

Analyzing the Efficacy of Local Government Initiatives in Alleviating Poverty and Advancing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): A Study at Gobra Union in Gopalganj Sadar, Gopalganj

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ABSTRACT

The Union Parishad (UP) is a local government that plays a crucial role in reducing rural poverty and promoting rural development to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the grassroots level. The primary objective of this study was to assess the effectiveness of local government measures in diminishing poverty and promoting progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Gobra Union, a sub-region under Gopalganj Sadar. This study adopted a quantitative research methodology and utilized the survey method to collect data on respondents' income, access to basic services, and the implementation of local government programs. We obtained data using the method of simple random sampling and ultimately selected 120 participants from 50 households. The results of our research indicated that Gobra Union has achieved notable progress in reducing poverty and advancing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through various interventions led by the government. These interventions have encompassed income-generating schemes, healthcare efforts, and educational programs. Furthermore, the analysis of data from the local community revealed that a mere 10.8% of respondents were unequivocally confident in the flawless execution of authorities' duties, while the remainder 89.2% have expressed disagreement with this notion. Merely 5% of participants expressed complete satisfaction with the performance of UP's representatives, and 31% expressed dissatisfaction with the overall system. However, the constraints of limited funds, administrative obstacles, and inadequate participation from the community persistently hinder the attainment of absolute success. The study has recommended establishing Gopalganj Sadar as a benchmark for encouraging sustainable development and poverty reduction. This may be achieved by fostering collaboration among local governments, communities, and development organizations.

Keywords: Poverty alleviation, Empowerment, Local Government, Union Parishad, Gobra Union

INTRODUCTION

Union Parishads (UPs) are the local bodies at the lowest level of local government, and they have great potential to alleviate poverty and have been seen as the key collaborator in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in their own communities. This institution plays a significant role in rural development across a number of fronts, as mandated by the Constitution and Ordinance. In general, people have a strong sense of loyalty and attachment to this organization. Union Parishads (UPs) have traditionally played an important role in local governance and development, and the recently adopted local government (Union Parishad) act 2009 has given them certain new responsibilities (Aminuzzaman, 2014). As a branch of central government, the Union Parishad is crucial in helping to solve the issues plaguing the region. Utter Praise's work to alleviate poverty and improve rural areas has benefited locals in many ways, including the creation of new institutions and the distribution of money, food, medical care, and other essentials. On the

other hand, it has the authority to enforce the law and deal with local problems including child abuse, domestic violence, sex discrimination, dowries, and dowry-related disputes, as well as concerns like early marriage, dowry, women's tyranny and torture, child abuse, and squabbles over property (LGD, 2015). Union Parishad (UP) can aid in reducing poverty and achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by effectively enforcing assigned power and activities.

Several revisions have been made to the current Union Parishad structure since its inception in 1885 at the hands of British colonial overlords. In accordance with Articles 30, 31, 32, and 33 of the Ordinance for Local Government (Union Parishad, 1983), the Union Parishad is responsible for the following areas: civic/municipal, police and security, revenue and administration, development and poverty elimination, and law (Historical Background of Local Government in Bangladesh: An Overview). Several agencies within our government have stated their intention to work more closely with local governments in order to attain the SDGs. Each division is making its own guidelines for achieving the SDGs as part of the preparatory process. According to UNDP (2016), our local government ministry has made significant progress towards the GENDA-2030 goals of citizen engagement and government accountability.

The effectiveness and continuity of local authority are examined here. Union Parishads are an integral aspect of local governments, playing a crucial role in judicial proceedings and rural advancement. In order to alleviate poverty and move forward in the direction of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, many people and organizations must play their respective parts and engage in their respective responsibilities (SDGs). Proper planning must go into these events, and those in charge must understand their roles. The purpose of this research is to determine how well local governments are carrying out their responsibilities and performing the services delegated to them, with a focus on poverty alleviation initiatives and rural development. Community happiness and the progress made on various rural development programs are used to evaluate the effectiveness of the regional administration. This research seeks to authenticate government authority by revealing the true state of Union Parishad's efforts to better the local region, as well as to show the public's reasonable perceptions of the success of rural development programs in a variety of fields.

Objectives of the Study

The study's primary objective was to determine how UP's poverty reduction and other development programs have affected low-income populations, with the hope of drawing conclusions about how these initiatives have affected efforts to attain the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the specific objectives are given below:

1. To evaluate the impact of local government programs on income generation, livelihood improvement, and poverty alleviation among the residents of Gobra Union;
2. To assess the effectiveness of local government activities and policies in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Gobra Union.

Justification and Scope of the Study

The Gobra Union, situated in Gopalganj Sadar, Gopalganj, represents a microcosm of rural challenges and opportunities. This research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of local government interventions in Gobra Union, with a specific focus on poverty alleviation and SDG advancement. Understanding the efficacy of local government initiatives is crucial, as it directly impacts the well-being of the community. By evaluating the outcomes of existing programs and policies, the study seeks to identify successful strategies and potential areas for improvement. This knowledge can inform policymakers, local authorities, and development practitioners on best practices and areas requiring targeted interventions. The choice of Gopalganj Sadar as the study location is strategic, considering its representation of broader regional challenges. Gopalganj, like many other regions, grapples with multifaceted issues such as poverty, limited access to education and healthcare, and environmental concerns. By focusing in on Gobra Union within this context, the research provides valuable insights that can be extrapolated to similar settings, contributing to the development of scalable and replicable solutions.

The scope of the study encompasses a comprehensive analysis of the initiatives undertaken by the local government in Gopalganj Sadar to alleviate poverty. This includes an examination of programs related to livelihood development, social welfare, education, and healthcare. The research will investigate the extent to which these initiatives have succeeded in improving the economic conditions of the residents in Gobra Union. Furthermore, the study will assess the alignment of these local initiatives with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations. It will explore how well the local government strategies align with global objectives, particularly those related to poverty eradication, quality education, good health and well-being, and other relevant SDGs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Local government must run efficiently and effectively so that people may obtain needed services and participate in decision-making processes. Local governments are often seen as the most accessible and helpful because of their closeness to the population (Chikerema, 2013). However, the provision of local services may encounter challenges owing to reasons such as placing a higher value on spending priorities and statistics than on community welfare (Swyngedouw 2005). Efficient municipal administration may alleviate these challenges by providing citizens with the tools they need to handle them autonomously and work toward a more hopeful future for everyone (Liu, 2020).

According to Eusuf et al. (2007), the majority of people assume that their local government is the most accommodating since it is the most accessible and situated nearby. Everyone should be able to easily get medical treatment, food assistance, and a safe place to live; it is their obligation (UCLG, 2009). Some argue that local service delivery is overly concerned with numbers and budgets rather than, for example, improving community health or local education—both of which are more difficult and time-consuming to measure (Hagen et al., 2006). As a result, effective governance mechanisms have a substantial impact on the success of broad efforts to improve service delivery. Good local management entails more than just ensuring that residents and businesses are satisfied with the services provided by local governments; rather, it involves giving people the tools they need to tackle problems on their own and create a more promising future for everyone concerned (Bovaird et al., 2002). It is hypothesised that people will have more faith in their local government if decisions are made in a transparent and accountable manner in which they play a more significant role.

Haque (2009) analysed the obstacles faced by Bangladeshi students trying to join UP. His investigation revealed that local administration is plagued by a number of issues, such as incompetence, inadequate funding, poor coordination, political corruption, insincerity on the part of chairmen, and so on. Participation is limited, he said, despite the fact that UP's many SCs are the major institutional way for people to have a say in local decision making. Despite the Union Parishad's active role in developing local people from an economic and social standpoint, the motives for rural development and poverty eradication have failed due to a lack of good governance, corrupted leaders, patriarchy, and other insufficient starting points and steps. To build efficient local administration, accountability and fair procedure are essential. As noted by Adhikary (2010), Hossain (2015) found that while it is the intention of municipal administrations to include citizens in the policymaking process, this is not always the case.

Maintaining a culture of transparency and accountability is difficult for many local administrations. This style of government has emerged for several causes, such as a lack of resources, a concentration of authority, apathetic citizens, etc. According to Khan (2006), the purpose of this investigation is to identify the legal and practical constraints that prohibit the UP from performing as planned. Although the local government code of 1983 has relieved UP of several mandatory and optional responsibilities, it still has a full plate. Most Ups do limit capacity infrastructure maintenance, hold 'village court' to settle local arbitrations, gather birth registration data, issue citizenship certificates, and oversee health, education, and agriculture systems. The Local Government and Rural Development Sector Strategy Paper was the result of a Planning Commission-led effort carried out in tandem with the Local Government Division, the Rural Development and co-operative Division, and other relevant actors. Sector strategy papers (SSPs) are planning documents designed to facilitate the incorporation of 7FYP national priorities and targets into sector-specific strategies and initiatives (Haque, 2018).

Razaue et al., (2007) found that SCs at the UP level were significantly improved to the Strengthening Democratic Local Government (SDLG) programme. Not only have SCs, which were previously largely dysfunctional, been encouraged by their successes in preventing violence against women and children, reducing absenteeism of health and agriculture workers, protecting agricultural land from water login and tidal water in coastal areas, and resolving community-level disputes, but the Ups can also learn from this novel approach. The standing committee must operate in accordance with the law and report its decisions to the appropriate Upazila Parishad or government bodies. The government must take measures, together with frequent monitoring and review, to ensure that the same unwanted circumstances do not recur with the same flow of information from the standing committees. As a result of the proliferation of Upazila-level committees established in response to ministry directives, there is a growing number of events and initiatives that are not coordinated with the UP's standing committees. It's possible that the number of these committees will be reduced, and that their work will become more closely aligned with that of the UP's standing committees.

Park (2014) states that the project's goals were consistent with those of the government and the ADB's country strategy for rural development. The project's design guaranteed that it was completed on time, was of use, and was as efficient and effective as possible in achieving its goals. The project was completed on time and without serious complications. This endeavour has assisted with several problems, including unemployment, poor access to transportation, and extreme poverty. There are currently an additional 136,000 jobs along the project roadways, including an additional 39,000 in the transportation sector. In addition to increasing pricing for farmers and other business owners, improved highways to rural markets have increased agricultural output. Every one of the program's goals, including increased prosperity and reduced poverty, were attained. The Upazila and Union roads development has increased the volume of motorised traffic by 140% and greatly shortened travel times. The results of the civil works have, for the most part, been satisfactory. The ability of LGED and local government organisations was bolstered through training in participatory planning, maintenance, management, accounting, tax collection, and quality control. The PCR group has concluded that the initiative was fruitful because its goals were achieved or surpassed. The federal government invests heavily in rural revitalization. This sort of spending allows the government to achieve a wide variety of objectives. In particular, the Accelerated Development Programme (ADP) aims to improve infrastructure, create jobs in rural areas, raise the income of rural residents, guarantee food security across the country, aid in the reduction of poverty, meet the power demand through the use of solar energy and power, and generally improve the quality of life in developing nations. However, practical observations reveal a low level of satisfaction. This problem may be caused by the method used to implement development activities (Abrar & Billah, 2016).

As a result of this knowledge gap, further in-depth studies are needed to determine whether or not local government programmes are effective in reducing poverty and promoting the SDGs in remote sub-districts like Gobra Union. Such research would illuminate the unique policies, community involvement tactics, and issues faced by local authorities in rural areas, and provide vital insights into the practical implementation of sustainable development projects at the grass-roots level. Our study's potential contribution to the subject of local governance and sustainable development lies in its filling of this gap in the literature, from which lessons and recommendations can be drawn to guide similar efforts in rural communities throughout Bangladesh and beyond. The study does more than just assess the results of local government actions; it also investigates how well those efforts line up with particular SDGs. To better understand how local activities might promote progress towards the SDGs, this study examines the relationship between local governance and global sustainability goals.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

For a successful sociological study, theoretical dissection is crucial. Simply put, a research study's theoretical framework is the scaffolding upon which the study's hypotheses can rest. The theoretical framework presents and describes the theory that provides an explanation for the existence of the research problem.

Liberal-Democratic Theory of Local Government

Liberal democracy prioritizes the separation of powers, an independent judiciary, and a system of checks and balances between the branches of government (Roy and Roy, 2023). The liberal case for democratic local

government as the optimal structure for the delivery of public services at the neighborhood level can be broken down into two broad camps. One group of people argue that strong local governments strengthen our national democracies, while another group focus primarily on how local democracy may improve their communities. It is possible to further categorize each into three related value ranges. These principles have to do with national-level concerns such as political literacy, leadership development, and governmental stability. Equality, freedom, and responsiveness are all values that matter at the regional level. In a democracy, the first and foremost duty of local government is to educate its residents about the political process. It has been said that it is overbearing and intrusive. Beyond the influence of class and formal education, there are a variety of additional social elements and institutions that shape people's political engagement. Given people's disinterest in politics at the local level, it's unlikely that many local government initiatives will have a significant educational influence (Local Government and Liberal Democracy- J.A Chandler).

Sub-culture theory of poverty

Oscar Lewis, an anthropologist, coined the term "sub-culture theory of poverty" in his 1959 book *Five Families: Mexican case studies in the culture of poverty*. Proponents of the "culture of poverty" idea argue that those who consistently struggle economically are more likely to develop a distinct cultural identity as a result of their circumstances. Dependency, inferiority, and powerlessness are all too common in today's culture. In addition, Lewis argued that people who are born into poor cultures have little appreciation for their past and, as a result, are unable to work together to better their present situation. Therefore, according to Lewis, the imposition of poverty on a population was the structural cause of the development of a culture of poverty, which then becomes autonomous as the behaviours and attitudes developed within a culture of poverty are passed on to subsequent generations through the socialization process (Oscar Lewis, 2017).

Social Exclusion Theory

The term "social exclusion" is used to describe the isolation of an individual from society at large. It highlights a variety of variables that limit access to possibilities for some people or groups but not for others. Access to basic commodities and services, such as education, health care, transportation, insurance, social security, banking, and the police or judiciary, is just as important as being able to feed, clothe, and house oneself. When people are left out of society, it is not by chance but rather because of the way our society is set up. When people are excluded from society, it is not because they choose to be excluded, but rather against their will (Giddens, 2009).

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Research Design

This study has adopted a cross-sectional design to collect data at a single point in time, allowing for the examination of the relationship between local government initiatives and poverty alleviation in Gobra Union.

Sampling Strategy and Sample Size Determination

Gobra Union have been divided into strata based on relevant characteristics (e.g., economic status, geographical location). A random sample will then be selected from each stratum to ensure representation across diverse socio-economic contexts.

The standard deviation from ANOVA table of pilot study show the population variability is about 28 percent or 0.28 (based on previous results) and the $Z_{\alpha/2}$ is 1.96 and the error in precision is $\alpha= 5\%$ so the desired sample size, $n=120$. Following formula shows the result:

$$n = \frac{z^2 pq}{d^2}$$
$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 (0.28)^2}{(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{3.8416 * 0.0784}{0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{0.301182}{0.0025} = 120.47$$

The error could be found by back calculation:

$$E = 1.96 \frac{0.2}{\sqrt{120}} = 0.05 = 5\%$$

A simple random sampling used to identify 120 individuals from 50 families is taken. Informed consent obtained, and anonymity have assured. All data have converted to natural logarithm to find out uniformity of data for final use.

Data Collection Instruments

- a) **Structured Surveys:** A structured questionnaire have developed to collect quantitative data. It has included closed-ended questions to measure variables such as household income, access to education and healthcare, and awareness of SDGs.
- b) **Official Records and Reports:** Government documents, reports, and statistical data related to local initiatives, poverty rates, and SDG implementation in Gobra Union have reviewed.

Variables and Measurements

a) Dependent Variables

- Poverty Level (measured using income thresholds, access to basic needs).
- SDG Achievement (measured based on indicators related to education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability).

b) Independent Variables:

- Local Government Initiatives (measured through budgets, programs, and projects).
- Demographic Variables (e.g., age, education, occupation).

Data processing and analyzing

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the coded quantitative data collected from the surveys (Excel file). After collecting descriptive statistics for every question, the analysis moves on to distill the most important features of the data. Processing the data is the first step in analyzing and interpreting it using statistical approaches such as frequency distribution and percentage measures.

Ethical Considerations

The study had adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring participant confidentiality, informed consent, and voluntary participation. Ethical approval has obtained from relevant institutional review boards.

Data Validation and Reliability

- a) **Pilot Testing:** Pre-test the survey instrument with a small sample to identify potential issues and refine the questionnaire.

b) **Reliability Checks:** Assess the internal consistency of the survey items using methods like Cronbach's alpha to ensure the reliability of the data.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This study has tried to assess the efficacy of the local government's initiatives in reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development goals among impoverished rural populations. In order to evaluate this, we gathered data on the income of the participants, the number of participants requiring assistance, and the availability of various services offered through the Union Parishad. The accompanying table and figures offer a visual representation of the data.

Income of the respondents

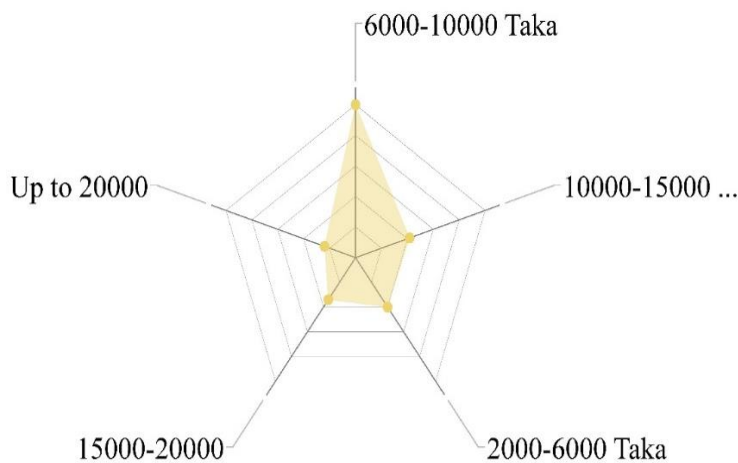


Figure 1: Income range of the respondents

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Figure 1 shows that 16.7% of the respondents had an income between 2000-6000 Taka, while 41.7% had an income between 6000-10000 Taka. 17.4% of the respondents stated that their earnings were between 10000-15000 Taka, while 14.2% reported an income range of 15000-20000 Taka. Just 10% of the population had an income below 20000 Taka.

Percentage of the respondents requiring aid

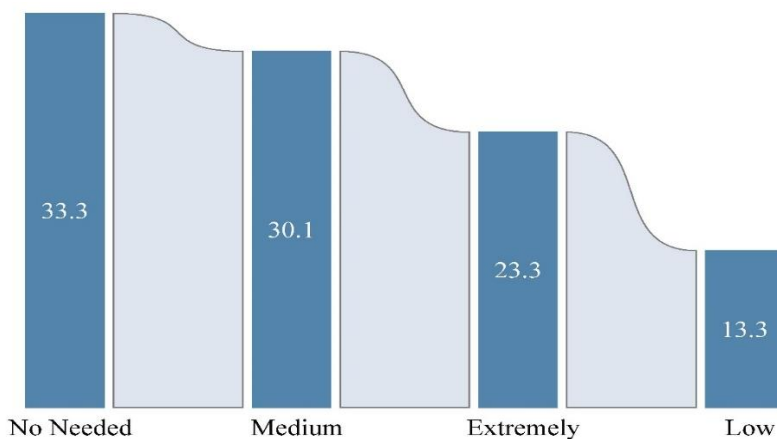


Figure 2: Respondents who seeking for help

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The above figure indicates that out of the total respondents, 23.3% needed extreme economic assistance, 30.0% needed medium assistance, 13.3% needed low assistance, and 33.3% did not require any assistance from UP.

Economic Assistance from UP

Table 1: Status of getting economic assistance from UP

Items	Frequency	Percent
Yes	3	2.5
No	117	97.5
Total	120	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 1 demonstrates that a mere 2.5% of the 120 participants who needed financial assistance to sustain themselves actually received it, while the overwhelming majority of 97.5% did not.

VGF or VGD Card Programs of UP

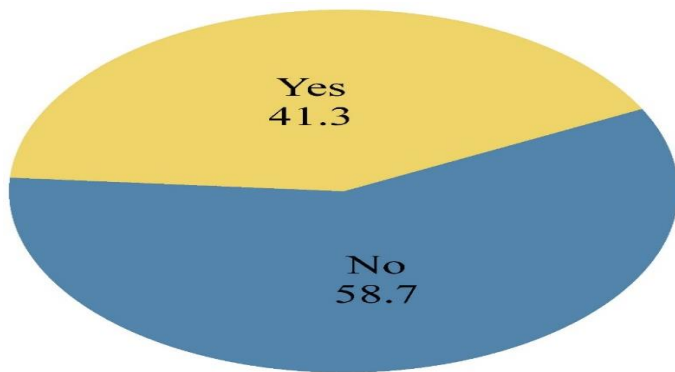


Figure 3: Lists of VGD card holders

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The above diagram depicts the uneven allocation of VGD Card, VGF Card, and Ration Card. Out of the 80 individuals who were qualified for food programming, 41.3% obtained this card, while the remaining 58.7% did not.

Ka-Bi-Kha Programs of UP

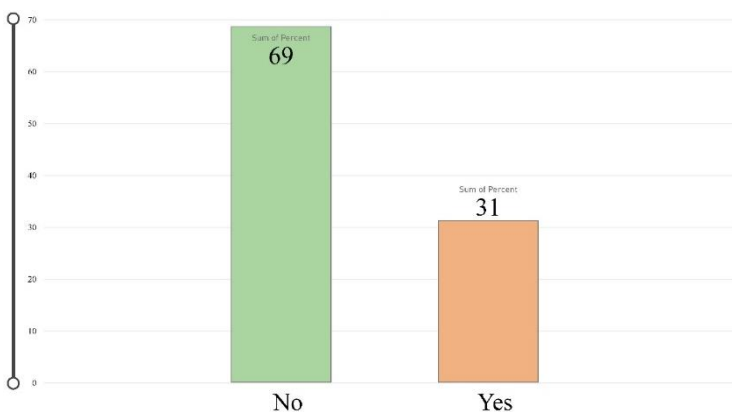


Figure 4: Ka-Bi-Kha programs

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Figure 4 shows that 31.3% of respondents who were eligible for the programs received the service, while another 68.7% did not.

Old/Widow/Disable Allowance Programs of UP

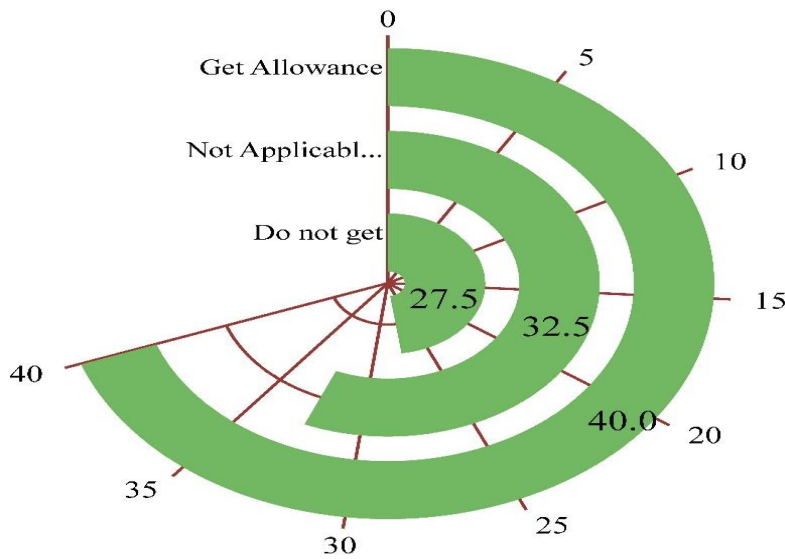


Figure 5: Widow allowances program

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The data presented in Figure 5, indicates that out of the respondents who were eligible for the programs, 40% received some form of allowance, 27.5% did not receive any allowance, and 32.5% were not eligible for the allowance due to not having the required membership.

Maternity Allowance Programs from UP

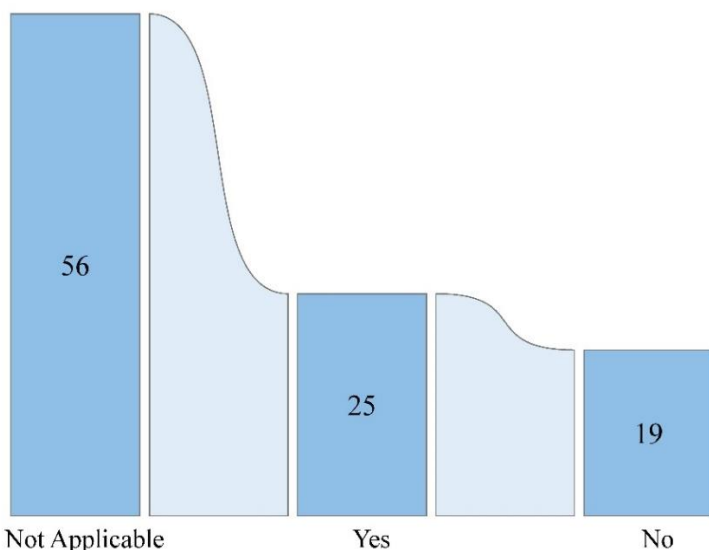


Figure 6: Maternity Allowance Programs

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Figure 6 shows that among respondents who were eligible for the allowance, 25% received it, 18.8% did not, and another 56.3% did not qualify since they were not such a member.

Educational Assistance from UP

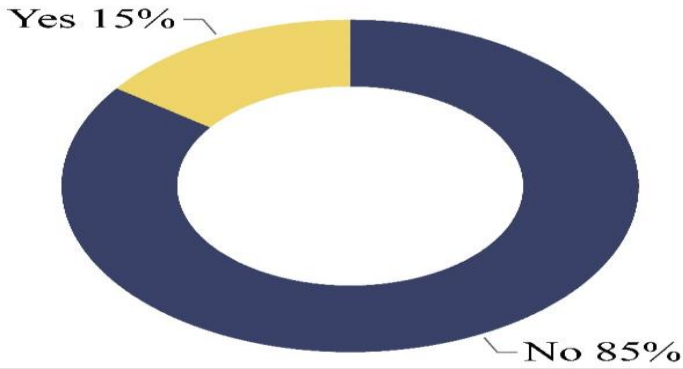


Figure 7: Educational assistance which provided Union Parishad.

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The above figure indicates that of the respondents who required educational facilities, 15% received assistance, while the remaining 85% did not receive any help.

Agricultural Assistance from UP

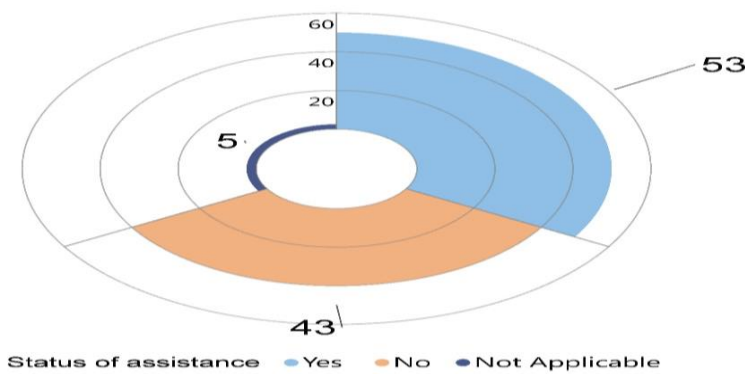


Figure 8: Agricultural assistance

Source: Field Survey, 2020

It is shown in the Figure 8, among respondents, 52.5% received agricultural assistance, 42.5% did not, and another 5% were not applicable.

Rehabilitation Programs of UP

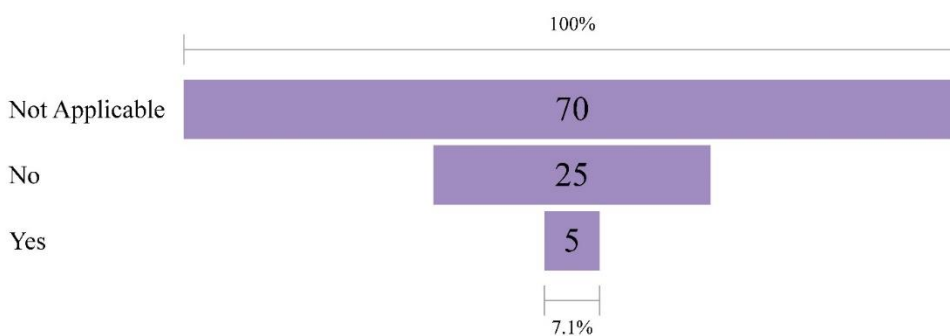


Figure 9: Rehabilitation programs supported by U.P

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The above figure shows that among the respondents who needed help from UP, 5% received the rehabilitation service, 25% did not get it, and another 70% were not applicable.

Winter Blanket Distribution Programs of UP

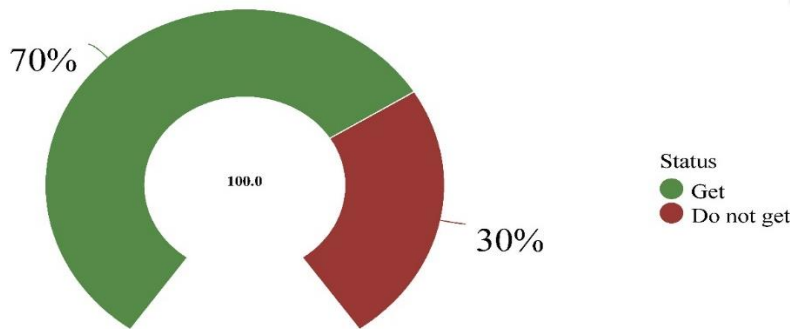


Figure 10: Winter Blanket Distribution Programs

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Figure 10 shows that among the respondents, 70% received winter blankets from UP, and another 30% did not.

Satisfaction Level of People about Different Programs of UP

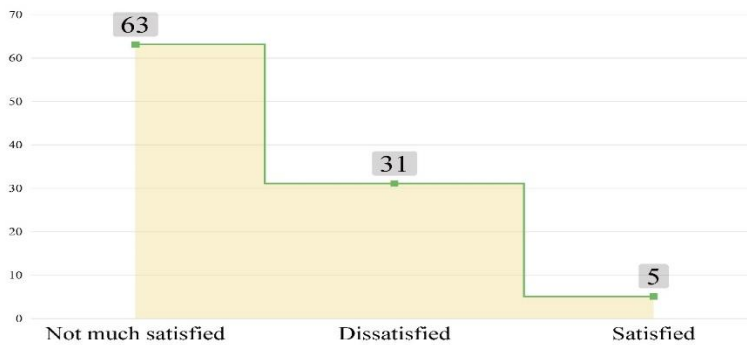


Figure 11: Satisfaction Level of People

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Figure 11 indicates that among the respondents, 5% are satisfied with the activities of UP, 63% are not very satisfied, and another 31% are dissatisfied.

Nepotism of Representatives of UP Authority

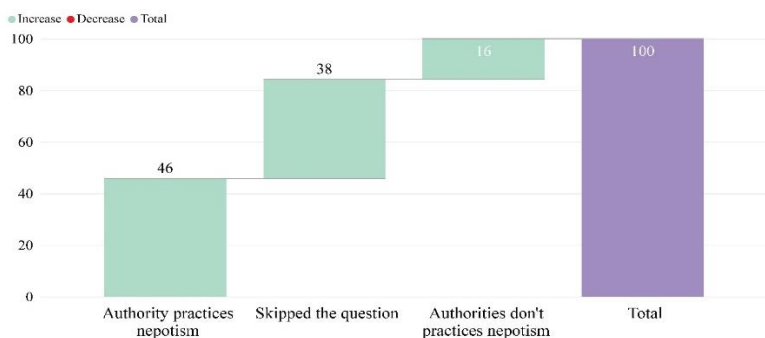


Figure 12: Nepotism of Representatives of UP Authority

Source: Field Survey, 2020

From Figure 12, it shows that among total respondents, 45.8% said that the authority of Gobra UP have practiced nepotism, 15.8% said no, and another 38.3% skipped the question.

Corruption of Representatives of UP

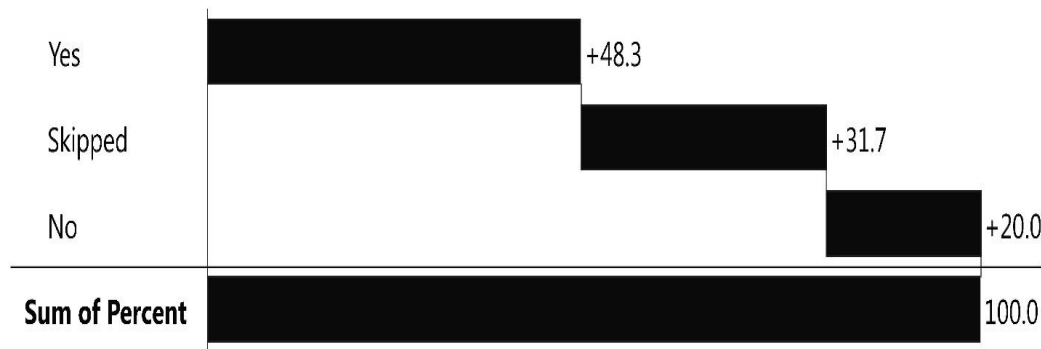
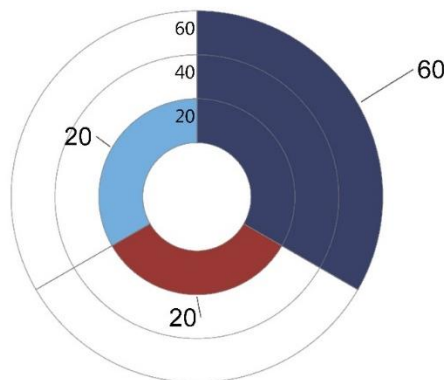


Figure 13: Corruption of Representatives

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The data presented in the above figure indicates that 48.3% of the participants expressed that the authorities of the union were corrupt, while 20.0% held a different opinion, and an additional 31.7% opted not to provide an answer.

Types of Corruption which are performed by Representatives



Types ● Both ● Lack of injury of suitable recipient ● Taking bribe and Stealing Grants Money/ Others

Figure 14: Types of Corruption which are performed by Representatives

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Figure 14 illustrates various forms of corruption, including accepting bribes, failing to conduct due diligence to identify the right individuals, and representatives engaging in both of these activities.

DISCUSSIONS

This study aimed to investigate the actual implementation of poverty reduction initiatives, including grants, assistance, projects, and programs, in Gobra Union Parishad. Additionally, it examined the development programs focused on education, health, and other essential supplementary needs. The Gobra Union's delegates (Chairman, Member, Ward Member) attest to the various Union Parishad initiatives funded by the central government to alleviate rural poverty, including the VGD/FVG/Ration Card, Old/widow/Disabled Allowance, Maternity Allowance, Ektee Bari Ektee Khamar Project, Ka Bi Kha/Ka Bi Ta Project, Educational Assistance,

Agricultural Assistance, Distribution Blanket in Winter, and the Yearly Development Budget for Local Governance.

The majority of rural residents, especially women, in this area are socially and economically disadvantaged due to their low levels of education, lack of knowledge about their rights, and lack of engagement in development initiatives. Fundamentally, the issue stems from extreme poverty and a growing disparity in wealth. Although the land-tenure system is inequitable, the majority of the labor force continues to rely on agriculture due to a scarcity of alternative employment opportunities. The Char people, residing in a significant chunk of this territory, are considered to be one of the most economically deprived populations globally.

Temporary or part-time work, poor pay, or no pay at all are all common occurrences in the labor market. Since several Bidi manufacturers are situated here, child labor is widespread in the region. Due to their exposure to tobacco, the youngsters have been diagnosed with a variety of illnesses. Widows and wives of men who have left the countryside in search of work sometimes find themselves as the sole breadwinners in their homes, making them among the poorest of the rural poor. They experience discrimination due to their gender expression. Despite being classed as a Sadar Upazila, the rural areas lack adequate transportation, communication, infrastructure, and networks. The study discovered that the formal governance system in the UPs under study is heavily influenced by patriarchy and the patron-client relationship. This is despite the fact that in a democracy, government should be more responsive, open, and accountable, and everyone should be able to have an equal say in making decisions (Eusuf, 2007).

The extreme and chronic poverty is a fact of life in Bangladesh. The link between poverty and poor leadership is becoming increasingly clear. The poor have less access to government services and fewer opportunities to borrow money on their own since they are outside the power structure and lack the resources and education to advocate for themselves. To eliminate poverty, help must be provided to those living in rural regions, which highlights the importance of greater local administration. As a local authority, UP may play an important role in poverty reduction programs by assuring the inclusion of all vulnerable groups. A new and powerful tool in the toolbox of development theorists is the emphasis on citizen engagement. As a result of the people's involvement, it is hoped that UP would be better governed, which could help alleviate poverty. By taking an active role in the planning process, individuals gain the knowledge and skills necessary to foster their own growth.

The government should allocate comprehensive financial, policy, and instrumental assistance to all educational institutions, regardless of their governance structure, whether they are government-run, non-governmental, autonomous, NGO-operated, local, or foreign. Over the next decade, it is imperative that the government prioritize industry, innovation, and infrastructural development. In this manner, Bangladesh has the potential to embark on the trajectory towards attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the year 2030 and optimize their influence. The official website of the United Nations confirms this. Gaining MIC Status is Crucial to Realizing the SDGs. The government of Bangladesh has set the ambitious target of joining the ranks of the world's Upper Middle Income Countries (MICs) by 2021. If this target is met, the country will be very well prepared for the adoption of SDGs. Based on their gross national product per inhabitant, the World Bank classifies countries as either low- or high-middle income as follows: From \$1026 to \$4125 for those in the middle class, and from \$436 to \$12475 for those in the upper middle class. The overall findings indicate a disparity between people's expectations and the actual outcomes when it comes to the implementation of UP's job. Gobra Union lacks efficient allocation of funding for poverty alleviation, implementation of development initiatives, and provision of legal services to the local community.

Governance Challenges

Dominance of Patriarchal and Patron-Client Systems

The institutional governing system of Gobra Union Parishad is dominated by patriarchal institutions and patron-client relationships. Poverty reduction projects face various governance issues as a result of the prevalent influence:

Limited Inclusivity: The amount of involvement in governance is limited, with a disproportionate effect on women and individuals with low incomes. A small handful of key persons control decision-making processes, limiting opportunities for community engagement.

Lack of Transparency: The lack of openness in governance leads to corruption and inefficient resource allocation. In the absence of transparent and easily understood protocols, it is impossible to trace or verify whether money has reached its intended recipients.

Accountability Issues: The power imbalance within the Union Parishad hampered the achievement of accountability, making it difficult, if not impossible. Poverty alleviation efforts are ineffectual and fail to achieve their goals because individuals responsible for their consequences are not held accountable.

Impact on Implementation and Outcomes

The governance problems of Gobra Union had a substantial influence on the results of poverty reduction programs, determining whether they succeeded or failed.

Ineffective Fund Distribution: The distribution of funding for poverty reduction is often ineffective owing to a lack of accountability and openness. As a result, the most disadvantaged populations get minimal aid.

Inequitable Resource Allocation: The patron-client system's intrinsic bias causes uneven resource allocation, benefitting certain groups while disadvantageously affecting others. Development efforts can miss people on the periphery who need the most aid.

Poor Program Execution: Governance issues contribute to poor program execution. Inadequate monitoring and administration may lead to project delays, ineffective management, and failure to meet goals.

Limited Community Engagement: Because political power is concentrated in the hands of a few key persons, community engagement is limited. When programs exclude the larger community, they are less likely to successfully meet the population's true needs and goals.

Gobra Union versus broader regional implication

To effectively alleviate poverty, initiatives must address governance issues and structural inefficiencies in Bangladesh's rural regions. The research focuses on the Union Parishad's social accountability mechanisms (Jahan, 2023), techniques for improving democratic local administration via citizen participation and leadership (Islam et al., 2019), and the role of community-based organizations in this setting. Bhuiyan et al. (2018) addressed the problems of rural governance. Challenges to establishing sustainable development include patriarchal hegemony, patron-client relationships, a lack of openness and accountability, and an exclusionary attitude toward community engagement.

To be successful and fair, poverty-reduction measures need major changes to both national and local government. Sohel et al. (2022) underline the need for planning, preventive measures, and community participation in rural local governments' responses to emergencies, such as the COVID-19 lockdown. The government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play critical roles in tackling a variety of issues, including poverty reduction, health, education, disaster management, and rural empowerment (Haque 2004).

Improving the provision of maternity care services (Rahman et al., 2008), community-based treatment for acute malnutrition (Kouam et al., 2014), and improving the healthcare system (Islam, 2014) are critical components of initiatives to alleviate poverty in rural regions. Furthermore, efforts like community-based tourist development (Afjal Hossain & Uchinlayen, 2018) and decentralized healthcare delivery systems (Seddiky, 2020) have the potential to economically empower rural Bangladeshis while also facilitating long-term progress.

To summarize, addressing issues in rural Bangladesh and ensuring the effectiveness of poverty reduction initiatives requires a comprehensive approach that includes improvements in governance, community

engagement, healthcare, and economic empowerment through initiatives such as social innovation (Nine & Chen, 2016) and micro entrepreneurship development (Alam, 2017).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening the Local Government (LG) bodies requires increasing the institutional capacity in terms of both human competence and logistics. According to Aminuzzaman's (1998) research, the majority of LG unit chairmen and members lack an appropriate understanding of the operational procedures and functions of these bodies. Their knowledge of budgeting, planning, and resource management is insufficient to achieve effectiveness. Through the encouragement of local entrepreneurship and other income-generating activities, the SDG Fund joint initiative aims to improve the economic and employment prospects of marginalized populations, particularly women and young people.

- i. **Enhanced Collaboration and Coordination:** Foster stronger collaboration between local government authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community-based organizations. Establishing effective communication channels and joint planning mechanisms can optimize resource allocation and improve the overall impact of poverty alleviation and SDG initiatives.
- ii. **Tailored Socio-Economic Programs:** Design and implement socio-economic development programs that are specifically tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities present in Gobra Union. These initiatives should address local needs, such as skill development, access to markets, and the promotion of sustainable livelihoods, ensuring they align with the broader SDG framework.
- iii. **Community Empowerment and Participation:** Promote community participation in decision-making processes. Encourage the active involvement of residents in the identification of their needs, the planning of development initiatives, and the monitoring and evaluation of program effectiveness. Empowering communities fosters a sense of ownership and sustainability.
- iv. **Capacity Building for Local Institutions:** Invest in capacity-building programs for local government institutions and community organizations. Strengthening their capabilities in project management, data collection, and analysis will enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of poverty alleviation and SDG initiatives, enabling better-informed decision-making.
- v. **Inclusive Education and Healthcare Access:** Prioritize initiatives that improve access to quality education and healthcare services. This includes infrastructure development, teacher training, and healthcare facility upgrades. Ensuring inclusivity in education and healthcare aligns with SDG goals for quality education (SDG 4) and good health and well-being (SDG 3).
- vi. **Environmental Sustainability Measures:** Incorporate environmentally sustainable practices into local development initiatives. This involves promoting eco-friendly agriculture, waste management, and energy-efficient solutions. Integrating environmental sustainability aligns with SDGs related to climate action (SDG 13) and responsible consumption and production (SDG 12).
- vii. **Regular Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to track the progress and impact of poverty alleviation and SDG initiatives over time. Regular assessments will provide valuable insights, allowing for adaptive management, identification of successful strategies, and timely intervention in areas where improvements are needed.
- viii. **Advocacy for Resource Mobilization:** Advocate for increased resource allocation from higher levels of government and international development agencies. Mobilizing additional resources will enable the implementation of more comprehensive and impactful poverty alleviation programs and SDG initiatives in Gobra Union.

By implementing these policy recommendations, local authorities and stakeholders can work towards creating a sustainable and inclusive development model for Gobra Union, ultimately contributing to the broader national and global efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Limitations of Data Sources

This study fully recognizes the limitations and possible biases of its data sources.

Data Quality: The conclusions may be less exact than they may be due to discrepancies in the quality of data in reports and surveys given by local governments.

Potential Biases: Respondents' biases, particularly those of community members and local governments, may impact their perceptions of the success of poverty-reduction efforts.

Limited Scope: While the study gives insights into wider regional concerns, its exclusive emphasis on Gobra Union restricts the generalizability of its results to rural regions as a whole.

Data Availability: The lack of up-to-date and thorough data on individual programs and their effects hampered in-depth research.

Longitudinal study design in future research to track the sustainability and long-term impact of Union Parishad initiatives

Galbraith et al. (2016) have found that longitudinal studies are particularly well-suited for understanding the dynamics of changes over time and identifying the factors that influence these changes. In order to improve the study design, researchers may implement a longitudinal approach, which allows them to evaluate variables that may potentially compromise internal validity (Mensah-Williams & Derera, 2023).

Uddin (2019) posits that union Parishads are essential for local governance because they empower communities, ensure the effective incorporation of stakeholders, and enhance service delivery. A longitudinal research design may offer a more precise evaluation of the impact of these initiatives on the long-term sustainability of services and community empowerment. Longitudinal studies are the most effective approach for comprehending the long-term effects of government initiatives, as they capture the progression and trajectories of development as individuals age (Galbraith et al., 2016).

Additionally, longitudinal research may offer a deeper understanding of the relationship between union devotion and involvement. Researchers may identify patterns that are not readily apparent in cross-sectional studies by conducting longitudinal monitoring of participants. This method enables the analysis of the evolution of attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes over time (Fullagar et al., 2004). Gelnik et al. (2017) contend that this method is indispensable for investigating the impact of interventions, including entrepreneurship training, on long-term motivation and outcomes.

In the context of Union Parishads, longitudinal studies may offer insight into the factors that influence loyalty and engagement over time by analyzing the influence of early socialization on commitment and participation (Fullagar et al., 2004). Additionally, longitudinal research may inform the development of enhanced policies and programs by providing insights into the psychological impact of governance initiatives and effective coping strategies (Kennedy et al., 2000).

Future research should employ a longitudinal study design to monitor the initiatives' durability and analyze their benefits over time in order to effectively evaluate the long-term impact of Union Parishad programs and comprehend the relationship between community empowerment and governance efficacy. In order to promote sustainable development and enable informed decision-making, researchers must employ longitudinal methodologies to gather and evaluate interconnections, trajectories, and changes.

CONCLUSION

In Bangladesh, the Union Parishad stands as the lowest political entity and is responsible for working at the grassroots level. Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGD), Test Relief (TR), and other forms of food aid were seen as indicators of good governance by the impoverished. To alleviate poverty and advance rural areas, the UP needs a governance system that is both efficient and equitable. This would open up more job opportunities for the region's rural poor, especially women and members of minority groups. To the poor, good governance means improved access to healthcare and education. Enhancing the quality and availability of essential necessities and other social and infrastructure services are vital for poverty reduction. However, it is equally important to

bolster local governance in order to safeguard democratic principles and ensure that the poor have access to public resources for poverty alleviation.

Through the diligent execution of local government programs, our data show that Gobra Union, like many rural communities around the world, has achieved significant progress in reducing poverty and advancing SDGs. All of these efforts were made to better the lives of locals in some way, and they included things like educational campaigns, healthcare services, and income-generating programmes. These efforts have to reduce poverty and advance several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including those dealing with healthcare, education, water, and economic opportunity. Nonetheless, our results highlight the complexities of municipal governance in rural areas. Significant obstacles have surfaced, including resource limitations, bureaucratic difficulties, and different levels of community participation. These challenges underscore the need for policies and activities specifically tailored to the conditions of rural communities. Our studies have also shown that there should be a stronger connection between municipal initiatives and international sustainability targets. While some progress has been made, a more complete and successful approach to sustainable development will benefit from more focused programmes that directly tie local actions to SDGs.

Conflict of Interests

The author states that no conflict of interest exists in connection with the publishing of this article.

Data Availability

The article contains all of the data necessary to support the results. Thus, no additional data sources are required.

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