> <p>Is HLP efficiently collaborating with government initiatives, with civil society and the private sector to promote it objectives? Also, beyond WASH?</p> <p>To what extent has HLP leveraged partnerships to maximize the project results? Any evidence of overlaps, synergies and complementarities with other initiatives? Are sufficient safeguards in place to avoid overlaps?</p> <p>Is there untapped potential for tapping into additional resources? Have DPs and GoB stepped in to scale up initiatives across target areas and beyond? Is this sufficiently documented?</p> <p>Can the PMU manage on its own without external backstopping?</p>	<p>Planning Commission circular on civil service rotation/transfers</p> <p>Prodoc and progress reports</p> <p>NILG social media and websites, guidelines</p> <p>Independent evaluation report and institutional assessments</p> <p>Budget and accounts</p> <p>M&E systems and data tracking</p>	<p>Desk review</p> <p>Semi-structured Key Informant Interviews/Focal Group Discussions – partially online through Zoom or similar application</p> <p>Field visits to and consultations with selected LGIs (national consultant)</p> <p>Triangulation</p>

Criterion/Evaluation Question	Sub-questions	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods
	<p>How does staff/management turnovers affect project implementation?</p> <p>To what extent have resources been used efficiently? Does HLP promote 'value for money' in terms of cost-efficiency?</p> <p>Were outputs/results achieved on time and according to budgeted cost estimates?</p> <p>Are resources scattered/spread thinly across initiatives?</p> <p>Has there been over-expenditure or under-expenditure in the support? In which areas?</p> <p>Which internal factors impede project implementation?</p>	Stakeholder consultations	
(ii) systems and policies	<p>Is the HLP based on solid mechanisms for information-sharing? Are good and best practises efficiently communicated and captured (communication channels and dissemination of relevant detail)? Are ministries and other partners involved?</p> <p>Is the civil service system able to leverage a sustained implementation capacity at NILG and prevent frequent staff turnovers?</p> <p>How does HLP relate to similar development interventions in the field?</p>		
(iii) monitoring system	<p>Have project management and oversight systems been adequate to solve implementation issues and did the HLP Project take prompt actions to solve implementation issues?</p> <p>Does IMED add value to project monitoring and how?</p>		

Criterion/Evaluation Question	Sub-questions	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods
	Do M&E efforts capture the feedback from the supporting agencies and the LGIs.		
Sustainability			
Assess to what extent the positive results will be continued beyond the of the external support.	<p>Does the HLP approach respect the core principle of demandbased, bottom-up peer learning on which the concept is depending?</p> <p>To what extent is the HLP approach likely to be fully integrated, resourced and sustained under NILG's strategy, organisation, portfolio of outreach services and its inter-governmental relationships with the LGIs.</p> <p>To what extent are good practises replicated and funded by the LGIs?</p> <p>To what extent is NILG likely to sustain a fruitful cooperation with CSOs and other facilitators/service providers on horizontal learning?</p> <p>Is there an emerging policy of LGI capacity development which promotes a common HLP approach?</p> <p>What major factors influence the achievement or nonachievement of sustainability?</p> <p>Is there any evidence of unanticipated sustainability threats emerging during implementation? What corrective measures were adopted, if any?</p>	<p>GoB policy papers, 8FYP</p> <p>Prodoc and progress reports</p> <p>Independent evaluation report and institutional assessments</p> <p>Stakeholder consultations</p>	<p>Desk review</p> <p>Semi-structured Key Informant Interviews/Focal Group Discussions – partially online through Zoom or similar application</p> <p>Field visits to and consultations with selected LGIs (national consultant)</p> <p>Triangulation</p>
Impact			
What are the intended and unintended effects of HLP, including the effects on the beneficiaries and others?	<p>What is the emerging impact of the HLP approach on LGI capacity development in Bangladesh?</p> <p>How does the HLP approach impact on local governance, planning and service delivery?</p>	<p>GoB policy papers, 8FYP</p> <p>Prodoc and progress reports</p>	<p>Desk review</p> <p>Semi-structured Key Informant Interviews/Focal Group Discussions – partially online</p>

Criterion/Evaluation Question	Sub-questions	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods
	<p>How does HLP affect the capabilities and self-esteem of elected officials and LGI inter-relationships?</p> <p>What changes were promoted or expected, but did not occur, and vice-versa?</p>	<p>Independent evaluation report and institutional assessments</p> <p>Stakeholder consultations</p>	<p>through Zoom or similar application</p> <p>Field visits to and consultations with selected LGIs (national consultant)</p> <p>Triangulation</p>

~~Annex 5. Meeting schedule~~

Annex 6. Midterm achievements against the HLP Log frame (July 2021)

Narrative Summary	Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Means of Verification (MOV)	Midterm Achievements	Important Assumptions (IA)
<p>Goal</p> <p>The LGIs (2000 Union Parishads, 150 Paurashavas and 200 Upazilas Parishads) in 25 districts in Bangladesh will contribute to the improvement of well-being of at least 50 million people including women, poor and disadvantaged through wider replication of good practices.</p>	<p>Outcome 01: NILG institutionalize ‘the Horizontal Learning Program (HLP) for Union Parishads and introduce HLP to the Paurashavas and Upazilas to contribute to the improvement of well-being for all, particularly for women, poor and disadvantaged.</p>			
	<p>At least 5 good practices on inclusive local governance processes are successfully replicated to benefits poor, women and disadvantaged.</p>	<p>Annual Plan and expenditure report of LGIs; data collected through MIS system.</p>	<p>275 good practises and 12 best practises ready to be shared with 4500 LGIs</p>	
	<p>80% citizens from among 2000 LGIs expressed their satisfaction about replicated good practices.</p>	<p>Carrying out Users’ Satisfaction Survey through LGHL.</p>	<p>Not yet measured</p>	
	<p>At least 200 champions from citizens emerged through HLP that demonstrate, promote, and advocate on gender sensitive local development.</p>	<p>Roster of champions shared by HLP websites gender-based development plans developed; validation of implementation of gender-based plan by HLP partners through supporting agency/agencies.</p>	<p>30 HLP experts identified</p>	
	<p>Outcome-2: Local government institutions (LGIs) implement their mandates more effectively, accountably, transparently, and in an inclusive manner (LGI level).</p>			
	<p>At least 2000 LGIs allocated their own revenue funds for replication of HLP good practices that benefitted women, poor and disadvantaged.</p>	<p>At least 2000 LGIs proactively disclose the success and achievements of replication of good practices, either through their own website, through their local digital centres.</p>	<p>Suggestion to lower target to 65 LGI (?)</p>	
	<p>At least 1000 LGIs allocated their own revenue funds for replication of HLP good practices under the leaderships of elected women UP members.</p>	<p>Annual Plan and expenditure reports of LGIs.</p>	<p>Not yet started</p>	<p>Political stability at local and national level.</p> <p>GoB commitment on local governance and decentralization remains same.</p>

Narrative Summary	Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVI)	Means of Verification (MOV)	Midterm Achievements	Important Assumptions (IA)	
	At least 60 Upazila Parishads organized Upazila HLP workshops and exposure visits with their own revenue funds.	Reports of Upazila, and verification missions by NILG.	<i>Not yet started</i>	Basic Block Grant to UPs continue even after phasing out of LGSP-III, and Revenue Enhancement Action Plan implementation continues even after MGSP ends. Local Government Helpline on board through NLTA. NILG continues to take the lead to coordinate, manage,	
	At least 50 small municipalities organized HLP learning workshops and exposure visits by allocating their own revenue funds.	Reports of Municipalities, and verification missions by NILG.	<i>Not yet started</i>		
Outcome-3: NILG creates an institutional learning and advocacy culture (National level).			<i>Five good practises integrated into NILG course manual</i>		
	At least 30 HLP good practices are integrated within NILG's regular course curricula and training sessions for LGIs.	Revised course curricula and session plans of training courses of NILG.			<i>Achieved</i>
	At least one dedicated session on HLP included in all LGIs training courses of NILG.	Session plans of training courses of NILG.			<i>One course completed</i>
	Field visit to HLP good practices integrated within "Foundation Course for UP Secretaries".	Session plans of training courses of NILG.			<i>Not yet started</i>
	Five Policy Advocacy Notes are prepared by NILG based on emerging best practices (i.e., good practices replicated more than 50 times).	Policy Advocacy Notes printed and uploaded to the HLP website.			<i>Not yet started</i>
	At least three LG policies amended / formulated by GoB based on HLP Policy Advocacy Notes.	GoB Circulars / gazette notifications issued			<i>Not yet started</i>

	<p>The concept and approach of HLP integrated for capacity building of LGIs within at least two investment projects by GoB and its development partners.</p>	<p>ProDoc/PAD of new investment projects.</p>	<p><i>Dialogue ongoing to include HLP in LGCRPP project with the World Bank (300 M US\$)</i></p>	<p>and analyse learning from practice to policy reform, despite regular change of its senior officials.</p>
--	--	---	---	---

Annex 7. Midterm achievements reported by the HLP Project (March and July 2021)

I. No.	Activities	Expected Key Output/Outcome	Proposed (As per revised plan)
1.	Target Areas:	25 districts = 100 Upazilas	39 districts = 204 Upazilas
		1500 UPs + 100 Pourashavas	1938 UPs + 150 Pourashavas
2.	Number of Good Practices (GPs) shared with 2350 LGIs.	20 GPs shared with 2350 LGIs	12 GPs ready to be shared with 4500 LGIs
	%age of citizens satisfied in 2350 LGIs on GP replication.	80 percent in 2350 LGIs	Will be done from June 2021 onwards
3.	Minimum number of champions from citizens emerged through HLP as HLP Expert. *	120 numbers	Divided as: 1) HLP Local Hero = 20 2) HLP Women Champion = 30 3) HLP School Ambassador = 20 4) HLP Experts = 50 [30 identified]
4.	HLP GPs to reach number of LGIs through advocacy.	4500 LGIs	12 GPs documented — ready to share after validation
5.	LGIs which allocate own funds for replication of GPs. *	1700 LGIs	65 LGIs
6.	Upazila and Network workshop organized by LGIs with own fund. *	10 numbers	Not yet started — will start from April 2021 onwards
7.	HLP session integrated within NILG's regular course.	At least one session	Done
8.	HLP field visit integrated within Foundation Course of NILG.	Four courses	Two courses completed — remaining another two
9.	Number of Good Practices integrated within NILG's Regular Course.	10 Good Practices	Done – 5 good practices integrated within NILG's course manual.
10.	Policy Advocacy Note prepared. *	Five numbers	Not yet started — all four policy learning notes followed by policy advocacy notes will start from April 2021
11.	Number of circular issued based on HLP practice to policy refinement.	Three numbers	Not yet started — need to wait until Thematic workshops are over, and policy advocacy notes are prepared.
12.	HLP integrated within new investment project. *	Two numbers	Dialogue is on-going to integrate HLP within LGCRRP of GoB and World Bank, a 300 million USD Project.

*means PMU shared that they need back-up support from SDC in this specific areas in 4th PIC meeting held on 25 March 2021 at NILG.

Annex 8. Debriefing slides

Midterm Review

Horizontal Learning Programme

Preliminary findings and recommendations

06 Sept 2021

Jens Peter Christensen, Team Leader
Swapan Kumar Sarkar, National Consultant

Scope of the midterm review

- OECD-DAC evaluation guidelines with emphasis on sustainability and exit strategy
- Three phases
 - Inception phase (document review, gap analysis, framework and workplan)
 - Field phase (virtual and physical consultations, workshop observations, field visits)
 - Synthesis phase (report drafting and validation)
- Stakeholders consulted
 - NILG – DG, PMU
 - NGOs/Supporting agencies
 - LGD, Ministry of Railways
 - UPs, Upazilas and beneficiaries in Satkhira, Rajshahi & Tangail districts
 - LGSP III, EALG, Hysawa
 - JICA
 - Resource persons – HLP Foundation, Santanu Lahiri, Aroma Dutta

Overall findings & observations

- The HLP approach is relevant and adds value to LGI capacity development in Bangladesh. It's innovative, if somewhat complex, and it was actively embraced by UPs and Pourashavas in previous phases
- The project design made an effort to explain the institutional outcomes of the project. HLP is well-known, if not yet fully understood
 - Further adaptation (simplification?) may be expected in the coming years (think of upscale challenges by LGSP, MGSP, UPGP, HYSAWA etc.)
- There is ownership of the HLP project in NILG and among all stakeholders consulted, including the NGO network
- JICA remains very active in HLP implementation and offered to join SDC in planning commission meetings etc.
 - Potential for JICA support beyond SDC exit
- The implementation has been seriously delayed by COVID-19 in addition to other factors:
 - Two prolonged government lock-downs over the last eighteen months, and UP elections since March 2021
 - Field activities disrupted - but rollout "still achievable"
 - TAPP with wrong modality caused by inexperience – a revised TAPP is ready to be processed "quickly"
 - New DG only arrived last January - but takes ownership
 - Frequent changes at PD level with no decision yet on the next (fourth) appointment
 - Delay of staff recruitments and procurements
 - Project staff turnovers (low pay?)

Institutionalisation – progress and critical issues

- 275 good practices identified and 12 best practices (within WASH and from previous phase) compiled in a compendium. Most of this awaits national dissemination – and replication
- Pourashavas are not yet involved in the HLP Project
- Resource pool - 25% of the HLP champions have been identified so far (but the team did not meet with them in the field)
- Delay meant that most outcomes have not yet been commenced/achieved, including policy advice, LGD circulars, capdev strategy update, investment scheme with HLP approach and NILG institutionalisation
- The DG assigned HLP responsibility to NILG Research Wing as a temporary measure
- Official appointment of NILG focal persons and transition of PMU functions needs to be accomplished within the duration of the project, but this is not reflected in the workplan
- Institutionalisation of the HLP hubs and the six step process still in progress
 - Focal persons, operational manual, inclusion in regular NILG trainings, linking to NGO partners...
- A HLP cell in LGD may accelerate institutionalization, e.g. incorporating HLP in LGI manuals, translate policy advice to circulars, etc.

Institutionalisation – progress and critical issues II

- 15 good practise criteria developed for upscale purpose, but what is the operational value?
 - UP voting on good practises and indicators is key. UPs will only fund what they deem to be good practises (e.g. huge improvement on holding tax collection after exchange of good practise)
- The HLP tracker to be launched next month. Needs urgent update with more detail to serve as reference for the next annual budget cycle
- NGO workplans for field activities in progress, but “more PMU backup support is needed” (DG)
 - There is no guideline available on HLP field implementation nor how HLP will continue after project completion
- The PMU’s own workplan contains project activities and TAPP financial codes. It does not link activities with outputs and outcomes or include a timeline with strategic milestone achievements

Observations from the field

- Rollout is severely affected by the lockdowns and most UPs visited had little knowledge about Horizontal Learning
- One Good Practice Identification Workshop (Step 1) was conducted in Satkhira District. Good practices disseminated in a workshop at Upazila level and all UPs in Sadar Upazila claim to implement them.
- No workshops were yet conducted in Tangail, and evidence of HLP workshops in Rajshahi could not be confirmed
- NGOs do not employ staff exclusively for HLP activities. They work for their own projects and Horizontal Learning is an additional responsibility
- Almost all NGO workers met did not have past experience with Horizontal Learning. They had not received any training (ToT) or supervision from NILG, although they engage with their own HQ.
- Some potential for horizontal e-learning – smart phones, SoMe, TV programmes (as in agriculture sector)
 - Key to digital empowerment and resilience of UPs, but only as add-on to exposure visits and workshops
 - Need for involvement of ICT Ministry

Synergies and impact

- JICA actively supports HLP in all workshops and promotes synergies with UPGP and the JICA project portfolio
- There are few linkages to LGSP, MGSP, EALG, and HYSAWA
 - Potential for synergies (common HLP approach, capturing and dissemination of best practises, mitigation of capacity gaps, etc)?
- The LGI associations could be long-term drivers of HLP, but the three main associations are not involved in the HLP project
 - Bangladesh Union Parishad Forum (BUPF), the Upazila Parishad Foundation of Bangladesh (UPFB) and the Municipal Association of Bangladesh (MAB)
- Unintended results – Horizontal learning is replicated in other sectors by champions with previous involvement in HLP
 - Railways, health and public administration

Preliminary recommendations

- More focus on institutionalisation within NILG
- No-cost extension for one year with conditionalities:
 - Official appointment of HLP Focal Person in NILG. SDC to receive confirmation letter from NILG about the appointment
 - Start transition of PMU functions to the Research Wing well in advance before project completion
 - Appointment and transition process to be incorporated as milestone achievements in the workplan and presented at next PSC meeting
- Next PD should be retained for remaining project duration
- The three LGI associations should be invited as observers for the PIC meetings to broaden learning and ownership
- JICA should also be invited as observers for the PIC meetings to strengthen JICAs long-term involvement in HLP

Preliminary recommendations II

- Develop operational manual for the HLP hubs
 - With safeguards for the participation of women UP members, “who are systematically left out of HLP”
 - With M&E measures for continuous update
- Develop guideline for the NGO field workers (Supporting Agencies)
- Expedite HLP Tracker development to facilitate the institutionalisation process
- Explore synergies with LGSP and similar programmes
 - Common HL approach, capturing and dissemination of best practices, mitigation of capacity gaps, etc.
- PMU’s project workplan should link activities with outputs/outcomes and milestone achievements and cover the remaining project duration
- Swapan to present findings from the three districts in a workshop with NILG and the Supporting Agencies