

# POWER TO CHANGE INSTITUTIONS

POVERTY



**Christian Aid has expertise and experience in working with partner organisations to make government institutions accountable, ensuring access to rights and strengthening citizens' participation. We believe all public institutions should be accountable for their services to the community**

## Introduction

Local government in Bangladesh contains four main administrative levels. Firstly, there are the regional arms of the central government, seven administrative divisions which are subdivided into 64 districts. These districts are made up of 500 upazilas that are further split into 4,486 unions<sup>1</sup>. Local administration and local politically elected representatives are weak in both human and financial resources and are heavily controlled by central government and a system of patronage. Even though the constitution of Bangladesh considers its people as the source of all power, such centralised power structures mean citizens lack the opportunity to participate in government decisions.

In rural areas, citizens' participation in the democratic process has been further narrowed as access to various administrative and social services are controlled by local power holders. Discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste and the exclusion of women, dalits and ethnic communities make it a daily struggle for the most marginalised people to attain their basic needs. In most cases, the poor are not aware of the services they are entitled to receive from government departments and local government institutions. Among the marginalised groups in

Bangladesh, women are the most vulnerable. The social and religious structure of society prevents women holding most forms of power; political, social or economic.

## Our governance work in Bangladesh

Christian Aid Bangladesh aims to bring about change by ensuring the accountability of institutions and access to just and equitable resources. We are committed to supporting the creation of a platform for communities to raise their voices and demand accountability. One of the core objectives of Christian Aid Bangladesh is to encourage community based organisations (CBOs), civil society organisations, the private sector and the state to develop pro-poor policies and institutions which provide large-scale innovative solutions to tackle poverty.

At the heart of Christian Aid's 'power to change institutions' global strategic objective is ensuring the effective participation of citizens in local government; empowering citizens with new knowledge, skills and abilities to contribute to decision making processes, and to seek pro-poor and inclusive development planning, delivery and evaluation. We will also work with other CBOs and non-governmental organisations on national advocacy for improved governance.

Christian Aid Bangladesh has expertise and experience in working to make government institutions accountable. We believe in downward accountability where all public institutions are accountable for their services to the community, and we will support and build the capacity of institutions to do so. We are also recognised for our relationship with local government institutions in disaster risk reduction (DRR) programmes in climate-vulnerable areas of the country.



***Gender and addressing the identity-based exclusion of women, dalits and ethnic minorities is central to all of our work. Our governance work aims to broaden civil society's influence on government policies and practices on inequality issues***

We will enable marginalised, excluded and vulnerable communities – especially single women and women-headed households – to demand access to and control over natural and economic resources, justice and government, government services, and to realise their rights and entitlements. Through our programme, landless movements will be strengthened to claim resources and their economic and social rights.

Womens' positions at family and community level will be improved through increased awareness and our support for rights-based collective movements. Christian Aid is helping to empower women and men from poor,

marginalised and excluded communities by promoting basic gender rights and human rights, responsive governance, livelihood security, financial services and DRR through participation, capacity building, networking, and policy advocacy at local and national level to make institutions accountable to communities.

Christian Aid understands that an inclusive economic development intervention is needed to bring about the change we are seeking. We are keen to forge new and wider partnerships with the private sector in Bangladesh and work with this sector towards a shared vision of a prosperous Bangladesh, using principles of corporate social responsibility which will help the poor and marginalised secure sustainable livelihoods.

### **Our partners**

Christian Aid's partnership model has seen us form long-standing relationships with local organisations. Our aim is to develop an excellent network based on mutual learning and experience.

Our work with **Nijera Kori** in Comilla, Kushtia, Natore and Tangail districts reaches 25,000 people, while projects with **Nagorik Udyog** in Tangail, Barishal, Rangpur, Pirojpur and Jhalokathi reach more than 51,000. The regional EIDHR (European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights) project with Nagorik Udyog will emphasise the human rights issues of dalits in Bangladesh. We also have a partnership with the **Wave Foundation** in Barishal Sadar.

### **Contact us**

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## **Endnotes**

**1** Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2011.