

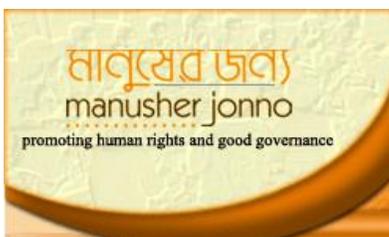
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# Five Years After: An Impact Assessment of the Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF)



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## Acronyms

ADD	Action on Disability and Development
AP	Aparajeyo Bangladesh
CEDAW	Commission on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CDA	Community Development Association
CHT	Chittigong Hill Tracts
CLEAN	Child Labor Elimination Action Network
CRP	Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed
CRPD	Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities
DFID	Department for International Development
DPO	Disabled Peoples' Organization
DRG	Disability Rights Group
ECNEC	Executive Committee of the National Economic Council
ESDO	Eco-Social Development Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GPM	Governance Performance Monitoring
HASAB	HIV/AIDS and STD Alliance of Bangladesh
HUGO	Human Rights and Governance
MJF	Manusher Jonno Foundation
OPR	Output to Purpose Review
PO	People's Organization
PWD	Person with Disability
RMG	Ready Made Garments
ROM	Rights of the Marginalized
RTI	Rights to Information
SHG	Self-Help Groups
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
UNCRC	United Nation Convention on the Rights of Children
VAW	Violence against Women

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## **Units and Conversions**

1 USD = 68.8 Tk  
1 lakh = 100,000 Tk  
1 crore = 10,000,000 Tk

## Executive Summary

The Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) was born of a human rights and governance initiative (HUGO) funded by the Department for International Development (DFID). The HUGO program originated in CARE/Bangladesh but was then established as MJF, an independent Bangladeshi institution in 2002. In January 2006, MJF was registered as an independent Trust with the Government of Bangladesh. The overall objective of MJF was to create within Bangladesh an institutional leader in human rights and governance programming with the capacity to garner international support. Such leadership is expressed along two broad dimensions. First, MJF manages a large challenge grant (financed by DFID and Norway) which supports the human rights and governance activities of a network of national NGOs and other stakeholder institutions. With this effort, MJF issues calls for proposals, reviews and funds projects, and provides comprehensive technical support to NGO partners in order to assure the quality of development delivery services. Second, MJF has initiated a national advocacy effort that has set the agenda for human rights and governance policy-making in favor of the marginalized and excluded groups within Bangladesh. In this regard, MJF coordinates with and mediates among government officials, lawmakers, national advocacy and lobbying groups, private sector leaders, and target group representatives to develop national solutions to issues of social exclusion and governance.

Manusher Jonno has now begun a second cycle of funding at a level of £30m and supports 123 partner NGOs. The individual partner projects are organized under six major programmatic themes that represent the institutional priorities within the human rights and governance agenda. These thematic programs are 1) rights of marginalized populations; 2) violence against women; 3) child protection; 4) workers' rights; 5) access to justice; and 6) Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Two other programs, governance and capacity building cut across and support the other six. The objective of this assessment is to document the impact of human rights and governance programming on the lives of the poor and excluded populations of Bangladesh. It seeks to determine the process by which the outcomes of human rights and governance programming are translated into livelihood benefits. The assessment further examines the effectiveness of the delivery of development services through MJF and its network of partners.

The assessment followed a mixed methodology, combining qualitative field visits with a quantitative survey of 600 households (300 beneficiaries and 300 control households) in three program areas (violence against women, child development and protection, and rights of the marginalized). For the qualitative component, a number of workshops, focus group discussions, and individual interviews were carried out in four regions of the country—the northwest, the southwest, Dhaka and surroundings, and Chittagong. In all, 34 partner NGOs participated in the assessment and 16 projects were visited in situ. The quantitative survey was carried out in the northwest and southwest, using a questionnaire that collected household information on demographic characteristics including health and education, economic data on income and assets, and rights awareness and access to government services. The quantitative results sought to demonstrate the magnitude of the impacts that were perceived during the qualitative field visits.

## *The Manusher Jonno Approach to Rights and Governance Programming*

Manusher Jonno Foundation has a unique multi-sited approach to human rights and governance programming. The basic structure of this approach premises a group of right-holders—those who by virtue of their citizenship and humanity are endowed with a set of rights designed to protect and promote life and livelihood. In MJF terminology, these right-holders constitute the *demand* side of the approach. At the same time, there are the duty-bearers—those who by virtue of their position or role in society have the responsibility to provide services and to protect their constituents. These constitute the *supply* side of the approach. On the one hand, the MJF-supported projects target the ultrapoor, the marginalized, and the socially “invisible” segments of society, making them aware of their rights and how to exercise them. At the same time, MJF projects urge duty-bearers to acknowledge these rights and to increase the effectiveness of the services they provide to constituents, clients, employees, etc. In the dynamic between supply and demand, the impacts of rights and governance programming are manifest not as direct asset transfers but as improvements in agency, access, and status. The path from rights-based programming to livelihood well-being is thus indirect. Expanded agency results in greater choice and opportunity for the beneficiary population; expanded access opens assures that the eligible receive the social entitlements, such as VGD cards or public khas land; and enhanced status allows the invisible—women, dalits, adivasi, sex workers, etc.—greater mobility and participation in society. It is through these impacts on agency, access, and status that people improve their asset and income positions, health, and education.

If the MJF approach is multi-sited (supply and demand), it is also multi-scalar. The MJF-supported projects engender impacts that accrue at the local household and community level and at societal level. At the higher level of society, the projects are designed to change institutional policy and laws. Such advocacy efforts result in major livelihood impacts on entire classes of people (such as garment workers, dalits, etc.) and tend to be more sustainable.

### *Livelihood Impacts of the MJF Approach*

The assessment visits affirmed that impacts of rights and governance programming on household livelihoods are spread across all six of the thematic program areas. For example, with respect to impacts on *agency*, the demand-supply programmatic strategic created a major movement in the northwest to remove children from hazardous labor and mainstream them in an educational path or locate them in non-hazardous alternatives; women workers in shrimp processing plants obtained equal and better working hours; street children in Dhaka are provided training and shelter from oppression; and physically disabled girls were provided skills-training to assume employment in garment factories. With regard to *access* impacts, households in the southwest received titles to khas lands which are now used for paddy cultivation and aquaculture; victims of domestic abuse have gained access to local justice institutions, police and hospital services; and the ultrapoor in Peoples’ Organizations have gained access to safety net entitlements in Dinajpur. With regard to *status* impacts, project interventions have enabled socially

excluded groups, such as dalits, women, people living with HIV/AIDS, and sex workers to gain greater mobility in society, including the opportunity to participate in public activities, send their children to school, and access public services. People with disabilities now have bus service because they have used their new sense of identity and self-worth to lobby for policy change. Sex workers can leave their brothels, wear shoes, and stop systematic abuse. Tribal peoples have used their sense of group identity to achieve schools for their children and advocate for favorable policy change.

If the qualitative assessment documents the process by which project interventions affect agency, access, and status, the quantitative survey offers evidence of how livelihoods are altered. The quantitative analysis compared 300 beneficiary families with a control group of equal size from the same geographical locations. The results show that significant differences in a set of economic variables, including income and asset ownership, favor the intervention group. These differences are even stronger for a set of variables that measures the awareness and exercises of rights. That is, the beneficiary group is more aware of their rights, participates more, and accesses government services more readily. This group, on average, also has a better economic situation. The analysis also demonstrates that there is a significant (non-random) relationship between rights/governance variables and economic variables, suggesting that as households learn about their rights and how to exercise them, their economic status increases.

### *Assessment Findings*

The general findings of the assessment can be summarized as follows:

- The most effective aspect of the MJF approach to human rights and governance programming has been its multi-sited operational strategy in each programmatic area. The concurrent presence of MJF partners on the factory floor, in the village, at the union parishad, in government offices, in the media, and in the halls of Parliament demonstrates itself to have the greatest sustainable impact on poverty and exclusion over time. This unique strength of MJF lies in its ability to extract the interactive multiplier value of advocacy and intervention, of grassroots action and policy influence.
- Not all impacts are realized on a similar timeframe or scale. Some impacts, such as access to the entitlements of safety net programs and the obtention of titles to khas land, are direct and immediate—and easily measured. The livelihood benefit of an education, however, will present itself to the individual child only in time and thus is not easily quantified. On the other hand, the change in the minimum wage law or formal recognition of dalit dignity and place in society generates impacts at a national level with thousands of beneficiaries. MJF management understands this outcome complexity and seeks to diversify its programming accordingly.
- The capacity building investment of MJF also underlies its particular effectiveness in human rights programming. MJF is in the business of the delivery of development services to a complex set of sectors, stakeholders, and beneficiaries. Not all the MJF

partnership shares the same level of experience or capacity, and MJF has made great progress in providing its partners the capacity support needed on both the technical, administrative, and financial side. Such improvement in national NGO capacity will yield important impacts to the beneficiary population as the quality of delivery improves.

- MJF has established itself as a national leader in human rights and governance, but this recognition is more than the reputation itself. MJF is seen as an asset to those who would champion human rights and governance in the country. As such the organization has itself become an influential actor at the advocacy and policy level. As importantly, MJF has positioned itself as a repository of information and a “clearing house” for human rights and governance ideas and strategies. This role itself has a long-term impact on the beneficiary population as it plays out.

### *Recommended Areas for Improvement*

With full recognition of the impact of the MJF on poverty and exclusion in Bangladesh, the assessment team is compelled to mention areas where improvement appears possible. The following comments are offered in a constructive spirit and may be seen as recommendations for areas of further refinement:

- There is an expected level of unevenness across the partners in terms of their organizational capacity and management effectiveness. Even some of the NGO partners with substantial experience and reputation in national development activities appear too limited in their approach and strategy. The structural weakness from the perspective of the assessment team is to promote the awareness of rights and not to focus on the exercise of rights. A myopic vision in rights and governance is to assume that an “aware” group is an “active” group or that 1000 people “made aware of” their rights will in fact act upon this awareness. This distinction is important in assuring that rights programming does engender concrete impacts.
- A second area of concern identified among the visits to the partners NGOs is the implicitly narrow definition of “group” as an operational category. Virtually all the partner NGOs that work at the community level engage in a process of group formation as a primary component of their development approach. The transfer of development messages occurs in the context of a project group, which becomes the primary beneficiary unit in most cases. In effect, group members (within a community) are beneficiaries and, by extension, non-group members are not beneficiaries. The assessment team believes that this distinction can itself create an ambience of exclusion, but more importantly it misses an opportunity to promote a sense of village leadership within the group. That is, the group should not be narrowly defined as the set of beneficiaries who are delivered a message or experience an outcome. Rather the group should be facilitated as a community mediator or community representative that accepts the responsibility to spread the development messages to other community members. The reality of many communities is that groups become closed entities that work directly with NGOs

(following the model of savings groups) to the exclusion of others. This definition, as operational category, should be rethought in rights and governance programming.

- Within MJF there is always the risk of “stove-piping” or creating silos of thematic areas. For example, a poor dalit woman who works in a shrimp processing factory may be a beneficiary of a rights programming NGOs—as a dalit—and thus participates in activities of rights awareness, but she would best benefit from a workers’ rights intervention. There is not a mechanism in MJF that allows for this type of crossover and promotes more horizontal contact across the NGO partnership. Ideally, an NGO partner encountering this woman as a beneficiary would refer her to a companion NGO working on factory floors. Individuals have multiple rights issues and MJF should be a system of built-in flexibility and cross-partner exchange to better meet the needs of beneficiaries.

### *Specific Recommendations*

As MJF matures as an organization, it will increasingly encounter the need to monitor and evaluate partner impacts across the range and scale of activities as part of the support to its management system. There are several steps that can be taken to enhance and systematize the monitoring and evaluation of impacts.

- The first recommendation is to instill an “evaluation mentality” at the program management level within MJF. Monitoring and evaluation is as much an operational approach as it is an ex post measurement activity, and there should be a set of robust impact indicators that monitor the outcomes of each programmatic theme. These indicators can be livelihood-based or innovatively molded to demonstrate the exercise of rights or the outcomes of improved governance. Once the indicators have been identified, the M&E division can work with partner NGOs to develop a monitoring strategy.
- At the same time, the management information system (MIS) is significantly underutilized and should play a more effective role in monitoring and evaluation. Currently, the computerized information system is used almost exclusively for administrative control, but it should be expanded to generate regular reports that track the critical project indicators for each program. From an organizational logic, the management information system should provide a core service to the M&E division as a management support tool. Program managers together with M&E staff would identify the appropriate indicators for monitoring, orient the PNGO staff to collect and organize the data, store the data and generate the reports that form the basis of regular project reviews. The technical capacity is currently available within the M&E, but the system of information dissemination and analysis needs improvement. A critical step is to make the MIS capacity program focused.

## **1.0 Introduction**

The Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) was born of a human rights and governance initiative (HUGO) funded by the Department for International Development (DFID). The HUGO program originated in CARE/Bangladesh but was then established as MJF, an independent Bangladeshi institution in 2002. In January 2006, MJF was registered as an independent Trust with the Government of Bangladesh. The overall objective of MJF was to create within Bangladesh an institutional leader in human rights and governance programming with the capacity to garner international support. Such leadership is expressed along two broad dimensions. First, MJF manages a large challenge grant (financed by DFID and Norway) which supports the human rights and governance activities of a network of national NGOs and other stakeholder institutions. With this effort, MJF issues calls for proposals, reviews and funds projects, and provides comprehensive technical support to NGO partners in order to assure the quality of development delivery services. Second, MJF has initiated a national advocacy effort that has set the agenda for human rights and governance policy-making in favor of the marginalized and excluded groups within Bangladesh. In this regard, MJF coordinates with and mediates among government officials, lawmakers, national advocacy and lobbying groups, private sector leaders, and target group representatives to develop national solutions to issues of social exclusion and governance.

Manusher Jonno Foundation currently funds projects implemented by 123 national (and some international) partner NGOs. These partners and projects have been selected from several thousand proposal applications which have been exhaustively and transparently evaluated to assure both internal quality and consistency to the MJF mission. The individual partner projects are organized under six major programmatic themes that represent the institutional priorities within the human rights and governance agenda. These thematic programs are 1) rights of marginalized populations; 2) violence against women; 3) child protection; 4) workers' rights; 5) access to justice; and 6) Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).<sup>1</sup> Two other program themes, governance and capacity building, are seen as crosscutting, and their activities are integrated within the other program areas. With its network of partners, MJF is able to maintain a national presence throughout all the regions of Bangladesh.

MJF nurtures a close relationship with this network of partner NGOs and provides capacity building support in both the programmatic and administrative (including financial) areas. In addition, MJF has a monitoring and evaluation system designed to assure that program outcomes are consistent with objectives and to assess the continued quality of the individual partner projects. The first five-year funding cycle of MJF was completed in 2007, and a second five-year cycle of support began in 2008 funded (again) by DFID and partially by the Government of Norway. Most of the PNGO partners have remained part of the second phase and have either continued or extended their project

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<sup>1</sup> CHT is considered a specialized programmatic focus because of the unique human rights and governance issues that affect the population of this region. For management purposes, it is incorporated into the capacity development program.

activities. A total of around £30m has been approved for current projects and program support.

This assessment was commissioned to examine and document the impacts of the human rights and governance projects funded by MJF upon the lives of the poor and excluded peoples. The prevailing question is how and to what extent does HUGO programming make a difference in the well-being of the targeted populations. In effect, does the fact that one understands their rights redound to benefits or, in the case of governance, does an enlightened duty-bearer result in improved access to public services and entitlements for the citizenry? Previous program reviews (MJF 2005; MJF 2006)<sup>2</sup> have indicated the need for greater documentation of project impacts, and this assessment is a step toward addressing that concern.<sup>3</sup>

This report is not an evaluation of the management of MJF or of its programmatic priorities. Rather it directly focuses upon project impacts and upon the process by which those impacts are realized. In contrast to an asset transfer program, human rights and governance interventions are “oblique” in the sense that they pursue intermediary changes in values, attitudes, behaviors, and institutions that create an opportunity for well-being improvements. Conceptually, human rights and governance programming finds its inspiration in Amartya Sen’s “capabilities” approach to poverty. Intervention activities seek to expand the capabilities of the poor and socially excluded and to increase their access to the entitlements that are basic to their persons as citizens and human beings. The actual exercise of these entitlements Sen has labeled as “functionings,” or the process by which people, using their agency, can convert entitlements to benefits. The assessment seeks to document both the expansion of these enabling capabilities and their application in the routine affairs of daily life.

Impacts are a result of both programming design (the inherent quality of the intervention) and programming effectiveness (the effectiveness of the implementation). MJF devotes a significant amount of effort in enhancing the capacity of the partnership NGOs in order to improve the delivery of development services. This assessment also focuses on this capacity development since it ultimately affects the impacts generated from the individual projects.

Thus, the principal objective of this assessment is to register the impacts on well-being at the individual, household, community, and national level of the human rights and governance projects funded under the Manusher Jonno Foundation. In examining the impacts on the lives of the poor and excluded, the assessment also seeks to understand the “impact” efficiency of such programming, to determine how such impacts are most effectively and efficiently achieved. Finally, the assessment looks forward and asks what can be expected of the current path set by MJF into the future.

The following section discusses the mixed methods approach that was adopted for the assessment. In the third section, we present a conceptual framework for assessing the

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<sup>2</sup> MJF (2005) Output to Purpose Review (OPR); MJF (2006) Output to Purpose Review (OPR)

<sup>3</sup> Manusher Jonno 2006, Output to Purpose Review

impacts achieved in rights and governance programming. It depicts in detail the complexity (and uniqueness) of the MJF approach. The impacts of the six programmatic areas are then summarized in the fourth section, using information from the qualitative interviews and focus groups. The fifth section presents and interprets the quantitative survey results. The final section focuses on the major findings, recommendations, and conclusions. It is important to emphasize that the assessment is not exhaustive. It does not fully document the impacts across all the activities sponsored by MJF nor does it attempt to capture the totality of impacts compiled since the beginning of the program in any one thematic area. Time imposed a binding constraint on both coverage and depth, so the assessment was limited to presenting an illustrative snapshot of the types of impacts achieved by the program. Despite these limitations, the assessment team is confident that it has adequately tracked the path of MJF over the last five years and has determined where impacts have been achieved and how so. With equal confidence, the team describes the direction that MJF has established and provides a set of findings designed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of that path.

## ***2.0 Methodology of the Assessment***

Although MJF currently has 123 implementing partners, the assessment was restricted to those partners with three years or more of project implementation, or 64 projects. The assessment team reviewed all available project documents (including proposals and evaluations, MJF reviews (OPRs and Cluster Reviews), policy statements, logical frameworks, monitoring and evaluation reports, and partner/stakeholder documents and publications). The assessment team also spent approximately 20 days engaged in field visits. The design of the field assessment included a quantitative and a qualitative component. The rationale driving a mixed methods approach centered around the need to achieve both an in-depth account of how program impacts were generated at beneficiary level and a sense of the magnitude of these impacts across the beneficiary groups.

### **2.1 The qualitative assessment**

For the qualitative field assessment, the team carried out a set of interviews and focus group discussions at all levels of program design, implementation, and evaluation. Initially, the assessment team presented the assessment objectives and implementation strategy to the MJF management, then interviewed the Executive Director, all the MJF program staff responsible for each thematic area, and the monitoring and evaluation staff. Short questionnaires regarding perceived impacts had been distributed to all 64 partners that met the sample criterion (three years or more of partnership activity), and these responses provided the background information for the field visits. The field visits were distributed among four main geographical regions: Dhaka and surroundings, the northwest region, the southwest coastal region, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Each visit was initiated by a partner workshop, then by visits to individual projects. Overall, 34 PNGO partners participated in the workshops and 16 projects were visited by the team. The four workshops were run as large focus group discussions in which each partner presented a brief synopsis of the project history, activities, achievements, impacts, and challenges. The follow-up discussions then focused more on project impacts and how

they were measured and assessed by the NGO staff. The PNGO participants at the workshops were selected by the MJF staff in an effort to capture the range of variability in program type and profile of the partner organization itself. In addition, in each region a number of stakeholder meetings were conducted.<sup>4</sup> The participants in the stakeholder meetings varied, but almost always included government agency representatives, locally-elected officials (UP members, etc.) journalists, and private sector representatives. The integration of stakeholder groups is a critical element of the overall MJF strategy, and these meetings tended to be highly informative and lively.

The visits to the individual projects were arranged by the MJF staff and, again, the purpose was to draw a sample of projects that represented the range of activities that are supported by the program. During the project visits, meetings were held with PNGO staff who gave brief and informal presentations of the project history and activities. During each visit, the assessment team met with beneficiary groups and, in some cases, stakeholder groups in an FGD format. Since most of the PNGO activities, as we see below, are organized around community groups, the FGDs were conducted among a sample of project groups and were open to all group members (and curious bystanders). Commonly, the team visited not only the community but also the site of project activities (e.g. factory, stone-crushing site, training center). Along with the FGDs, several individual key informant interviews were conducted with beneficiaries in an effort to get life history accounts of how individuals benefited from the recognition and exercise of their rights. Several of these stories are included as case studies.

In this qualitative component, the team covered all six of the MJF thematic areas. Nevertheless, because of the large number of PNGOs and the constraints of time, the team was obliged to limit visits to a sample of projects. The team is confident that the overall qualitative field assessment, while necessarily selective in terms of coverage, did capture the range of variability in terms of project type, project approaches, and partner institutional capacity.

## **2.2 The quantitative survey**

For the quantitative component, a survey was conducted in two regions of the country (northwest and southwest) and focused on three programmatic themes—rights of the marginalized, violence against women, and child protection. The purpose of the quantitative survey was to determine to what extent the extended presence of rights and governance projects in a specific region had resulted in concrete livelihood impacts. The survey was thus challenged both to provide some measure of livelihood impacts and to attribute these impacts to rights-based programming. Unfortunately, there was no set of comparative baseline data to measure current impacts against; so the survey was designed with a control group as the point of comparison. The total sample was comprised of 600 households, comprised of 300 intervention families (in the three programs) and 300 control families from within the same geographical area, but not targeted by the NGO

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<sup>4</sup> For clarification, partners are those entities (NGOs) that are formally funded by MJF; stakeholders are groups and individuals who are formally or informally included or affected by project activities, such as government agency representatives, locally-elected officials, factory owners, journalists, etc.

project. Overall, the sample covers six districts in two regions, 10 upazillas, 15 unions, and 37 villages. Table 1 summarizes the survey information.

**Table 1. Distribution of survey sample by program and region and PNGO**

<b>Program/Region/PNGO</b>	<b>Beneficiary</b>	<b>Control</b>
<b>Violence Against Women</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Southwest/Bachte Shekha	50	50
Northwest/Polli Sree	50	50
<b>Rights of the Marginalized</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Southwest/Uttaran	50	50
Southwest/Prodipan	50	50
<b>Child Rights and Protection</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Northwest/ESDO	50	50
Northwest /Solidarity	50	50
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>300</b>

The 300 beneficiary households in the sample were selected using a simple random sampling technique and a sampling frame comprised of lists of PNGO project participants. The control group was selected from neighboring villages of a similar socio-economic profile using a systematic random sampling (selecting every third household from a village point randomly selected).

The choice intervention-control research design, although not optimal, was considered the most robust option available in the absence of a baseline. The analysis compares a selected cluster of livelihood characteristics between the beneficiary and control group as a means of measuring impact; but also seeks to establish a level of correspondence between the recognition (and exercise) of rights and livelihood outcomes. Thus, the survey instrument was designed to capture basic levels of human capital retained within the household, the economic status of the household, and indicators of rights awareness including the exercise of those rights through access to services.

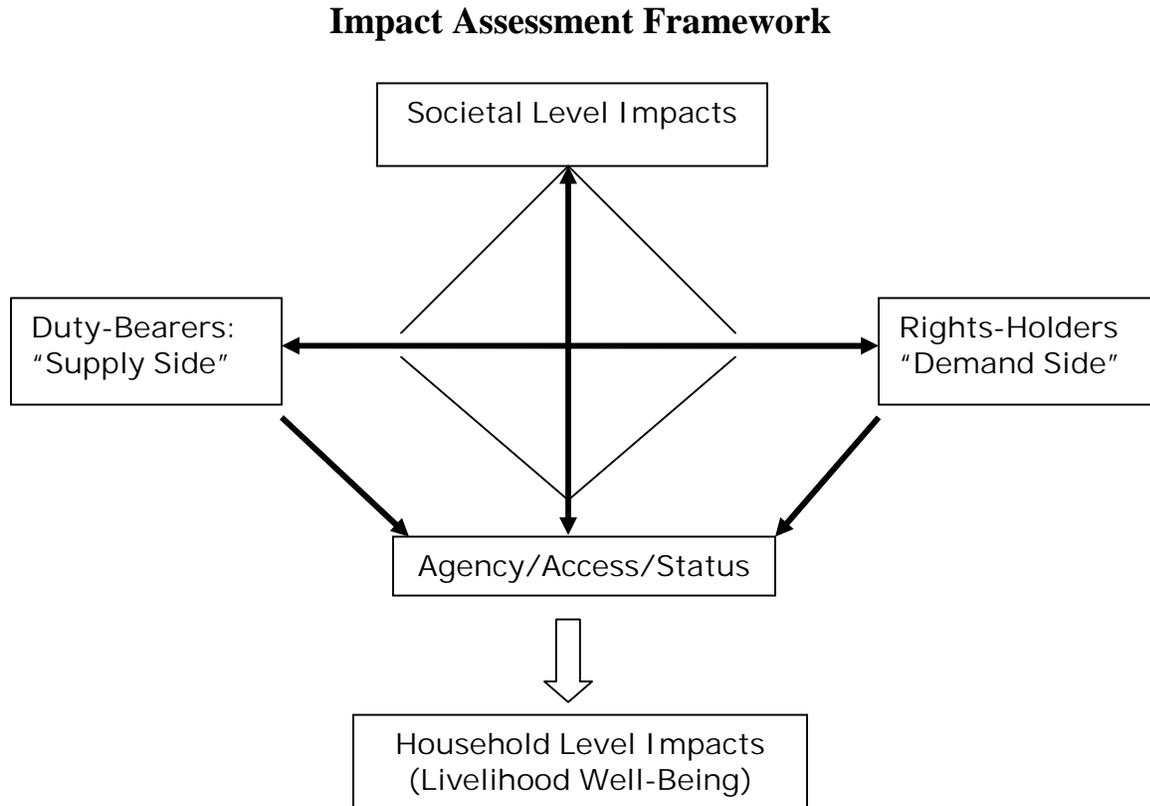
Several case studies are also presented throughout the report. These case studies are representative of the stories that were gathered by the assessment team in discussions with beneficiary groups. These stories are meant to illustrate the struggle of the invisible people that constitute the MJF target population and how project interventions can effect change in their lives.

### **3.0 Manusher Jonno Foundation Approach**

There is an important underlying logic in the rights-based approach developed by Manusher Jonno. In contrast to the direct benefits associated with an assets transfer strategy, human rights and governance programming seeks to instill a socio-political environment that enables sustainable well-being improvements through the exercise of fundamental and encoded rights. As depicted in Figure 1, the MJF approach operates at two key junctures. First there is the dynamic and simultaneous relationship between

duty-bearers and rights-holders. Rights-holders are the excluded, marginalized, and ultrapoor who constitute the “demand” side of the development equation, while the duty-bearers who constitute the “supply” side are comprised of the public servants who have a legally instituted responsibility to citizen constituencies.

**Figure 1. The Manusher Jonno Approach to Rights and Governance**



Many of the projects funded under MJF are designed to target simultaneously the demand and supply sides of rights and governance programming. Thus, they work among the “invisible” populations of society to enhance awareness and stimulate the exercise of legal rights as well as among the locally-elected representatives and other public service providers to reaffirm the responsibilities associated with their positions. On the demand side, project activities are directed toward informing the excluded and ultrapoor of their rights as citizens and inspiring in them the confidence to demand these rights—in the workplace, in the courts, in the government service agency, and in public. On the supply side, the PNGO interventions also target those who are pledged to honor those rights—the union parishad and other locally-elected bodies, the government civil service, factory owners, etc. These interventions encourage duty-bearers to uphold their responsibilities to constituents and to provide their services more effectively. In this sense, rights-holders are enabled to act upon their rights while duty-bearers are urged to respond to them. It is

at this dynamic interface that opportunities are created to improve the well-being and livelihoods of beneficiaries.

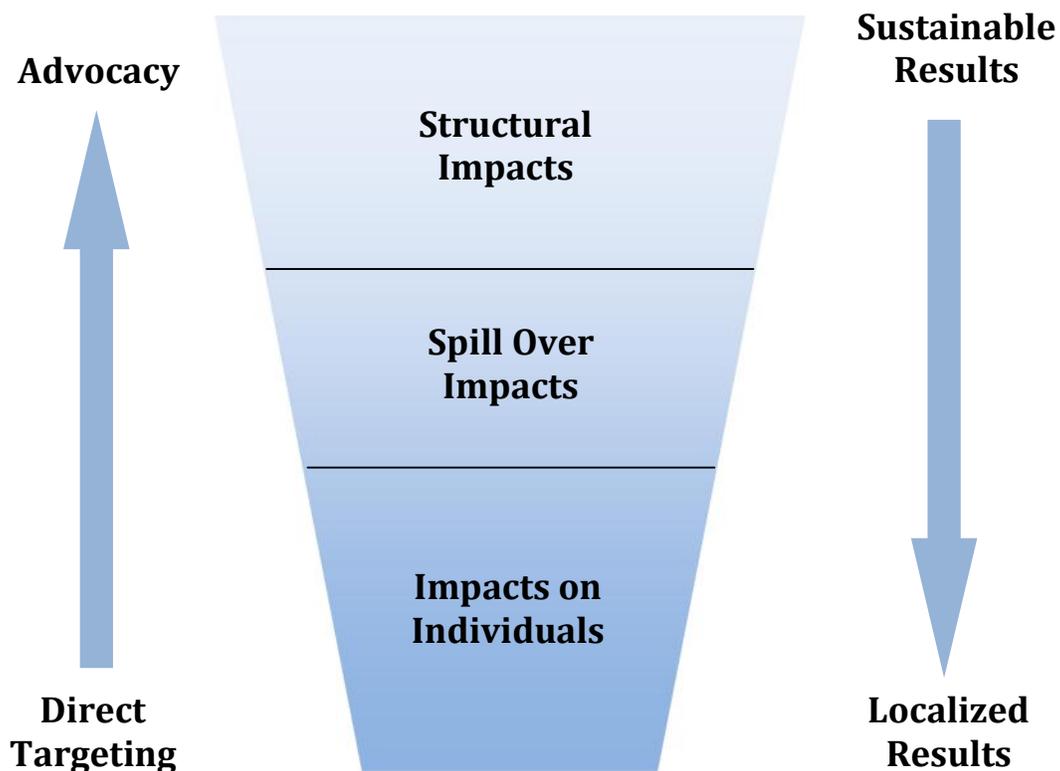
Figure 1 shows that the impacts of the MJF supply and demand approach are manifest at the level of human agency, access, and status, which are constituent elements of expanded capabilities. *Agency* refers to the expansion of choice for marginalized peoples. For example, the skill-building of persons with disabilities and parents of children in hazardous work expands their horizon of choice and provides alternatives that can produce livelihood impacts. Or where women come to earn equal wages in factory employment, they enjoy a wider range of choices regarding the management of their households and the care for their children. The exercise of rights also enhances human capabilities by opening social and economic space or *access* to social entitlements such as widow stipends and VGD cards, to livelihood resources such as land, and to public services such as health care. Rights-based efforts can also increase *status*, or social acknowledgment. Social acceptance of one's identity results in greater mobility, greater participation, and, consequently, greater opportunity for such marginalized groups as occupational castes, women, and tribal peoples. Although project impacts agency, access, and status are often overlapping and difficult to distinguish, these expanded capabilities do result in concrete well-being improvements.

The second key juncture of the MJF approach is its simultaneous focus at multiple levels of impact. The projects funded by MJF target several institutional levels in Bangladeshi society. Most directly, the beneficiaries of these projects are individuals (e.g. street children) and households. There is strong evidence of spillover effects that disseminate impacts through larger segments of the population. For example, formal groups of people with disabilities organized under one specific project have shared their learning with inquiring disabled individuals from other towns who are interested in organizing self-help groups. These spillover impacts are a frequent outcome of human rights programming; however, they are difficult to quantify and measure. The third level of impact is at the national level. These are structural impacts that have a large coverage and affect entire categories of people. When MJF helps to draft legislation that protects factory workers injured on the job, the impacts are distributed to all workers. These structural impacts are the most sustaining, and they are the result of the strong advocacy position that MJF has promoted and supported in its projects.

Figure 2 illustrates the “funnel” effect of the MJF programming. At the narrow end of the funnel, the impacts are more direct but less widespread, limited usually to the targeted group, or “localized” as the figure suggests. When there are spillover effects, the impacts are more widely felt but indirectly rather than by a focused NGO intervention. At the widest point of the funnel, the structural changes have the greatest coverage and are more long-lasting, as is the case with changes in the law or in national policies. At this level, it is not the individual or the group that is targeted but rather the institution or the duty-bearer. The standard tools for program evaluation are more applicable to the narrow end of the funnel and are not often designed to capture the spillover impacts or the structural impacts.

The figure is meant to illustrate the unique nature of the Manusher Jonno Foundation approach. As a national leader in human rights and governance programming, MJF not only promotes projects that directly affect targeted individual and communities at the grass roots level. It also performs the role of catalyst, thus targeting institutions at the national level. In this way, MJF becomes a major actor in the human rights and governance movement in contemporary society—not just a funding organization for implementing partners. This ability to mediate between different scales, from the grass roots at one level to the halls of parliament at another, defines the unique position of MJF in assuring the sustainability of human rights and governance impacts.

**Figure 2. The "Funnel" Distribution of the Impacts of the MJF Approach**



#### **4.0 Documented Impacts by Programmatic Theme**

The following sections present a synthesis of the impacts documented in the MJF programs. As stated above, the synthesis is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive, but seeks to show where the impacts of human rights and governance programming are perceived in terms of agency, access, and status, and how these impacts improve the lives of the ultrapoor and the excluded in Bangladesh.

##### **4.1 Rights of the Marginalized**

The Rights of the Marginalized (ROM) program is one of the most active in MJF and currently has 39 NGO implementing partners. The targeted beneficiaries of the ROM theme are the nation's "invisible" peoples, those who are considered "unimportant" and powerless. Operationally, the beneficiaries are the ultrapoor, peoples excluded from society because of occupation (sex workers, outcasts), tribal and ethnic peoples, those who live and work in remote areas (e.g. Sundarbans fisher peoples), persons living with HIV/AIDS, and persons with disabilities (PWD). Following the demand-supply approach described above, the most common intervention strategy in ROM programming is to create a sense of rights awareness around small group formation. Partner NGOs commonly mobilize a dynamic of group formation at the local level and provide a regular set of messages regarding basic rights during group meetings. Many of the partners also facilitate the federation of these groups at the union, upazilla, and district levels. The purpose of this strategy is not only to create the widespread awareness of rights but also to position the groups relative to the existing power structure, particularly the locally-elected bodies. The next step in this strategy is to influence the supply side (the duty-bearers) by alerting them to the responsibilities of their office. Thus, groups are encouraged to contact the union parishad or the upazilla officer with a specific agenda of actionable requests that reflect the exercise of existing rights.



The case of the partner NGO, the *Disabled peoples' self-help group* Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed (CRP), is illustrative of this intervention strategy. The partner works in more than 35 upazillas in 7 districts with disabled peoples. Traditionally, the special needs of disabled peoples in Bangladesh are not recognized as a class, and they regularly suffer personal and social indignities—e.g. buses do not stop for a wheelchair, children with disabilities tend not to go to school, and Bangladesh has a number of legal supports and protections that are not implemented in practice. CRP's strategy is based on the organization of "self-help groups" (SHGs) that have currently mobilized almost 20,000 people with disabilities at the village level. These groups have met with local officials, presented their agenda, and subsequently several have been granted space within government offices. In this case, the exercise of rights has improved agency, access, and status, with significant impacts on well-being. The efforts of the SHGs has expanded access to the existing safety net program (for more the 5,000 PWDs), and has opened the opportunity for education of PWDs and their children. In some cases, the SHGs have been able to gain access to khas land and to the micro-credit needed to pursue income-generating activities. Partner NGOs have also provided training in specific skills at disabled centers, and these beneficiaries have graduated into employment opportunities in the ready-made garment (RMG) industry. Through the efforts of the project team, 20 memoranda of understanding have been signed with the RMG sector to hire PWDs.

The success of this project has been repeated by Action on Disability and Development (ADD), another MJF partner and a nation-wide advocate and activist group for people with disabilities. With MJF support, ADD is working in 12 districts where nearly 15,000 people have been organized into self-help groups. The operational strategy of ADD is more focused on advocacy and structural impacts at both the demand and supply side. The core organization of the project is the Disabled Peoples' Organization (DPO), and much effort is invested to build the capacity and the leadership of these groups. The DPOs are also represented by federations at higher levels of government, and they pursue specific activist goals to recognize the rights of the disabled and to include them in the national poverty reduction programs. The impacts of the project has been felt, as with CRP, at the local level where the more vulnerable PWDs have gained access to national safety nets, education stipends, and employment opportunities. At the same time, however, there is an increasing awareness of the plight of disabled peoples at the national level, and Bangladesh has recently ratified the UN Convention of the Rights of Disabled Peoples and specifically included disabled peoples into the national poverty reduction strategy.

Community Development Association (CDA) is a partner NGO that works with village "people's organizations" (POs), local groups that represent the poorest segments of society. Currently, with funding from MJF, CDA is active in 9 upazillas in Dinajpur and Thakurgaon districts, where they have developed program activities with 435 POs that reach about 30,000 people. The development strategy of CDA is multi-dimensional and multi-scalar. The organization seeks to enhance the organizational capacity of the PO through skill training and leadership development. Within each group, CDA staff promote an awareness of rights—particularly rights to food security and to employment.

At the same time, each group creates a specific action agenda to exercise those rights in ways that bring concrete benefits to members. With this strategy, the POs have been able to gain access to khas lands and to khas ponds. In Dinajpur, one PO has initiated a collective farming project of 100 acres of potatoes; other POs have started collective fish pond projects; and others have demanded and received employment from local officials. CDA also retains a legal fund to support the claims of members. Thus, based on the awareness of rights, the actual program activities target concrete benefits in local livelihoods. At one PO meeting, members told the assessment team that the union parishad chairman recognizes the political strength of the group and visits it regularly.

In Khulna district, the NGO Uttaran has partnered with MJF to promote the rights to khas land among the landless in Satkira district. In the midst of strong opposition from local elites, Uttaran has successfully brokered the obtention of land titles for almost 2000 landless families, and more than 7000 acres have been distributed. This work has engaged not only the landless families but also the entire legal and governmental system that manages land. More than 300 court decisions have been settled in favor of the landless. Uttaran works at both the demand and supply side of rights programming, often exposing its staff to precarious confrontations with local elites who seek to claim the land for themselves. This access to land has allowed the benefited families to engage in paddy production as well as in shrimp and fish aquaculture.

In some cases, the gains from rights programming accrue to the household in the form of reduced costs. In the southwest coastal region, Prodipan works with the ultrapoor households whose livelihoods are based on extractive activities in the Sundarbans. These workers face regular harassment from government officials responsible for the licensing of fishing and other forms of forest extraction. The MJF-supported project forms groups of workers who depend upon the Sundarbans and provide them information about national forestry regulations and fishing laws, including the use-fee structure. Workers state that with this information, they are able to counteract those seeking to exploit their ignorance by exacting exorbitant fees and fines.

A final example demonstrates how direct livelihood impacts can only be achieved after significant investment in status-building and advocacy. The implementing partner HASAB (HIV/AIDS and STD Alliance of Bangladesh) targets the most excluded (and “invisible”) groups in the country—those affected with or vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and other STDs. Among these groups are sex workers, men who have sex with men<sup>5</sup> and intravenous drug-users, all of which suffer the discrimination of strong social taboos. As seen above, the project targets both the excluded groups and the public duty-bearers responsible for service provisioning. The rights-based strategy is to organize and facilitate self-help groups that are informed of their rights, then to engage service providers so that these rights can be exercised. At the same time, the project has initiated

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<sup>5</sup> The term “men who have sex with men” (MSM) - describes a behaviour rather than a specific group of people. It includes self-identified gay, bisexual, or heterosexual men, many of whom may not consider themselves gay or bisexual. MSM may often be married, particularly where discriminatory laws or social stigma of male sexual relations exist. (<http://www.unaids.org/en/PolicyAndPractice/KeyPopulations/MenSexMen/default.asp>)

a public campaign through the media to create a greater public awareness of and consideration for these excluded groups. The direct well-being impacts are difficult to assess, although there are concrete benefits from greater access to medical and public health facilities, greater physical and legal protection for sex workers, and education for their children. Nonetheless the enhancement of status and self-esteem lays a critically important foundation for livelihood improvement due to increased mobility and access. The team was touched by the fact that sex workers can now have a public burial—a symbolic victory in death perhaps, but one which certainly improves a very difficult existence in life.

In sum, the ROM program has achieved significant impacts at the household and structural levels. The process which realizes such impacts includes the integration of excluded and marginalized peoples into the economic “mainstream” as is the case of PWDs obtaining employment in the garment sector; the increasing of access to productive resources, such as khas land; the expansion of access to safety net programs; and the reduction of costs through access to service providers and better information. The magnitude of these impacts is difficult to estimate, although MJF has sought to accumulate a measure of impacts from the individual partners. These include:

- 11,132 families received around 9,120 acres of *khas* land;
- more than 200 Adivasi (plains land ethnic group) recovered more than 400 acres of land that had been mortgaged;
- more than 17,000 excluded and marginalized received new livelihood opportunities; and
- more than 140,000 people received access to social protection benefits, to service providers (e.g. health care), and to education.

The following structural impacts have been achieved at the national level through advocacy efforts:

- Bangladesh ratified the Optional Protocol of UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2008;
- For the first time in the history of Bangladesh, the issues of disabled and dalit rights have been incorporated in the election manifesto of both national political parties;
- The Election Commission of Bangladesh included PWDs in the voter registration and ensured their voting through postal ballots where relevant;
- The 2008-2009 national budget increased monthly allowance for the insolvent persons with disabilities from Tk. 220 to Tk. 250. A total of six lakh PWDs will get this allowance. Allocation for education of the disabled children has increased from taka five crore to six crore and Tk. 150 crore has been allocated for National Disability Development Foundation (Jatio Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation) for the mainstream disability;
- The issue of women with disabilities has been addressed in the periodic report of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) both in the report of state and the shadow report of the civil society for the first time;
- The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) approved the 2<sup>nd</sup> PRSP on 23 October 2008 where disability was addressed in light of CRPD (Convention on the Rights of the People with Disabilities);
- Advocacy initiatives by DRGs (Disability Rights Groups) ensured reserved spaces for PWDs on public buses throughout the county; and
- More than 3000 sex workers received national ID cards by means of which they could cast their votes in the 2008 general election.

While these examples do not exhaust the totality of impacts derived from ROM, they do illuminate the pathway through which livelihood impacts are achieved. The assessment team did observe that not all projects are equally successful in creating the livelihood outcomes from rights programming, and several projects seemed too focused on awareness of rights rather than the exercise of rights. Nonetheless, this MJF program has achieved a significant magnitude of impact on the lives of the poor and excluded.

## **4.2 Child Protection**

The child protection and development program theme has two strategic vectors of action. One is to create an awareness of children's rights as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and to provide the environment in which these rights can be exercised. This vector supports projects that focus upon children and children groups and upon the duty-bearers responsible for providing basic services to children. The program thus has a strong advocacy arm with substantial involvement of the stakeholder community, including factory owners, government service staff, elected-bodies, and the media. The second vector of activity focuses on child development through the provisioning of poor, marginalized children with expanded capabilities.

Half the population of Bangladesh is under 18 years of age, and children constitute around 12 percent of the workforce. The defining age of children varies nationally depending on the context; but draft child labor legislation sets age limits of 12 for light work and 18 for hazardous work. One area of concern is the entry of young girls into the sex trade. It is estimated that 13,000 children are sex workers and 20,000 children a year are born to sex workers in the registered brothels in the country. The trafficking of children is also widespread (e.g. to India) but the numbers are difficult to document. In addition, there are large numbers of street children either abandoned, homeless, or abused living in the major urban centers. Dhaka alone is estimated to have over 200,000 such children, exposed to exploitation, oppression, drug use, and sex trafficking.

The current program in child protection and development supports 12 NGO partners directly and over 50 sub-partners indirectly. Seven of these projects target children engaged in hazardous work. In the ultrapoor households, it is common for children to begin work at an early age in order to support the family, thus forsaking any opportunity for study. The types of jobs available to young children, 8-15 years old, often subject them to physical hazards. The most serious forms of child labor are found in the stone-crushing industry in the Northwest where children either break stones with hammers or carry stones to crushing machines where they are exposed to dust, flying particles, and moving machine parts; in motor garages where they work in poorly ventilated environments with toxic fumes; in cigarette production (*bidi*) where toxic substances are used in the manufacturing process; in jewelry shops where acid is commonly used for cleaning; and in welding shops where children are susceptible to eye damage and burns. Other projects focus on young children who work as domestic help in homes and are often subjected to oppressive living conditions with no opportunity for education. One NGO works with street children in Dhaka to provide protection and education; while another partner NGO targets child victims of sexual abuse, one of the most "invisible" groups in society. Finally, other MJF-funded projects provide specific life skills training that promote an awareness of rights (particularly for girls), civic and cultural orientations to teach children about citizenship and pride, and recreational opportunities to enhance the experience of youth. Overall, several hundred thousand children around the country are reached directly or indirectly through this program.

There is compelling evidence worldwide that investment in children, their education, and the quality of their childhood has strong livelihood benefits for the individual children, households, and for society in general (e.g. reduction in crime rate, social protection costs). Unfortunately these benefits are realized over the long term and are difficult to measure at the time of the intervention. The MJF projects target impacts that will expand the agency and access of young people, and several have a strong gender component, designed to break the traditional constraints on girls (restricted mobility, early marriage, violence, etc.). Two specific projects can be cited to demonstrate how these access and agency impacts are achieved.

The implementing partner Eco-Social Development Organization (ESDO) has initiated a campaign in the impoverished northwest region of Bangladesh to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. Thakurgaon district is a national producer of stone aggregate for construction, and this has been a sector of ready employment for children. With MJF support, ESDO first developed its approach in Tetulia upazilla where it succeeded in the total removal of children from hazardous work; now through the formation of a child protection network of NGOs and stakeholders (CLEAN), eight districts in the northwest have been included in this effort. In Tetulia, the project targeted 1900 children, aged 5-17, for removal from hazardous employment. The children who were under 14 years of age were “mainstreamed” into the formal educational system. The assessment team met with several groups of these children, who appear profoundly grateful for the chance to leave the stone fields and pursue their education. Since these children previously contributed vital income to the household welfare, the project also has a component of IGA skills-training for the parents that provides them with alternative employment opportunities and loans them funds to use towards start-up costs. For those children over 14 years, the project has sought to sign agreements with employers to remove the children from hazardous tasks and environments and to provide them the opportunity for non-formal education. These agreements have also resulted in improvements in wages for these children. ESDO also operates 15 recreation centers where children can meet for play, cultural learning, and access to basic health care.



*Children removed from hazardous workplaces, now enrolled in the formal education system*

One of the signature elements of this approach has been the effective use of the stakeholder community. The assessment team met with several stakeholder groups that included industry (stone aggregate) representatives, UP members, school leaders, government service providers, other NGO staff, and journalists. In addition, the formation of the CLEAN network with 40 other organizations has created a wide public

awareness of the unacceptability of hazardous child labor. The goal of the network is to eliminate all hazardous child labor from the region and to mainstream children into educational and life skill trajectories. The multi-sited nature of this intervention package— not only targeting individual children in danger, but also addressing the needs of their parents and creating a strong advocacy campaign with widespread public participation—has made this project particularly effective in improving the welfare of children and expanding their capabilities through agency and access impacts. This project has produced a significant; albeit unmeasured, level of spillover impacts as other employers (not targeted by the project) begin to increase their awareness of the rights of children.

A second project visited by the assessment team is managed by the implementing partner, Aparajeyo-Bangladesh (AB) and focuses on the street children of Dhaka. This project seeks to reach nearly 25,000 children through different strategic interventions. The key element of the AB approach is to create a local safe environment through a network of drop-in safe havens for street children located throughout larger Dhaka. Here the homeless children are able to gain access to informal education and to life skills-building, as well as cultivate a sense of solidarity and peer support. The project also provides legal aid for street children and over three hundred children were released from police stations. Over 7,000 children have been enrolled in informal classes, and 500 children are in vocational schools learning marketable skills. More than 200 children have already been placed in steady jobs. In addition, nearly 500 children have been reunited with their families.

AB staff provides awareness training about children's rights and the dangers of drug use and HIV/AIDS to solidarity groups of children, as well as connecting them to health care facilities. As importantly, the project seeks to instill a sense of hope and aspiration in children and to assure them of their own value to society. As part of an innovative peer-based strategy, the project trains groups of street children to contact other homeless children to make them aware of the benefits of the project and to share the messages about rights, safety, and health. There are 75 trained peers seeking out and working with other children throughout the city which significantly increases the spillover impacts of the project. At the advocacy level, AB has reached agreements with the police authorities and with social services agencies to respect the rights of children and with community organizations (like mosque committees) to expand awareness of the plight of street children. The project has also used the media to exposure the issue of street children and to the public support.

The child protection program has generated significant impacts for the well-being of individual children and for their families in some cases. The magnitude of these impacts, however, is difficult to measure directly and will likely be manifest later in the life cycle, as the benefits of education are fully realized. The benefit to society of increasing the agency, access, and aspirations of its youth is unassailable both from an economic and a moral perspective, and there are likely clear reductions in social costs by protecting children from an environment of danger and crime. The major challenge with regard to MJF is to assure that the impacts are sustainable or, perhaps better said, "actionable" in

the futures of these children. Not all the NGO partners distinguish between the *awareness* of rights and the *exercise* of rights, and it is the latter that generates impacts. The two examples provided here—and several others that were reviewed—do make this transition from rights awareness to rights action, but this distinction should be a regular emphasis of the program to ensure the long-term impact of child protection.

### **4.3 Violence Against Women (VAW)**

The Violence Against Women programmatic theme is MJF's most extensive one in terms of reach and beneficiary population. This program funds 20 NGO projects directly (and 75 partners indirectly), operating in 45 districts and 179 upazillas. The targeted population is estimated at 1.6 million women. Violence against women has been a center stage national issue for many years and much progress has been made at the policy level and at the community level. Despite this positive trend, VAW remains endemic in the society and in the culture. Violence is intimately related to the social status of women, which is manifest in male-female relationships, the cultural rules governing marriage, the restricted social and economic mobility of women, and their general "invisibility" in public affairs.

The strategic approach common to all the MJF implementing partners generally consists of four key components. The first component promotes the demand side by enhancing the local awareness of women's basic rights to safety and participation in public life. These interventions target the women themselves as well as the perpetrators of violence, such as husbands, mothers-in-law, and other family members. To achieve this awareness goal, most of the projects organize committees at the village level to disseminate the message that all forms of violence against women are unacceptable. In some project interventions, the victims of violence are identified and support groups are formed. The second component addresses the role of duty-bearers and their responsibility to eliminate such violence. These interventions are designed to assure that violence perpetrators are identified and that the force of the law is applied. The NGO partners work with police stations to sensitize the police force and insist upon prompt response to violence against women cases; they also work with local village court and *salish* institutions to assure that cases involving the status of women—such as domestic violence against women, divorce, dowry, dower payments, polygamy, early marriage, etc.—are given appropriate attention and resolved. Under this component, the NGOs also collaborate with hospitals and health services to assure that victims of violence are adequately treated and that women have access to appropriate reproductive health care. In effect, if the first component emphasizes the recognition and the demand for rights, the second component provides the mechanisms for the exercise of those rights.

### **Bithi: A Child Marriage Frustrated**

“Bithi”<sup>\*</sup> is a 13 year old student in Chirir Bandar in Bogra district. Her family arranged her wedding with her cousin who is a factory worker near Dhaka. The family wanted to keep it as a family affair and did not tell others. In Bithi’s own words, “I was awakened up at night and was given a nose ring to wear...that was my wedding! I protested and I said ‘I don’t want to marry now’ but who listens, so I tried to escape from home.” Bithi did flee home and came for shelter to the home of a (NGO) group member, who had been trying to stop child marriages. The group member arranged a place to stay with one of her friends and sought help from government officials. One group member said “...helping others who need it is a virtuous thing, but it is not always easy. Before joining this group we would have never had the courage to do something like this, we would have just sent her back thinking ‘hard luck, dear, you will get used to being married,’ but now we feel very different and take action without hesitation. We have kept Bithi for nearly a month and we are not letting her go without a positive solution. She wants to study and we feel we will help her to achieve her goals...now we just await the solution. But our ultimate objective is to eliminate violence against women, child marriages, and polygamy from our village.

<sup>\*</sup>To respect her privacy, her name has been changed for this case study.

The third component focuses more on strategies to address the root causes of violence, particularly the inferior status of women. Under this component, the NGO partners have organized community-based groups to promote women’s public participation and to increase their economic role in the households. One innovative intervention in this regard focuses on husband-wife relationships and promotes one common family meal per day in which all members of the household are present. The sharing of a common meal carries the symbolic value of exercising equality in the home and giving husband and wife an opportunity for focused communication. Other interventions include skills-training and IGA activities among women’s groups that expand women’s role in the household. The fourth component focuses on the policy dimension and seeks to gain public and legal support for VAW objectives at the national level. MJF and its partners participate in several initiatives at the policy level including the full ratification of the CEDAW (the UN Commission on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) by Government of Bangladesh. MJF has also joined an advocacy effort to pass national domestic violence legislation. As part of this structural approach to domestic violence, MJF contracted two research studies on the judicial precedents for domestic violence against women—one which documents all landmark judgments since Liberation and another which assesses the current status of cases before the national supreme court.

The poverty impacts of these VAW programming interventions are difficult to quantify and attribute direct program causality. Despite this, there is little doubt that public awareness regarding VAW has increased at all levels, that many villages and towns now have community support structures that provide for both prevention and response, that public institutions—such as the police, the courts, and the hospitals—are more responsive, and that women play a public and economic role in local society.

The MJF management has attempted to estimate the magnitude of this impact by combining the reported achievements of the implementing partners. For example, MJF concludes that 40 percent of the 1.6 million women beneficiaries have participated in project activities related to domestic violence prevention, to the demand for rights recognition, for access to equal wages (e.g. for agriculture, road construction); 30 percent of the beneficiaries have participated in local court or salish or have worked to prevent early marriage, dowry, and the other manifestations of women's lower status; 20 percent have participated in IGA and other economic activities; and over 2500 community-based organizations have emerged as a support structure against domestic violence. In addition, hundreds of hospitals, union parishads, and police stations have become active in VAW response.

In terms of the conceptual framework presented in this report, the interventions in the VAW program are directed at agency impacts to the extent that they expand women's decision making, increase their mobility, and remove such binding constraints as early marriage. In fact, during the last year, some 3000 girls were prevented from early marriage, 1500 girls re-enrolled in school with the support of a stipend, nearly 1000 marriages occurred with dowry, and more than 2000 women entrepreneurs increased monthly household revenues—all impacts reported as outcomes of project activities. With regard to access impacts, some 600 women received their VGD cards last year. The major impacts, however, seem to be found in terms of status. Last year, partners reported that 4500 women participated on salish courts in which over 600 cases were resolved, and police have begun to respond rapidly and comprehensively to cases of violence. Perhaps as a result of increased status and reduced violence, a drop of 60 percent in female suicide rates was reported by program management in the project areas.

The assessment team did have the opportunity to visit several VAW projects—mostly in the northwest region (with NGO partners Uddog and Polli Sree). These projects follow the strategy outlined above; there is a strong effort to make local communities aware of women's rights through the formation of groups and the dissemination of messages. At the same time, these partners work to form coalitions of stakeholders and duty-bearers at the union and upazilla levels. The team interviewed these groups as well as police representatives who handle violence against women cases. The visits to beneficiaries and duty-bearers revealed a strong awareness of the unacceptability of VAW and the need for strong community support structures. Polli Sree reported for example that out of 429 documented cases of VAW last year, 45 percent went through a court process and were decided. Despite these successes, the partners have not attempted to systematically measure the well-being impacts of these outcomes.

#### **4.4 Workers' Rights**

The Workers' Rights program has a straightforward and important strategy—to strengthen and apply the existing labor laws that protect the interests of the nation's labor force. There are approximately 50 million workers in Bangladesh, with 80 percent in the informal labor market. The country's legal structure also lays claim to a corpus of labor legislation and a judicial structure that guarantee access to employment, a secure and safe

work environment, and equal and just wages. Nonetheless, in the reality of both the formal and informal labor sector, these laws are either unknown or purposely ignored by both employers and government representatives responsible for their application. Manusher Jonno Foundation has taken a national leadership position in defending workers' rights, raising awareness of existing laws, and strengthening the legal protection where necessary.

Under this program, MJF supports 11 NGO partners who directly or indirectly reach 350,000 workers and their families. The program partners have targeted the ready made garment industry where over 2.5 million workers are employed (90 percent female), the shrimp and fish processing sector, which predominantly employs women, the export processing zones with 130,000 workers, again mostly female, the rice milling plants, where 500,000 workers are employed, and tea garden workers. In the informal sector, the program targets self-employed female entrepreneurs connected to the garment industry or to handicraft production (where they are paid piecework), agricultural workers, and domestic workers.

The overall program implementation strategy is focused at four levels. First, most of the NGOs carry out organizational activities directly with the workers at home or at the factory. These demand side interventions are designed to spread awareness of workers' rights and existing legislation as it applies to the daily lives of the project beneficiaries (e.g. equal salary for men and women, workplace safety). A second node of activity is the formal trade union sector, and the project partners support union efforts to organize the workers so they can make collective demands. At a third level, some partners work with the industry representatives and factory owners in order to negotiate agreements on worker issues. Finally, MJF has been very active at the national level in developing legislation that reinforces worker protection. Recently new legislation has improved worker access to disability compensation in the case of job-related accident or death.

The impacts of the Workers' Rights program are most pronounced when a "precedent" is set in the formal employment sector or when industry wide protections are adopted. These outcomes result in strong structural impacts that benefit a large segment of the work force. In the shrimp processing sector, for example, the demands of a group of female employees led to a doubling of pay from Tk. 30 to Tk. 60 per five hour work period. These benefits accrue not only to the project beneficiaries but to all the female workers in the factory. Similar impacts have been documented with regard to working conditions, where 33 shrimp processors have agreed to introduce three eight-hour shifts rather than two 12-hour shifts.

### **A Woman in Shrimp Processing**

“Rojina” began as a shrimp factory worker when she was about seven years old. On some days she was paid next to nothing; on less fortunate days, she indeed received nothing. She worked in different factories wherever and whenever she could. “One day I was told by one factory that I will get Tk300 for one week’s wage, but was given only Tk50...my hands were raw and bleeding, and I was angry. I shouted at the man who was paying me, and I lost my job. My older sister was also a factory worker and she protested too...we both lost our jobs even though she was older and had experience.” Rojina grew into adulthood as a factory worker. She got married and became pregnant, but lost her husband to another woman. She had to continue working throughout her pregnancy and was without an income after the child arrived. When she returned to work as a single mother, she was not allowed to feed her baby during working hours. “I would feel pain with milk and my baby cried desperately out for hunger, but I could not feed her...One day my baby was very sick and I arrived late at work. I was again let go.” Rojina joined the partner NGO program, and she feels that it changed her life in many ways. “I know how to negotiate and protest when things don’t work fairly. I advise my husband and brothers who come to me because I have learnt a great deal about the workers’ rights and the malik’s responsibilities...I won’t accept if something is not right.” Rojiina is now remarried and has another child. Unfortunately, her first child died from an accident, and she is now on leave without pay. She has been thinking about working for daily wages, for this will give her more time with her child. “I may not work as a shrimp worker any more, but I want to see trade union, and I will do anything to make that happen.”

In several cases, where it was determined that factories had wrongly dismissed employees or had held back wages from employees who resigned, the actions of the partner NGOs resulted in restitution for groups of ex-employees. In one RMG case, the factory settled with 76 workers and paid back wages worth 2.6 lakh. The outcome of these cases has encouraged the sector to change its dismissal policies. The assessment team also identified significant spillover effects in the shrimp processing sector. In one case, the husband of a female worker beneficiary was inspired to initiate similar demands to his factory management.

MJF, through its partners had advocated for changes in the national minimum wage, which resulted in an increase to Tk. 1500 per month in 2007. More than 13 million unskilled workers are estimated to have benefited from this outcome. Similarly, an increase in the minimum wage for RMG class-7 workers to Tk. 1662 per month has raised the salaries of 2 million workers. Policies that allow for maternity leave have been adopted throughout the industry, and several factories offer daycare facilities for children of female workers.

In sum, worker exploitation has many causes, including the lack of education, precarious living conditions, and little understanding of the protection available under the law. The efforts of the MJF partnership in this program have yielded significant impacts through systematic awareness-raising and the support of workers rights. There is rich ground for improvement in worker wages, equity for women, and working conditions that enhance human dignity, and the program has demonstrated measurable progress. The greatest

potential of the program lies in its strategic ability to act as mediator and negotiator between the different stakeholders (workers, trade unions, factory owners) and at the same time to pressure and influence national labor legislation. This tactical combination of multi-scaled interventions results in structural impacts of great substance.

#### **4.5 Access to Justice, Government Performance Monitoring, and Rights to Information**

As stated above, governance programming pervades all the other programmatic areas, but there are several programmatic themes that the assessment team bundled under the governance label. The main purpose of MJF governance programming is to increase the responsiveness, transparency and accountability of locally-elected bodies to the rights and needs of their constituencies; to build strong local institutions of justice available to the poor and excluded; and to introduce local mechanisms to monitor violations of rights and bring them to light. The ultrapoor commonly face situations of injustice regarding access to resources and services. Women are particularly vulnerable to victimization and oppression because of their status in society. In the event of such injustice or any local dispute (e.g. over land), the poor have little recourse to justice either because local level institutions are not available and active or because of intimidation. Although the union parishad has the authority and responsibility to maintain a village level court to resolve disputes, the court is seldom constituted.

To achieve its goals, the program supports NGO partners who reinforce and reinvigorate local village courts and the traditional salish courts in order for the poor to have a place to seek resolution of disputes (land grabbing, mortgaging, cattle damage, etc.) and other kinds of grievances (violence, divorce, dower, dowry, petty theft, etc.). MJF estimates that nearly 12,000 disputes have been resolved under this program, benefiting 30,000 poor people at a monetary value of nearly 7 crore taka (Tk. 68 million). Another project under this program encourages the poor to access the government legal aid fund to which they have rightful access but which is seldom utilized. The project particularly focuses on poor women and such issues as divorce, alimony, and inheritance.

Another innovative project carried out by BELA, a partner NGO, promotes the institutionalization of environmental justice—the (ab)use of natural resources to the specific disadvantage of the poor. As in other areas of governance, environmental laws are on the books but are not adequately enforced. Thus the project objective is to create awareness of the concept of environmental justice, inform people about the law, identify violations of the law, and seek redress for people’s grievances. Some sixty cases have been initiated in six regions of the country, and they involve the disposal of toxic pollutants in areas populated by the poor, land use that creates environment risk (e.g. hill slides, flooding), the location of polluting factories, and so forth.

A final access to justice project addresses children specifically. This juvenile justice initiative seeks to implement the Children’s Act of 1974, which prohibits the jailing of children. The implementation strategy of this project is to create a widespread advocacy

movement through the enlisting of local institutions to prevent children from imprisonment and to remove those who have already been incarcerated.

The non-material impacts of the MJF justice program are difficult to measure, but it implies an increase in confidence of the poor in local justice. Justice security is acknowledged as one of the capabilities that lead to enhanced well-being, and there is solid evidence that these access projects have made the public recording of grievances more commonplace among the poor. Increased efficiency of local justice systems also serves as a disincentive to the recurrence of such violations of rights. Thus, although impacts are not amenable to quantification, they appear to be significant in a society in which injustice has held rein for so long.

The Governance Performance Monitoring (GMP) component of the MJF governance program supported seven NGO projects (and nine NGO partners) during the first phase of funding. These projects are designed to address a stark local reality: the poor consider government services to be the domain of the privileged and not the right of the citizen—regardless of status. These projects support access to such public service areas as primary education, agricultural extension, safety net entitlements, and health services, especially reproductive health. The implementation strategies focus on stimulating a demand for these rights through awareness campaigns and, in the case of education, working with primary school children; promoting a message of citizen rights with service providers; and mobilizing advocacy and policy campaigns through the creation of client associations, providers associations, national charters, and national policy. Another project directly works with locally-elected bodies to incorporate the public in the decision making process regarding the development of the local budget, tax collection, and the expenditure of tax monies.

One of the high potential and innovative initiatives under the governance programming of MJF is called “rights to information” (RTI). The overall strategy of this program focus is to expand the flow of information to poor people in a way that is accessible and immediately relevant to people’s lives. The MJF-supported project, Shamunnay, has adopted a strategic approach to reduce the level of “economic illiteracy” in the country and to make the budget (and the constitution) accessible to poor people. This project works through local level groups and schools as well as through a media-intensive national platform to enable local participation in the debate and the development of the national budget. The intent of the project is to influence the budget toward a more pro-poor stance by expanding the participation of the poor in the process. A second project, Abolombon, uses internet and communication capabilities to provide an innovative information source to poor people. It has created a website information referral service for a wide range of services, including entitlement access, agricultural technology, educational opportunities, etc. The project also includes a referral “hot line” that people can contact via mobile phone, and for those without access to internet or phone, the project provides an “informediary,” or a geographical point where person to person contact is available. A third project under RTI is a mobile library that assures access to written materials. Besides bringing written and audio materials to households, the project

in effect creates an environment of informal learning by forming book clubs and other interest learning groups.

The RTI initiative is one of the most promising of the governance program. The assessment team sees the democratization of information as one of the basic building blocks for rights programming—one that will yield transformational impacts through time. The elite in Bangladeshi society control not only material resources, but also access to information and knowledge. The constrained access to knowledge creates a rigid societal structure with little socio-economic mobility and creates an environment for the systemic violation of human rights. The interventions that disseminate the access to knowledge are integral to livelihood improvement and poverty reduction.

#### **4.6 Chittagong Hill Tracts and Capacity Development**

From the MJF perspective, the populations of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) present a unique set of problems and require a more adaptive programming approach. The region has less than one million inhabitants, more than half of which are divided among 11 indigenous groups each with a distinct language and culture. The complex indigenous fabric of CHT society is reflected in the mixture of traditional and government institutions that determine access to resources and services. The CHT is also characterized by armed conflict that was only formally resolved in 1997. The settlement of traditional indigenous lands by Bangalee families, part of a government policy of colonization after Liberation, has created ethnic tensions over land access. The indigenous peoples practice a slash and burn agricultural livelihood (called *jum*), which requires access to significantly larger tracts of land than are actually cultivated in any year. The effect of these historical and cultural factors is a population that has languished outside the mainstream of society, with little access to government services, few schools for their children, and living in extreme poverty.

The MJF-funded program has been built around a carefully designed strategy based on a comprehensive assessment of the CHT context. There are 12 NGO partners in CHT who work in 15 upazillas and reach an estimated 350,000 beneficiaries. This is the only MJF-supported program that has an asset transfer component, which is justified by the need to provide basic economic assistance to local agricultural livelihoods and to diversify income generating activities. The agricultural interventions include inputs and training for farmers, the formation of farmer groups, and improved linkages with the agricultural service providers. This component also works to improve the productivity and sustainability of the traditional *jum* (swidden) agriculture. Another program component addresses the need for primary education for (mostly) indigenous children in remote and inaccessible regions; NGO partners have helped supported almost 200 schools and have worked to enhance the effectiveness of more than 700 local school management committees. Other NGO partners address issues of health care and seek to expand access to health; and other projects promote an understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage through work with traditional leaders and UP members.

One of the challenges with the CHT program component has been the uneven capacity of the NGO partners in the region. The history of conflict and institutional inconsistency in the region has limited the number of NGOs relative to the other parts of Bangladesh, and many of the partners are young organizations. For this reason, the CHT is clustered with the Capacity Development program focus in MJF. Capacity Development, like Governance, is a crosscutting theme, and MJF staff provide skill-building support to all the partners as needed. Nonetheless, the need is particularly high in the CHT, which does not have an NGO tradition of development delivery services.

In effect, the strategy of MJF in the CHT is to promote the integration of the region and its socially isolated and geographically remote population into larger society. Particularly the indigenous groups that are subject to government policies that they do not comprehend and which prohibit the practice of their traditional livelihoods and culture. The CHT program is very sophisticated in design and seeks to assure these groups of the rights of citizenship and to organize their voices in critical service areas such as education and health. At the same time, the program directs its efforts to the government service providers who have in the past ignored their responsibilities to these marginalized citizens. Conflicts over land and land use are very complex in this region, and it requires concerted effort to institutionalize the peaceful solutions outlined in the peace accord. The livelihood impacts of the CHT program are significant, and they are manifest through improvements in agency, access, and status.

## ***5.0 A Quantitative Survey of Impacts: Results***

As stated above, the quantitative survey was conducted in the northwest and southwest of Bangladesh over a period of two weeks. The survey generated basic information on the demographic structure of the household and on two areas of potential program impact. One was the economic status of the household, including assets, income streams, and allocation strategies; the second was the awareness and exercise of rights, which is the core thrust of many program interventions. It is, of course, difficult to directly capture the concept of “rights in action”, so a set of proxy variables associated with the practice of citizen rights—access to and use of services, participation in public fora, and mobility (especially for women)—was developed. For purposes of analysis, three household composite indices were constructed to assess the overall human capital status, the livelihood economic status, and the level of rights awareness/action. The calculation of these composite variables was made by summing binary values for the component variables, then identifying three threshold values for each variable (good, moderate, poor). Details for the creation of these composite indices are found in Appendix A.

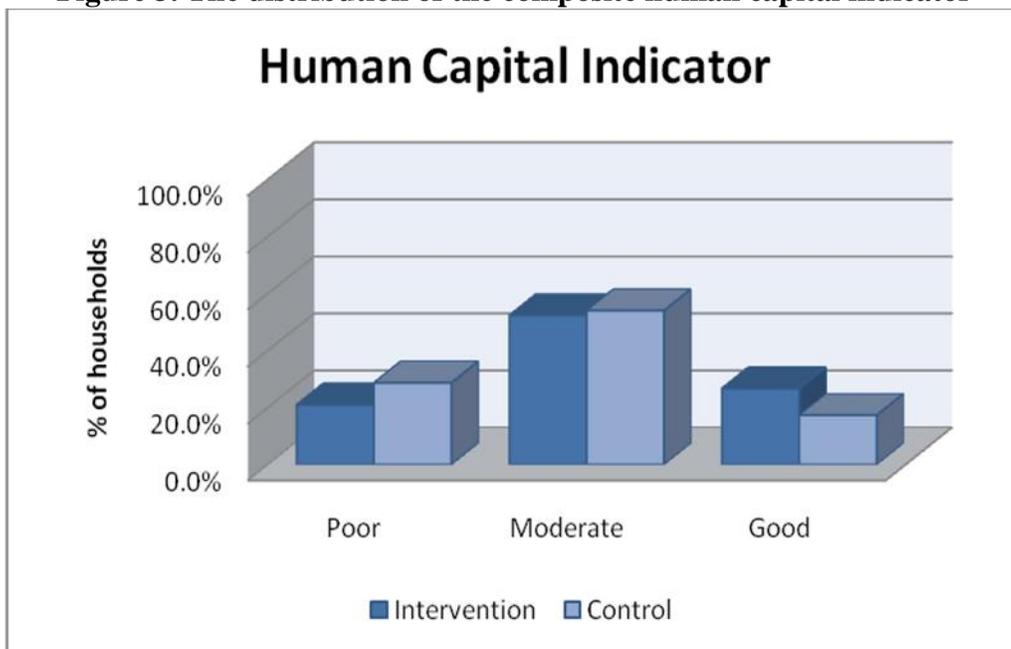
### **5.1 Livelihood Patterns for Beneficiary and Control Groups**

The results from the field visit (the qualitative component) revealed the direct impacts on human capabilities—increased agency (opportunity), greater access to entitlements, and improved status. The question of interest for the survey was whether over a 3-5 year period changes in agency, access, and status had produced any perceivable and measurable impact on a set of livelihood variables, if a random sample of beneficiaries

was drawn and compared to a random sample of non-beneficiaries. The three program themes covered by the survey all promoted interventions in the three impact areas (agency, access, and status), as documented in the qualitative interviews and focus groups. The design of the survey hypothesized significant differences in the composite variables between beneficiaries and their non-participating neighbors under the assumptions that enough time had elapsed to allow the expanded rights to be “translated” into concrete action (i.e. an ultrapoor woman actually gets a VGD card) and that the populations of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries were not significantly different to begin with.

There are no significant differences in the demographic characteristics of the intervention and control groups. Both have around five members per household (intervention: 4.8 and control: 4.7), and the sex ratio and the age structure of both groups are identical. With regard to human capital characteristics, illness rates are similar for both groups, although half the control group considered their health care “inadequate” while only a third of the intervention group did so. For both groups, educational attainment is concentrated at the primary level, and there was a slightly higher rate of illiteracy in the control group. On the other hand, 57 percent of the intervention group considered current access to schooling adequate, while only 36 percent of the control group provided this response.

**Figure 3. The distribution of the composite human capital indicator**



The human capital proxy variable (a composite of female education, health status, and female occupation) did not identify robust differences between the two groups, as shown in Figure 3. While there are slightly more intervention households in the favorable category and slightly fewer in the poor one, these differences are not of a magnitude to permit interpretation of impact.

There are major differences between the two groups, however, in a set of income and asset variables. The team calculated a wealth ranking measure based on per capita income levels and divided the sample into three income groups—the extreme, moderate, and non-poor.<sup>6</sup> Using the income threshold levels, Table 2 demonstrates that the intervention group is significantly less poor than the control group. For the latter, more than 20 percent of the households are situated in the extreme poor category (less than Tk. 643 per capita per month), while only eleven percent of the beneficiary group are classified as extreme poor. At the other end, more than half the beneficiary group is classified as non-poor (above Tk. 1071 per capita per month) compared to 32 percent of the control group. In monetary terms, the average monthly income level for the intervention group was about Tk. 300 higher, a difference that is statistically significant.

**Table 2. Classification of the survey sample by income group**

Category	Intervention		Control	
	No.	%	No.	%
Extreme Poor	33	11.0	68	22.7
Moderate Poor	110	36.7	135	45.0
Non Poor	157	52.3	97	32.3

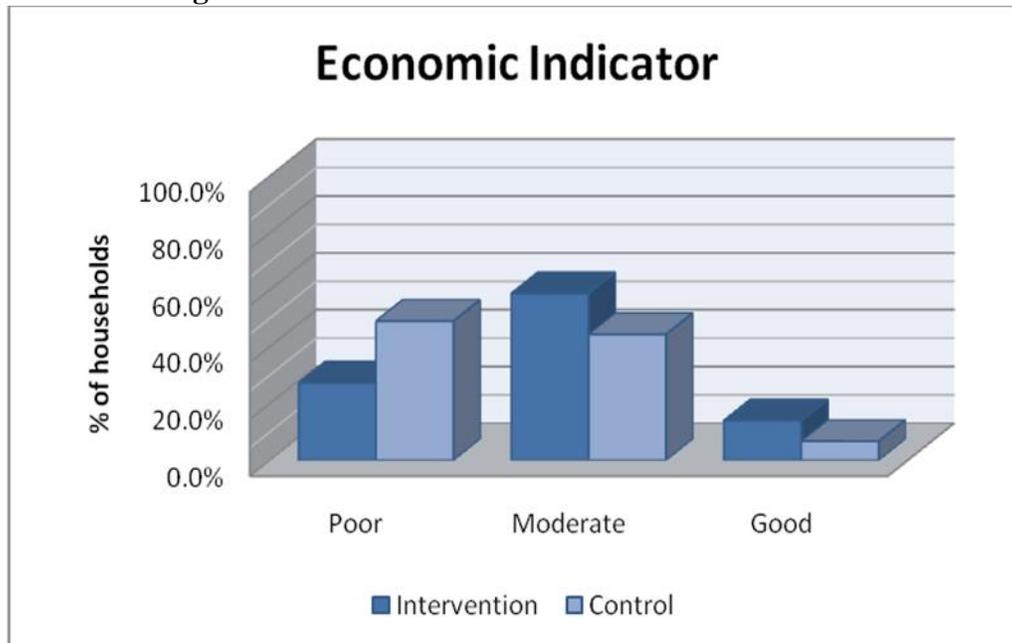
The major household occupational differences between the two groups centered on agricultural and non-agricultural labor. Of the total labor pool available to households (all workers), more than twice as many members of intervention households were engaged in agricultural production than control group members; although for those households with land, the difference in size of landholdings was insignificant. Twice as many members from the control group worked as agricultural labor, and twice as many intervention household members were employed in the non-agricultural sector. The vast majority of both groups owned their own homes and the quality of the dwelling was not significantly different; however, nearly twice as many intervention households had water sealed latrines and access to their own tube wells for drinking water. In terms of food security, nearly 80 percent of the intervention group enjoyed two full meals over at least 10 months of the previous year, while 60 percent of the control group claimed a similar level of food security.

The composite economic variable was comprised not only of income, but also assets (land, animals, cell phone, housing, latrine, and credit). The distribution pattern across the three categories (poor, moderate, and good) significantly favors the beneficiary group. More than half the control group is situated in the poor category, compared to 27 percent of the beneficiary group; while significantly more of the beneficiary households are found in the moderate (59 percent) and good (14 percent) groups. Only seven percent of the control households are classified as good for this composite index. These results are illustrated in Figure 4.

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<sup>6</sup> These categories are based on the income thresholds presented in the GoB (2007) publication of the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES). The HIE survey was conducted in 2005 and the income thresholds in this report have been adjusted to account for inflation.

**Figure 4. The distribution of the economic indicator**

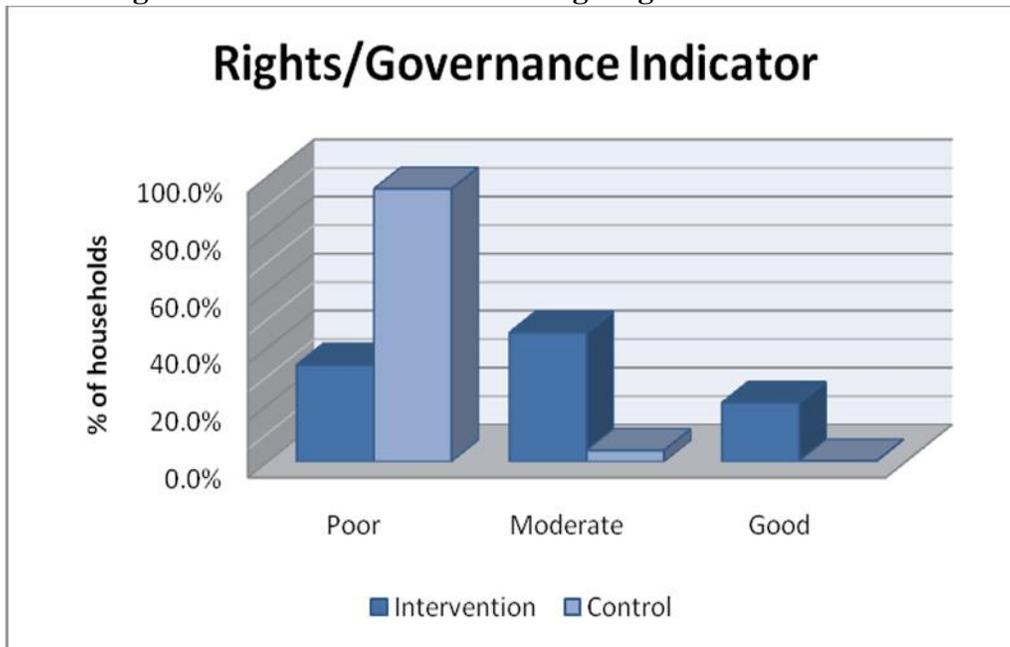


With regards to rights and governance, the survey sought to determine if households were aware of their rights to services and if they participated or actually used these services, such as government health care. There were striking differences between the groups in awareness of rights—97 percent of the intervention group compared to 39 percent of the control households claimed awareness of basic rights. Consistent with this finding, the intervention group was much more active in seeking out services, particularly government health services, technical support (agricultural extension, land office), microcredit, safety net entitlements, local justice institutions (court and salish), and the union parishad and upazilla complex. Among the intervention households, there was also a higher rate of success in the actual obtention of these services, particularly from the land office, safety net entitlements, UP services, and court response.

It is important to note that intervention households reported a more “progressive” status for female members. There were fewer accounts of domestic violence (28 percent of the control households and 18 percent of the intervention households), more female participation in the economic affairs and decision making of the household, and more mobility as measured by the ability to go to market or to the health complex unaccompanied by the husband or other male relative. Women in the intervention households were more likely to state that they felt respected.

A composite rights/governance proxy variable was created based on access to services, participation in collective action, access to safety net entitlements, and stated awareness of basic human rights. The distribution of the sample across the three values (good, moderate, and poor) is depicted in Figure 5. The differences are stark. While 20 percent of the beneficiary households scored “good” in this composite index, 96 percent of the control households were in the “poor” group.

**Figure 5. The distribution of the rights/governance indicator**



The interpretation of these results suggests that while the households in the two groups are quite similar with regard to basic demographic and human capital characteristics, the distributional patterns diverge significantly when the economic and the rights profiles are considered. It appears easily defensible to maintain that the rights-based programming is having an impact on households. In addition, these differences in the exercise of rights (through agency, access, and status) seem to be reflected in the economic well-being of the households. This interpretation, of course, does require a certain caveat that derives from the absence of a baseline standard—it is possible that the partner NGOs do not always target the poorest segments of the population.<sup>7</sup> If the underlying beneficiary groups were selected from non-poor community members, then the economic impacts documented here could be unrelated to programming interventions. The qualitative assessment, however, suggests otherwise. In the case of the southwest region, the beneficiaries in the survey come from communities where the NGO has facilitated access to khas land, and this economic difference would be captured in the survey instrument. In general, the qualitative evidence does support the conclusion that economic well-being impacts have resulted from rights based programming.

## **5.2 Relationship Between Economic Impacts and Rights/Governance**

To further test the strength of association between economic and rights/governance outcomes, a chi-square cross-tabulation was run with the intervention and control groups separately and then with the entire sample of 600 households. The results of this analytical step showed that the distribution of households across the six possible cells (poor, moderate, and good for each indicator) would not have occurred randomly—that

<sup>7</sup> For example, the assessment team identified MJF beneficiaries, such as some people with disabilities, who are non-poor but suffer social discrimination.

is, there is a statistical association between a rights score and a livelihood score even for those with no exposure to the intervention package. Specifically, for the entire sample, 48 percent of the households that scored low for the rights/governance index also scored low for the economic index. As the awareness of rights and access to services (i.e. the rights/governance composite) increase, the percentage of households in the low economic category decreases. Those with good rights scores tend to cluster in the moderate and good economic categories. These results are even clearer for the beneficiary sample. This analysis permits the conclusion that with effective rights and governance outcomes, economic well-being tends to improve.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, the survey analysis suggests that beneficiaries display differences in economic well-being and in rights/governance awareness and action. Attributing these differences to the efforts of MJF and its network of partners is difficult without a baseline. While this issue is valid, the results of the qualitative assessment provide strong evidence of program impact. It is true that there are many NGOs operating throughout the country and that broad background changes are occurring in society which support greater awareness of rights. It may not be possible to strictly assign level impact to MJF and partner efforts, but the assessment team is confident that the MJF program, because of its scope and magnitude, has indeed had an influence on successful rights programming.

## **6.0 Overall Findings of the Assessment**

It is necessary to reiterate that this assessment did not cover the entire range of MJF activities nor did it contact the complete network of partners. Rather, under time and resource constraints, the assessment conducted a “spot check” of activities in an effort to capture the range of activities and impacts. Nonetheless, based on both the qualitative and quantitative evidence, the assessment team believes that there is a strong case for the livelihood impacts of rights and governance programming under the current MJF approach. It is possible to assert that Manusher Jonno Foundation supports NGO partners and activities that do make a difference in the lives of the poor and excluded. The team has sought to situate its findings in a conceptual rights based framework that explicitly recognizes how rights and governance are translated into palpable and transforming impacts. The strengths of the approach can be summarized as follows:

- The most effective aspect of the MJF approach to human rights and governance programming has been its multi-sited operational strategy in each programmatic area. The concurrent presence of MJF partners on the factory floor, in the village, at the union parishad, in government offices, in the media, and in the halls of Parliament demonstrates itself to have the greatest sustainable impact on poverty and exclusion over time. This unique strength of MJF lies in its ability to extract the interactive multiplier value of advocacy and intervention, of grassroots action and policy influence.

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<sup>8</sup> Again, the caveat is necessary: it is possible but not likely that an advantageous economic situation results in a better awareness of rights and access to services, but this causal directionality is not supported by the qualitative evidence.

- Not all impacts are realized on a similar timeframe or scale. Some impacts, such as access to the entitlements of safety net programs and the obtention of titles to khas land, are direct and immediate—and easily measured. The livelihood benefit of an education, however, will present itself to the individual child only in time and thus is not easily quantified. On the other hand, the change in the minimum wage law or formal recognition of dalit dignity and place in society generates impacts at a national level with thousands of beneficiaries. MJF management understands this outcome complexity and seeks to diversify its programming accordingly.
- The capacity building investment of MJF also underlies its particular effectiveness in human rights programming. MJF is in the business of the delivery of development services...to a complex set of sectors, stakeholders, and beneficiaries. Not all the MJF partnership shares the same level of experience or capacity, and MJF has made great progress in providing its partners the capacity support needed on both the technical, administrative, and financial side. Such improvement in national NGO capacity will yield important impacts to the beneficiary population as the quality of delivery improves.
- MJF has established itself as a national leader in human rights and governance, but this recognition is more than the reputation itself. MJF is seen as an asset to those who would champion human rights and governance in the country. As such the organization has itself become an influential actor at the advocacy and policy level. As importantly, MJF has positioned itself as a repository of information and a “clearing house” for human rights and governance ideas and strategies. This role itself has a long-term impact on the beneficiary population as it plays out.

With full recognition of the impact of the MJF on poverty and exclusion in Bangladesh, the assessment team is compelled to mention areas where improvement appears possible. The following comments are offered in a constructive spirit and may be seen as recommendations for areas of further refinement:

- There is an expected level of unevenness across the partners in terms of their organizational capacity and management effectiveness. Even some of the NGO partners with substantial experience and reputation in national development activities appear too limited in their approach and strategy. The structural weakness from the perspective of the assessment team is to promote the awareness of rights and not to focus on the exercise of rights. A myopic vision in rights and governance is to assume that an “aware” group is an “active” group or that 1000 people “made aware of” their rights will in fact act upon this awareness. This distinction is important in assuring that rights programming does engender concrete impacts.
- A second area of concern identified among the visits to the partners NGOs is the implicitly narrow definition of “group” as an operational category. Virtually all the partner NGOs that work at community level engage in a process of group formation as a primary component of their development approach. The transfer of development messages occurs in the context of a project group, which becomes the primary

beneficiary unit in most cases. In effect, group members (within a community) are beneficiaries and, by extension, non-group members are not beneficiaries. The assessment team believes that this distinction can itself create an ambience of exclusion, but more importantly it misses an opportunity to promote a sense of village leadership within the group. That is, the group should not be narrowly defined as the set of beneficiaries who are delivered a message or experience an outcome. Rather the group should be facilitated as a community mediator or community representative that accepts the responsibility to spread the development messages to other community members. The reality of many communities is that groups become closed entities that work directly with NGOs (following the model of savings groups) to the exclusion of others. This definition, as operational category, should be rethought in rights and governance programming.

- Within MJF there is always the risk of “stove-piping” or creating silos of thematic areas. For example, a poor dalit woman who works in a shrimp processing factory may be a beneficiary of a rights programming NGOs—as a dalit—and thus participates in activities of rights awareness, but she would best benefit from a workers’ rights intervention. There is not a mechanism in MJF that allows for this type of crossover and promotes more horizontal contact across the NGO partnership. Ideally, an NGO partner encountering this woman as a beneficiary would refer her to a companion NGO working on factory floors. Individuals have multiple rights issues and MJF should be a system of built-in flexibility and cross-partner exchange to better meet the needs of beneficiaries.

## **7.0 *Recommendations and Concluding Comments***

The assessment team has come away highly impressed with Manusher Jonno’s mission and its progress. The team is convinced that MJF has developed an approach that can improve the lives of the ultrapoor and excluded populations in dramatic ways. In contrast to asset transfer strategies, human rights and governance programming generates impacts at differing rates of time, sometimes beyond the life of the project. Also there are livelihood impacts from this programming that do not yield to easy measurement, such as a sense of physical safety, a new-found dignity, a chance to cultivate aspirations. Nonetheless, the team has seen sufficient evidence to state that the human rights and governance ball is clearly rolling and, with a credit to MJF, is gaining momentum. With it come the livelihood impacts that are the ultimate target of development change.

The team does see areas for improvement within MJF. As is common within the NGO sector in Bangladesh, there is little consistency in the monitoring and evaluation of impacts—and such is true within the MJF partnership. As MJF matures as an organization, it will increasingly encounter the need to monitor and evaluate partner impacts across the range and scale of activities as part of the support to its management system. There are several steps that can be taken to enhance and systematize the monitoring and evaluation of impacts.

1. The first recommendation is to instill an “evaluation mentality” at the program management level within MJF. Monitoring and evaluation is as much an operational approach as it is an ex post measurement activity, and there should be a set of robust impact indicators that monitor the outcomes of each programmatic theme. These indicators can be livelihood-based or innovatively molded to demonstrate the exercise of rights or the outcomes of improved governance. Once the indicators have been identified, the M&E division can work with partner NGOs to develop a monitoring strategy.
2. At the same time, the management information system (MIS) is significantly underutilized and should play a more effective role in monitoring and evaluation. Currently, the computerized information system is used almost exclusively for administrative control, but it should be expanded to generate regular reports that track the critical project indicators for each program. From an organizational logic, the management information system should provide a core service to the M&E division as a management support tool. Program managers together with M&E staff would identify the appropriate indicators for monitoring, orient the PNGO staff to collect and organize the data, store the data and generate the reports that form the basis of regular project reviews. The technical capacity is currently available within the M&E, but the system of information dissemination and analysis needs improvement. A critical step is to make the MIS capacity program focused.

In conclusion, the team considers MJF to be on track towards their greater programming objectives. It has demonstrated its ability to blaze new pathways into the development landscape of Bangladesh, and its approach will continue to set the standards for human right and governance programming. There are areas in MJF where some adjustment will increase effectiveness, but this is always part of a social learning process. The impacts documented by the assessment team are highly positive milestones in the arduous quest for a just and equitable society and great progress has been made.

It is important that MJF maintain its national leadership in rights and governance programming. Because it is a large institution, pressures will tend to push MJF in a direction of increasing bureaucratization. It is a time-honored rule that as management increases, managers specialize. The early successes of MJF, however, have been nurtured through cross-fertilization and flexibility, and the sustainability of the organization as a national leader will rely on these qualities and a constant reaffirmation of the vision that has defined its vitality. There is a delicate balance between management efficiency (built on predictability) and management creativity (built on experimentation). MJF should not become a national “donor” that only manages challenge grants against some standard of efficiency. Its success and sustainability will also depend on its continued management of ideas and values.

## Appendix A: Methodology for Creation of Composite Variables

### A. Human Capital Indicator (HCI) -> HCI\_gr

#### Education Status

At least on female member with education status 1 and +=1, otherwise 0

#### Perceived Health Status

All HH members with health status (good) 1 = 1, otherwise 0

#### Main occupation

At least one female HH member with main occupation direct income earning =1, otherwise 0

**HCI = a+b+c**

**Categorization of HCI: Poor=HCI score (0-1); Moderate= HCI score (2), Good= HCI score (3)**

### B. Economic Indicator (LVI) ->LVI\_gr

#### Total Land holding

Total land holding 300\_6 >50 =1, otherwise 0

#### Cow/buffalo

311\_3>1=1, otherwise 0

#### Mobile Phone

322\_3>1=1, otherwise 0

#### Housing

Housing (401) with 2-5 = 1, otherwise 0

#### Sanitation (Latrine)

403 with 4 =1, otherwise 0

#### Per capita income recoded

HH with per capita income >1071 =1, otherwise 0

#### Credit access source 602

HH with source code 1-4 = 1, otherwise 0

**LVI=a+b+c+d+e+f+g**

**Categorization of LVI: Poor=LVI score (0-2); Moderate= LVI score (3-5), Good= LVI score (6 -7)**

### C: Rights/Governance Indicator (SCI) ->SCI\_Gr

#### Access to social service

If member = 1, otherwise 0

#### Collective action

Participation with 1 =1, otherwise 0

#### Access to safety net

Accessed with 1 = 1, otherwise 0

#### Access to safety net

Accessed with 1 = 1, otherwise 0

#### Awareness about Rights

Response with 1=1, otherwise 0

**SCI=a+b+c+d+e**

**Categorization of SCI: Poor=SCI score (0-2); Moderate= SCI score (3), Good= SCI score (4)**