Women Empowerment: Urban Context

Contextualizing Rural Solidarity Group Approach

URBAN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

As Bangladesh progresses towards rapid urbanization, so does our work in women empowerment. An in-depth look at solidarity platform approach – EKATA – facilitated by CARE Bangladesh. How the urban contextual factors transformed the approach and what empowerment looks like for urban women.

CARE Bangladesh

SUMMARY

This report is part of Learning Agenda Pilot, started by CARE USA Multiplying Impact Team, to look at organizational learnings for CARE Bangladesh specifically beyond the needs of donors or CARE International. EKATA is a women's solidarity platform approach to women empowerment that is designed by CARE Bangladesh and one of the organization's core USPs. In Bangladesh CARE's work has changed keeping with development needs of this dynamic nation. Priorities expanded from immediate humanitarian assistance to long-term development addressing underlying causes of poverty with women at the center. As Bangladesh goes through rapid urbanization the contexts of poverty, injustice, discrimination and exclusion is also changing. Decades of experience honed our approach to women empowerment into specific models, and as we begin our work for marginalized women in urban areas, it is important to document the transition for approach to the same goal of empowerment with new solutions for different obstacles.

CARE began adopting solidarity groups as a means for women empowerment through Education Programs such as ECCD (Early Childhood Care and Development), CRC (Community Resource Centers) and SETUP (School Effectiveness through Union Porishod). The EKATA group's first came into being from the mothers of the children involved in these programs. The empowerment through solidarity tool bases itself on the core idea that collective action can structurally transform the social realities of ultra-poor and vulnerable women. Solidarity is seen as key because it serves the purpose of creating a sense of bonding between women from the same locality and creates a collective social and political purpose for the women of a given community.

The following 7 factors are contextually different in urban from rural, which have the greatest impact on women empowerment:

1. Community structure, behavior and culture
2. Migrant behavior vs. generational residence
3. Support systems for female migrants vs. rural community support
4. Livelihoods/income generation
5. Barriers to empowerment
6. Influential stakeholders
7. Governance structure

These factors influence the outcomes of women empowerment across 3 levels of changes: Agency, Structure and Relations. Agency is the first level of change which was contextualized to urban women. Isolative nuclear family structure, relatively higher distrust of neighbors poses a strong risk of EKATA leaders and members being deemed "trouble-makers". Both in workplace and home, urban women are in extreme vulnerable state as they do not own their home (Renters) and workplace (employees not self-employed). Thus, a proper introduction of the project in community and selection of participant is a crucial component in EKATA approach. The length of residence, current income sources, type of slum (government land or private), and community attitude towards development work are important urban-specific factors considered. EKATA leaders are selected on some criteria, the strongest performers are selected to be leaders among leaders in an EKATA-based platform.

Urban women have different dreams and aspirations, more based around building career, acquiring higher value skills, children's education, diversifying income sources with their own business someday. In turn, while forming EKATA groups, using occupation-based groups had better results.

Structures aims at creating an enabling environment for women. The following aspects came across as biggest issues on urban structures of women empowerment:

1. Household & Community
2. Services
3. Career
4. Safety
5. Accommodations
6. Sanitation

The key challenge is working with powerholders to bring about the enabling environment. The urban stakeholder mapping revealed three different kinds: economic, social and political. Especially for urban slums, utilities provider, banking services, landlords, job providers and networkers are important.

In influencing relations, the EKATA leaders and their group, defined as Natural Leader's Organization (NLO) play the crucial role for positive changes to the women in the community. While building linkages for leadership, working in conjunction with other groups help to multiply their influence. Community Support Groups, Government-assigned groups, unions and federations are some of the groups which synergizes with EKATA's work to bring mass-level changes.

Some major Outcomes we have seen across 3 levels of change are:

Level of Change	Results
Agency	● Aware of rights and entitlements at workplace ● Working together with other women ● Understand and articulate rights as a woman ● Engaging spouse for HH decision-making ● Financial Management & Savings ● Access basic services and utilities ● Greater Self-dependence & mobility ● Skill development for additional income ● Time management skills help in work-life balance
Structure	● Reduce VAW and child marriage at work and home (community) ● Social acceptance and value in community ● Increased Safety in community ● Access to affordable safe water supply ● Reduced harassment and threats during work commute ● Account opening and use at formal banking institutions ● Community Garbage management for cleaner community ● Increased access and use of local health facilities ● Women's bathroom at factories
Relations	● Communication skills at workplace with managers ● Linkage with service providers, especially health and education is most valued ● For EKATA Leaders, social capital and chance to make change for others is most valued ● Operationalizing WDMCs for increased community resilience ● Sharing HH work with other family members ● Trade Union and Federations to deal with Factory owners ● Timely payment of Festival bonus

Overall, EKATA's core principle of self-determination makes it a highly adaptive approach to answer the challenges of women empowerment in a dynamic environment of urban slums in Bangladesh.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADB	**Asian Development Bank**
BNSC	Bangladesh National Scout's Council
CDC	Community Development Committee
CRC	Community Resource Centers
CSG	Community Support Group
CWA	Community Worker's Association
DAE	Department of Agriculture Extension
DC	District Commissioner
DLO	Department of Livestock Offices
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
FSCD	Fire Service Civil Department
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GO	Government Organizations
HH	Household
IWD	International Water Day
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MP	Member of the Parliament
NGO	Non-Government Organizations
NL	Natural Leaders
NLO	Natural Leaders' Organization
PF	Peer Facilitator
PLA	Particpatory Learning and Action
RMG	Ready-made Garments
SETUP	School Effectiveness through Union Porishod
UP	Upazilla Porishod (Sub-district Committee)
VAW	Violence against women
WDMC	Ward Disaster Management Committees

1. Give country and sub-regional offices the space to think about their own learning questions (as distinct from donor-driven or organization-wide learning mandates).
2. Organize disparate pieces of data and research within coherent learning themes or questions, resulting in country/sub-regional-level, rather than program-level learning priorities.
3. Strengthen systems and processes for learning

CONTEXT OF THE PILOT

Capturing changes to the EKATA for urban context for future work become a priority for CARE Bangladesh due to an increasingly urban impact group. With this purpose in mind, work under A "Good Enough" Learning Agenda Pilot – an initiative of CARE USA Multiplying Impact team – began with the goal to capture how one of the most established approaches to women empowerment for CARE Bangladesh has changed as we expanded our work from rural areas to urban.

METHODOLOGY

Steps are summarized as:

1. Basic concept and approach of EKATA
2. Contextual comparison factors:
   a. Community Structure, behavior and culture
   b. Migrant behavior vs. generational residence
   c. Support systems for female migrants vs. rural community support
   d. Rural vs. urban livelihoods/income generation
   e. Barriers to empowerment: Rural vs. urban
   f. Influential stakeholders in rural vs. urban setting
   g. Local Government (Rural) vs. City Corporation (Urban)
3. **KEY importance:** Take understanding of solidarity process from staff. This is because the process of empowerment through solidarity is heavily dependent on the facilitation process
4. Field Research (FGDs) with EKATA group members and leaders to gauge tangible outcomes of EKATA
5. Roundtable Discussion with Peer Facilitators, Project Team, Program Team and Technical lead to identify signs of EKATA-related empowerment factors

TEAM STRUCTURE AND ROLES

Research Action	Responsibility	Reporting to	Who
Key Learning Question	Focal Point	Question Lead & PEARL	Focal Point – KML-C, PEARL Question Lead – Director, W&GE
Learning Needs	Focal Point	CO Program	PEARL – Director, PEARL
Methodology	Focal Point	Question Lead Research Technical Expert	Research Expert – STAAR Coordinator
Workplan	Focal Point	Question Lead	CO Program – ACD-Program
Research Asst. Hire	Focal Point Procurement	Question Lead PEARL	
Secondary Research	Focal Point Research Asst.	Question Lead, PEARL, CI, Project Lead and Project Implement	CI- Korinne Chiu Research Asst. – External Hire Project Lead – TL BRUP & OIKKO

			Project Implement – PO BRUP & OIKKO
Primary Research Design	Focal Point Research Technical Expert	Question Lead PEARL, CI	
Primary Research Logistics	Focal Point Regional Logistics Impact Group Implementers	Question Lead PEARL Regional Office Team	Impact Group – Beneficiaries, TL, Project Officers of BRUP & OIKKO
Primary Research Questionnaire	Focal Point Research Technical Expert Project Teams	Question Lead PEARL CI	
Research Conduct	Focal Point Project Team Implementers	Question Lead PEARL	
Sense-Making & Reflection	Focal Point Project Team Implementers Admin Support Research Asst. Program M&E	Question Lead Technical Assistance-W&GE	Technical Asst.-W&GE – TL-Tipping Point project Program M&E – Program E,M&E Coordinator, PEARL
Report-writing	Focal Point Research Asst.	Question Lead PEARL Team	
Publication & Dissemination	Focal Point Publishing & Graphic Designer (Hired) Procurement	Question Lead PEARL Team PR & Comm	Procurement Team PR & Comm – Manager, Media & Communications
Pilot Wrap Up	Focal Point	Budget Holder Finance Team Admin Team	Budget Holder – Director, PEARL

LEARNING QUESTIONS

1. Collate understanding of EKATA model of solidarity groups for empowerment
2. Analyze urbanization trends for consequent social impact on women empowerment
3. Synthesize learnings from EKATA Facilitators for Urban projects
4. Study impact of EKATA on project participants in urban areas across agency, structures and relations
5. Synthesize common contextualization of EKATA in urban areas

First took stock of information available, identified learning gaps then consequent Questionnaire for filling those gaps. Secondary Information review came from multiple sources

SECONDARY INFORMATION

Project Information	CO Archived Information	External Information
● Target Area Information ● Key Enablers' list ● Participants' Profile ● Session Data collection ● EKATA Session Plan ● EKATA Center visits ● Reflection Sessions ● Case Studies ● NLO formation: Member list, reflection, communication chart ● ToT for PFs ● EKATA Action plans ● Process and reflection ● Evaluation Reports ● Empowerment for Resilience – Impact document	● Gender Strategy – SHOUHARDO ● Measurement of Women Empowerment ● Country Presence Review ● EKATA – Basic Concept ● EKATA in 5 projects ● Closing Report of SETU ● EKATA initiative to stop violence ● Story of challenging poverty by EKATA ● Program Impact Statement – W&GE and Urban ● CI Gender Strategy ● CARE Gender Marker ●	● Poverty and climate change in urban Bangladesh; an analytical framework – Manoj et al, 2011 ● Age and attitudes towards multigenerational residences, Journal of Gerontology ● Migration and Development: the importance of gender, Chant S et al ● Internal Migration in Bangladesh: Character, Drivers and Policy Issues, UNDP ●

PRIMARY RESEARCH

4 FGDs (2 for each project), were held with EKATA members and Leaders. Reflection sessions with Project Teams to identify project processes behind the responses. Then, a learning discussion was held with project teams, program team, implementers and Peer Facilitators for an evaluation of EKATA as a process and identify tangible outcomes.

FGD questionnaire was developed and a discussion agenda outline was developed for the sessions respectively. (See in Annex)

ANALYSIS

Learning Question	Analysis Process	Detail
Collate understanding of EKATA model of solidarity groups for empowerment	Meta-analysis	Collecting, collating all EKATA related information from prior projects from Organizational Archive Extracting, synthesizing Need-specific information
Analyze urbanization trends for consequent social impact on women empowerment	Social Impact Analysis	6 factors in social impact of urbanization chosen as contextual factors for being most impactful on women empowerment

Synthesize learnings from EKATA Facilitators for Urban projects	Process Evaluation	Process tracing, discussion with Facilitators. Reflections and changes to implementation. Assess relevance, effectiveness, sustainability and impact with project team.
Study impact of EKATA on project participants in urban areas	Impact Assessment	Beneficiary profiling, Case studies, Impact indicators, Relevance and contribution by EKATA. Separating impact at home (community) and workplace. Impact classification across agency, structure and relations.
Synthesize common contextualization of EKATA in urban areas	Synthesis	Summarized extraction of key implementation changes and outcomes of empowerment in urban context

RESULTS

Given below are the results of the Study presented according to the key learning questions outlined above:
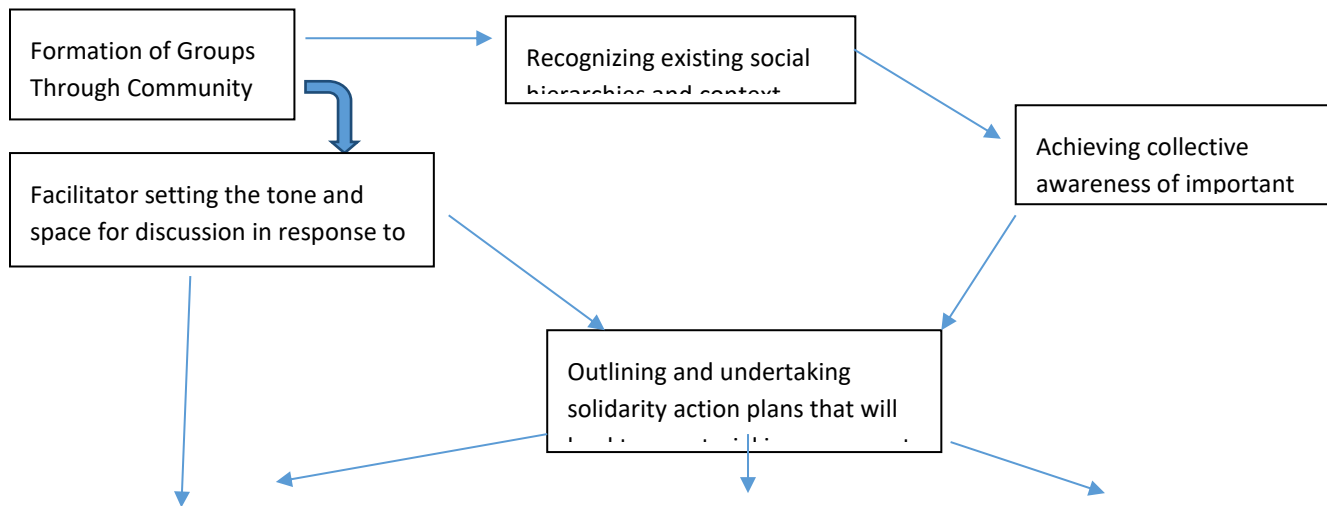
COLLATE UNDERSTANDING OF EKATA MODEL OF SOLIDARITY GROUPS FOR EMPOWERMENT

In Bengali, Ekata means 'unity', a collective of individuals bound together by some shared ideals and values. EKATA (Empowerment, knowledge and transformative action) is being undertaken by CARE Bangladesh's Education Program to provide a comprehensive learning process to these women by involving them in collective activities that enriches their social and legal knowledge, that provides them with life skills and that engenders a transfer of knowledge into concrete social action. The endeavor is consistent with the empowerment framework, which strengthens and provides material improvements to the women's agency, their personal relationships and the structure of their community in order to lead to a more equitable and just society.

Under EKATA, these groups of women and adolescent girls meet regularly in order to discuss the problems that they face in their own communities and to generate local solutions to these issues. Some of the major issues include violence against women, dowry, lack of education and child marriage. The EKATA groups were able to collectively educate themselves on their own legal rights and entitlements as citizens of Bangladesh and apply those legal provisions to counter the systemic barriers that they faced in their communities. The EKATA philosophy engenders a space for reflection and for the creation of a strong women's community, where roles and responsibilities relating to specific efforts can be distributed among the participants. The groups are led by an EKATA facilitator who works to tap into the collective potential of the EKATA groups in order for them to realize their own agency in effecting community decisions. At the same time, the groups develop many aspects of functional literacy which directly creates a positive impact on issues such as child marriage and lack of education.
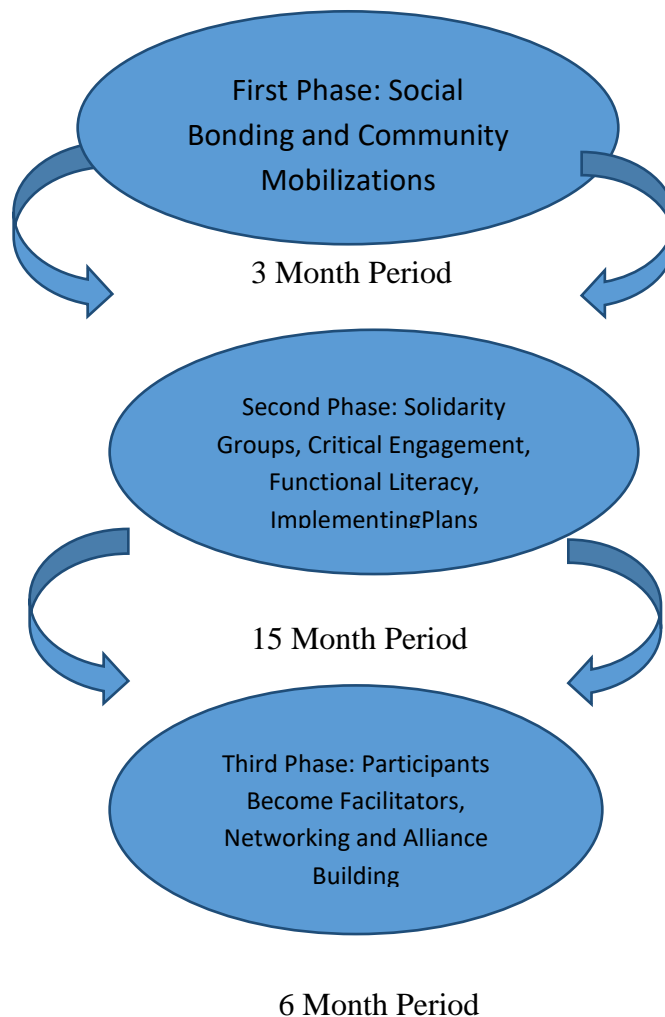
One of EKATA's goals is to build a relationship between critical analysis and action through a continuous learning process. To do this, EKATA does not have any previously assigned resource material. Instead, the groups come together to design their own learning material and then develop their own resources. As a result, EKATA acts as a platform for the promotion of local knowledges, contexts and realities which really helps create a strong sense of ownership and responsibility in the participants towards the overarching goals of the project itself.

One of the most appealing aspects of the EKATA program is its adherence to a democratic and safe environment, where the women and girls can collectively come to decisions on what is good for themselves and each other. The formation of these democratic collectives leads to a collective reconstruction of the power structure itself, both in the groups and in their wider community.

EKATA Group
- Learning Together About Relevant Laws and Rights
- Identifying Problems Through Discussion
- Designing Roadmaps to Achieving Empowerment Collectively
- Gaining Functional and Numerical Literacy

Formation of Groups Through Community

Recognizing existing social hierarchies and context

Achieving collective awareness of important

Facilitator setting the tone and space for discussion in response to

Outlining and undertaking solidarity action plans that will

Building large networks improvements, of solidarity groups utility.	Policy change, advocacy, managing funds.	Local increased

Timeline of one EKATA project:

First Phase: Social Bonding and Community Mobilizations

3 Month Period

Second Phase: Solidarity Groups, Critical Engagement, Functional Literacy, ImplementingPlans

15 Month Period

Third Phase: Participants Become Facilitators, Networking and Alliance Building

6 Month Period

The EKATA groups are encouraged to take part in conversations that reflect on economic, social, cultural and political realities of the community to change the individual, family, community and national level status of marginalized women in the country. Additionally, they take part in activities that improve the functional literacy of the women, including numerical literacy. The activities are focused on the development of the following skill sets: decision-making, problem analysis, problem solving, analysing local power structures, linkage building, communication skill, negotiation skill, the promotion women's rights issues, access to social justice and children's access to quality education.

The facilitators in each EKATA group are tasked with nurturing the discussion on these topics and overseeing the transformation of discussion into concrete action. The facilitator thus plays the role of a mentor whose job is to uncover the collectivizing potential of the participating women and adolescents. These groups then become the bedrock of large social justice movements led by the women to bring about a distribution of power and lead to social change.

Given below is a summarized comparison on contextual factors. Detailed analysis is given in the main Learning Report.

Table 1: Rural and Urban Context Comparison

SL	Indicator	Rural	Urban
1	Community structure, behavior and culture	Intertwined families, community participation, cohesive community, homogeneity [1]	Work-based social interaction. Smaller groups, nuclear families, limited cohesion, wide diversity [2]
2	Migrant behavior vs. generational residence	Ancestral relations, multi-family HH, life synchronicity[3]	Floating population, single or nuclear family HH, market-driven living conditions[4]
3	Support systems for female migrants vs. rural community support	Extended family, community, elites and influencers	Rent-controller, neighbors, workplace relations, spouse
4	Rural vs. urban livelihoods/income generation	Sources of employment 1. Agriculture 2. Non-farm activities 3. Forestry 4. Fisheries 5. Education Average income Tk. 8,236 Women earn an average of 21 per cent less per hour than men [5]	Sources of employment 1.Industry 2.Service sector 3.Unpaid household worker 4. Education Average monthly income of paid employees in 2013 was TK. 11,493. On average, males earned, at TK. 11,621 which was slightly more than what female employees earned, at TK 11,136. [6]
5	Barriers to empowerment: Rural vs. Urban	Poverty, early marriage[7], Religious patriarchal values [8]	Commuting safety, social security[9],Patriarchal capitalism [10]
6	Influential stakeholders in rural vs. urban setting	Household head, community leader, Large farmers, landowners	Spouse, community perception, employer, rent-controller
7	Local Government (Rural) vs. City Corporation (Urban)	Division to union governance structure (DAE, Union member and Upazilla Chairman, Thana Health Complex)	City Corporation, Power and water ministry, Roads and Highways, Clinics, Politically networked people.

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[1] *Community Structure and Social Rank in Two Villages in Bangladesh, Peter J. Bartocci, 1972*

[2] *Poverty and climate change in urban Bangladesh (CLIMURB): an analytical framework, Manoj et al., 2011*

[3] *Age and attitudes towards multigenerational residences 1973-83, Journal of Gerontology, 1987"*

[4] *Migration and Development: the importance of gender", Chant S et al*

[5] *Rural employment structure (ILO, 2008)*

[6] *Labor Force Survey, 2013*

[7]*Rushidan I. Rahman and Rizwanul Islam October 2013)*

[8] *(Rouf, Abdur Kazi, 2013)*

[9] *(ADB Policy brief, October 2016)*

[10] *(Kalam, Abdul, 2013)*

The Learnings are divided into the 3 phases of EKATA, which coincides with the 3 levels of changes they result in: Agency, Structures, and Relations.

BUILDING AGENCY IN URBAN CONTEXT

One difference in working with urban women is their lives and hours spent are different than in rural areas. Some direct ones are:

- Women work long hours outside home and they are only able to meet at night for the EKATA and other sessions
- The outcomes often challenge social norms and practices, like women voicing their rights in home and workplace and working for the community
- Structure and Relations outcome requires working within and often challenging current power structure and patriarchal tendencies.

This means that projects have to be a lot more thorough, deliberate and require multiple engagements in order to introduce the project to the community to avoid misperceptions and misunderstandings. In deep-dive with peer facilitators, following reasons lie at the core of distrust for EKATA and most development projects in urban slums:

1. Eviction
2. Illegal Activity
3. Trade Union

Building on agency is catalyzed by EKATA Leaders and especially on the next levels of changes. Thus, choosing the right EKATA leaders is important. The following criteria were chosen for Potential and High-potential leaders:

Potential Leader:

1. Motivated by rights-based work for all
2. Matured behavior and communication
3. Higher degree of comprehension
4. Spontaneous participation in discussion
5. Urban: Often higher-grade employment – Operator not line worker
6. Minimal literacy skill (can write name and read/write simple things)
7. Other members follow their instruction and speech
8. Advices others and listened to
9. Willing to provide time for the group
10. Form smaller cluster (2-4) within group – Visibly active

High Potential Leader (Additional Characteristics):

1. Familiarity with development work and ability to extract knowledge
2. High mobility - Willing to move outside group's area if required
3. Interested/experienced in work with trade groups/platforms
4. Deliver constructive dialogue/speech
5. Takes decisions independently of family and partner
6. Drive to improve community condition beyond self
7. Moderate literacy skill (Can write/read more complex ideas)
8. Works collectively and team player
9. Proactive participation in NLO (Natural Leaders' Organization) activities

10.   Interpersonal Skill: Highly proficient in communicating with new people

Building agency begins with enabling women to identify their dreams and aspirations, collating information from EKATA groups across both OIKKO and BRUP reveal the following common finding:

- Career-based: Promotion, rights and entitlements at workplace, business skills, skills to work abroad
- Community-based: Social acceptance and value and get necessary services easily, Working together with other women, no VAW and child marriage
- Within household: Have my rights as a woman, Decision-making in her family, Save money for future and invest to change economic condition, enroll children in school, educating and empowering siblings
- Self-development: Learn use of computer, want to be self-dependent

Forming groups by occupation, especially with female RMG workers working in factories in the same area, worked well in building cohesion within the groups. Details of the issues and what EKATA groups did to gain the agency are explained further in the main report.

ENGAGING STRUCTURES

An objective of EKATA process is to create an enabling environment for women – To create access to products, facilities and services within their community that serves their specific needs in a gender-sensitive manner in how they are availed. Thus, collating community issues from both projects across different kinds of slums, urban areas and impact groups, allowed identifying most common issues:

1.   Household & Community: Mobility and decision-making in Household, community and workplace
2.   Services: Access to health, education and utilities services
3.   Career: Access to training, employers and skill development
4.   Safety: Harassment and threat of violence during commute
5.   Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR): Limited work in DRR in community

STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

Stakeholder mapping reveals the key powerholders who will work to enable or hinder positive changes at structures level for these women. Stakeholder mapping exercise with Peer Facilitators revealed 3 types of stakeholders.

1.   Economic Stakeholders – Utilities service providers, recruiters, Big grocer, business association leader
2.   Political Stakeholders – Local ward committee members, current and former ward councilors, FSCD
3.   Social Stakeholders – Landlord, religious figureheads, Principal of community school

Details of the stakeholders along with their motivations and interests on women empowerment is described in the main learning report.

Leaders of the EKATA groups – Natural Leaders (NL) – and subsequently the leaders' association – Natural Leaders' Organization (NLO) – are the key drivers of change on the higher levels of structure and relations. Through linkages with various stakeholders (described above) and improved negotiation skills, sustainable changes are brought for women in the communities. Given below are the key summarized influences:

COMMUNITY SUPPORT GROUPS (CSG)

Through both OIKKO and BRUP it became clear that EKATA alone would not be able to make the level of changes required in community structures and workplace relations. Thus, NLs became members of CSGs so they can play a greater role in community development, guiding the decisions to better represent needs of women in the community.

SERVICE PROVIDERS

Local health facilities and banking services were made more accessible to women, especially those working in RMGs who work long hours and thus traditional service hours would not work for them. Better negotiation skills also helped with bargaining with major grocers and Business association leaders also. Most importantly, factory environment, management attitude became less confrontational and more collaborative, with issues like delayed payment of wages or bonuses being handled by NLO leaders on behalf of their respective factory's workers.

DAY OBSERVATIONS AND PARTICIPATION IN MASS-ACTIVITIES

Celebrating various days like Women's Day, Children's Day, Disaster Awareness Week etc with programs and activities made the groups more visible and gain acceptance within community.

COMMUNITY WORKERS' ASSOCIATION (CWA)

Leaders of EKATA groups came together form a group of leaders – called NLOs – and referred to as CWA for the OIKKO project. This helped to deal with factory owners and top management to execute more complex changes like arranging women-friendly health facilities, bathrooms and other benefits like maternity leave (in limited capacity) in factories.

Details on the process with case studies are shared in the main report.

OUTCOME-LEVEL CHANGES

Identifying tangible changes in empowerment in EKATA strengthens the approach with linking its activities with results. Group exercises were held bringing together CARE Program staff, Project Team, Technical expert, Implementing organization and Peer facilitators. Through results mapping and other Knowledge Management and Learning exercises the following examples were collected:

AGENCY LEVEL CHANGES

Through both projects, the most common change cited was in level of knowledge, communication skill level and confidence. While these seem vague personal characteristics to some, they were expressed anecdotally by project beneficiaries quite clearly. Across multiple EKATA groups in both projects, the first and most significant change they mentioned was within their home. Some of the signs mentioned are:

- Husband and/or Mother-in-law sharing household chores

- Ownership and decision-making over how to spend their own income
- Resolving spousal disputes through communication, not arguments
- Family members value her as a woman and the work she does, both in household and at workplace

STRUCTURE LEVEL CHANGES

Access to basic services at a time and in a way that caters to the needs of working women, addressing safety concerns is how most structure level changes came across. Given below are some of the major changes mentioned:

1. Community-level
- Health services from special providers like Smiling Sun, BRAC etc.
- Safety: EKATA group collectively tracks suspicious movements in community like drug dealers
- Community guard service
- Community garbage management system
- Community-managed affordable safe water supply
- Solar-powered streetlamps - safer roads for female commuters
2. Workplace
- Female bathrooms and doctor
- Timely full payment of festival bonuses, severance
- Overtime pay gap between male and female
- Separate lines on payday
- Minimum wage payment
- Safer, ventilated, well-lit workspace
- Maternity leave (for some)
- Trade unions/federations at workplace

RELATIONS LEVEL CHANGES

Relations level changes is key to sustainability of impacts from EKATA approach. Aforementioned stakeholders have come through with changed perceptions demonstrated by commitments and actions, major ones listed below:

- Mayor committed to expand BRUP piloted WDMCs across entire Gazipur City Corporation
- Female Urban Community Volunteers are now part of the first-responders' team of Fire department
- In recent fire incidents, female firefighters of BRUP have gained recognition and value within community. Also, afterwards, community united to help those affected with food, clothing and shelter, including help from adjacent factories and businesses.
- Government-given maternity benefits and disaster relief came to eligible community dwellers in urban area for the first time – usually all assigned for rural areas of Gazipur District.
- EKATA leaders part of community groups in charge of garbage management, water supply, guards and other community development services.
- CWAs contacted by factory managers to resolve worker disputes. CWA leaders have strong social capital now as they are seen as "problem-solvers/peace-keepers" instead of "trouble-makers".
- Landlords, especially female ones, are strong advocates for EKATA as it fosters peace, safety and builds unity within the renters in her building. Important to note that as many as 60 people live in a single building.
- Female Ward Commissioner issued orders under Nari Nirjaton Protirodh (Prevention of VAW law) to stop StreetSide shops and tea stalls showing objectionable content and carom-based gambling games.

WAY FORWARD

This learning agenda provided an opportunity to bring together all learning from CARE Bangladesh's experiences in implementing EKATA in urban context. It also created a stronger case for replication of EKATA approach in other projects in similar context by identifying tangible changes to women empowerment generated through this approach. Along with positives, the study also revealed potential areas for the approach to grow and expand its scope. The following points summarize such areas of further action for EKATA in urban context:

- **Standardized approach:** EKATA remains flexible in its approach as it enables beneficiaries to define their problems, resources and solution. However, a degree of standardization is required in terms of outcomes of empowerment to make its impact more communicable to donors to integrate into various projects.
- **Community-workplace impact balance:** Bringing BRUP and OIKKO together revealed complementary gaps in impact-capture for respective projects. OIKKO project plans to capture more community-based impacts after this study to share as spill over impact of their project. Similarly, BRUP has identified the importance of workplace environment and safety as part of resilience. As such, they have shared impact of their approach on surrounding businesses to donors and plans to incorporate interventions for such in future phases.
- **Economic empowerment:** Both beneficiaries and peer facilitators have expressed the distinction between economic development and economic empowerment. When sharing the successes of EKATA it was more important to have the *ownership* of the money they earn than having *higher* income. Thus, financial decision-making in household and facilitating savings either in groups or at banks is considered high value interventions.
- **Adult-Education:** Women mentioned that as they started working through the EKATA process, they came to realize the ever-growing importance of education. They mentioned that without basic literacy, they are unable to capitalize on skill development and ability to learn on-the-job. Weak or absent arithmetic skills also mean dependence on others to manage their money and secondary businesses. One mentioned adult literacy/ informal education program in a prior CARE project (PACE), which could be incorporated as part of EKATA process.

USE OF FINDINGS

As mentioned above, the following uses have been found:

- PEARL team identified specific indicators, incorporated into designing their Program Indicators for Women Economic Empowerment
- WEE team has reached out to PEARL team to capture community-level impacts for OIKKO as spill-over impact.
- BRUP shared business and workplace impact of their project to share with donors and making those imapcts a part of their next-phase design
- The Facilitators themselves have communicated interest to meet again for exchanging the differences in their experience in executing EKATA approach with the partner NGO for replicating in their other projects
- Director of Women & Girl's Empowerment Program of CARE Bangladesh plans on creating a standard template approach to EKATA in a format conducive to external communication for incorporation to projects working on women empowerment for Program Development
- Identifying areas of improvement for EKATA approaches to increase its effectiveness and impacts

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for other teams doing similar research:

- **Time:** Clear understanding of time requirements for internal engagement of staff is very important as for most CARE Bangladesh staff, these works have to be done along with their individual work priorities.
- **Flexible research plan:** Research methodologies have to adapt to dynamic circumstances in Country office. For example, within the research period, the month of Ramadan slowed work significantly along with other CO prio
- **Fund management:** The key challenge of the research was in navigating the myriad policies regarding administrative, financial-management and procurement-related rules and regulations, especially for the nature of fund (Unrestricted) which required clearances from Country Director *and* both Assistant Country Directors. In addition, handling unrestricted funds was a relatively new experience for the learning agenda team, which led to delays as they took time to learn the process.
- **Budget planning:** Reflecting on the process, it was better to first plan for total budget requirement as per research plan and then ask for it than the other way around.
- **Key technical lead and the learning facilitator (focal point person):** For explorative research like model documentation in this learning agenda, choosing the right technical person including the learning facilitator is crucial in choosing the right methodology and research plan.
- **Support from the SMT** encouraging learning initiates/pilots is extremely helpful in drawing support from various parts of the CO
- **Begin with end (Report Outline):** One helpful aspect was in designing a skeleton of the final delivery report before primary research which kept such a large team on the same page with clear idea on the final output.
- **Learning for Action and demonstration of short term benefits:** Effective dissemination and compelling consequent action is crucial for any learning agenda so allocating resources to these results is important. It is also important that the learning doesn't become an extractive process rather a symbiotic one and crease win-win situation. Thus, unlike traditional research, dissemination/validation events and workshops for next actions is a primary goal, requiring sufficient commitments in resource allocation.

CONCLUSION

The learning agenda defined the contextual factors that compares rural context with urban context, taking factors that have the biggest impact on women empowerment. Then it defined CARE Bangladesh's take on solidarity platform approach to women empowerment – known as EKATA – a process developed and owned by CARE Bangladesh as one its key value propositions. Then the process was assessed against urban contextual factors on how they affected project implementation, impact groups and outcomes on women empowerment.

The next actions from this learning agenda are:

1. Program Team using these learnings in developing program indicators of Women and Girls' Empowerment Program
2. Urban projects capturing and sharing both community and workplace impacts of empowerment
3. Implementing organizations and their facilitators sharing experiences to better their work
4. Program team planning to work with WEE team to develop a standardized approach to EKATA for replication.