



কোভিড-১৯ লার্নিং, এভিডেন্স
অ্যান্ড রিসার্চ প্রোগ্রাম



Covid-19 Learning, Evidence
and Research Programme

Research Project Summary

Rethinking Accountability for Digitised Futures in Bangladesh

Project leads

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Key personnel

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Expected project outcome

Ensure future digital connectiveness increases accountability for marginalized communities and improves the governance of service delivery

Setting the scene

Digitized services in Bangladesh confront two major challenges 1) huge capacity constraints at local institutional levels in terms of expertise and knowledge of delivering online services in ways appropriate and relevant to marginal groups in particular; and 2) deepening digital inequality as more than 67% of Bangladesh population cannot access expensive mobile internet, despite living within the footprint of digital infrastructures. This leads to huge gender and income gaps in ICT access across generation, ethnic, religion and urban-rural contexts but are rarely studied.

Digitised platforms like *Surrokha*, the National Helpline and other A2i led initiatives were a flagship part of GOB's Covid-19 policy response. Initial uptake of digitized essential services was low. To widen participation, 16,000 Union Digital Centres (UDCs) across 4,500 Union Parishads were set up. Meanwhile, NGOs like CARE also used digital technology to provide information on essential services to vulnerable citizens and mobilised the social interface to increase uptake.

However, there is little evidence on how marginalized communities living in the peripheries of urban and rural areas engaged with digital services and how this can improve accountability and responsiveness in future.' Both A2i and CARE are our project partners, and their experiences constitute the empirical focus of the project which aims to investigate the impact and potential of digitized services launched during Covid-19 pandemic for the marginalized communities in Bangladesh.

Methodological approach

The project adopts a mixed methods approach to: 1) explain digital inequalities based on gendered, regional and intersectional differences from A2i and CARE data; 2) ethnographic insights on how marginalized communities engaged with digitized service- via digital and analogue grids of knowledge and action; 3) policy labs to test the potential of the demand side of digital services.

Research activities

- Data mapping of A2i and CARE programmes
- Ethnographies in Gazipur (a major industrial city located about 25 km north of Dhaka) and Khulna (Bangladesh's third city), where we will select three sites (in each location): informal urban, informal peri-urban, and more remote rural.
- 20 x Interviews with duty bearers
- 6 Policy Labs Stakeholder engagement activities

Three pathways to impact

1. Time for reflection for research partners (and service delivery implementers) A2i and CARE to draw lessons for future work
2. Empower citizens through
 - a. 12 x Focus Group Discussions (in each ethnography site)
 - b. 6 x Policy Labs (building on the ethos of Rockefeller Foundation 'Transformation Labs') bringing key stakeholders together to engage collaboratively on complex challenges, and identify potential ways forward
 - c. a Citizens Manifesto on Digitised Services
3. Present findings at the annual Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre. Conference. Potentially discuss with BPATC opportunities to host a training/dissemination event for civil servants

Proposed outputs include:

- 2 x Policy Briefings (English and Bangla)
- Policy lab report
- Final research report
- 2 x peer reviewed articles

Potential further outputs include articles for national media, blog series on project's developments and relevant roundtables and workshops

Primary CLEAR theme: Service delivery, accountability and governance

Secondary CLEAR themes: Innovations, Poverty and vulnerability, Protection of rights