



# Women and the Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh

---

A mixed-methods study

THE  
CARTER CENTER



মানুষের জন্ম  
manusher jonno

# THE CARTER CENTER'S

## Global Access to Information Program

Women and the Right of Access to Information  
in Bangladesh

May 2016

MAKING ALL  
VOICES COUNT

A GRAND CHALLENGE  
FOR DEVELOPMENT



**Irish Aid**

Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

THE  
CARTER CENTER



মানুষের জন্য  
manusher jonno

# CONTENTS

<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	4
<b>Forewords</b> .....	5
Jimmy Carter, Former President of the United States; Founder of The Carter Center	
Dr. Golam Rahman, Chief Information Commissioner, Information Commission, Bangladesh	
Shaheen Anam, Executive Director, The Manusher Jonno Foundation	
<b>Abstract</b> .....	8
<b>Introduction</b> .....	9
What Is the Right of Access to Information?	
What Importance Does the Right to Information Hold for Women?	
<b>Socio-political Context</b> .....	12
Status of Women in Bangladesh	
Economic Empowerment	
Other Fundamental Rights	
Bangladesh Right to Information Act	
<b>Study Methodology</b> .....	19
Research Questions	
Types of Data	
Focus Areas	
Mixed-Methods Study	
Selection of Districts for Study	
Data Collection	
Analysis	
<b>Findings</b> .....	25
Aggregate Findings	
District Findings	
Key Findings	
Limitations of Study and Considerations	
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	56
<b>Endnotes</b> .....	57
<b>Appendices</b> .....	60
A. Survey Instruments	
B. Select Frequency Tables	
C. District Profiles	

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Women and the Right of Access to Information study and report were made possible through the commitment of many dedicated individuals. Laura Neuman, director of the Carter Center's Global Access to Information Program, inspired this effort to examine the asymmetries facing women in the exercise of the right of access to information and to advance creative programming to overcome inequities. Ms. Neuman shouldered the responsibility for designing the project, training researchers, engaging local partners, and drafting and editing this report.

The Carter Center was fortunate to count on The Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) as our partner in this research. Under the stewardship of Executive Director Shaheen Anam, MJF has proven itself one of the continent's leading human rights and governance organizations, with particular focus on marginalized populations. With the supervision of Research Manager Dr. Shahnaz Karim and her dedicated team and the engagement of MJF Deputy Program Manager Mohammed Iftekher Hussain, researchers from Dhaka, Khagrachari, Khulna, Rajshahi, Rangpur, and Sylhet painstakingly conducted hundreds of interviews and gathered multitudes of data. Dr. Karim and her team facilitated the validation exercises and assisted in planning the report launch. This study benefited immeasurably from the knowledge, experience, and integrity of MJF, Dr. Karim, and the many researchers, in particular Abul Kalam.

We have been supported throughout this project by a number of key government agencies, including the Bangladesh Information Commission and the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs. We thank them for their generosity in time and advice. It is with their leadership that one day the women of Bangladesh will be able to exercise the right to information equitably.

Special thanks to the civil society and government colleagues from various institutions in Bangladesh who gave valuable input on design and application based on the country context. Moreover, we acknowledge Meg McDermott for finalizing reports from study validations and longtime partner Mohammed Sirajul Islam of the BRAC-Institute of Governance and Development for translating hundreds of questionnaires from Bangla to English.

The Carter Center is privileged to have incredibly committed staff and interns who worked to make this study and report possible including Elizabeth McGlamry who set up a system to manage and track data, input data points, and assured quality control; Megan Card who helped populate the data tables; and Parker Cleveland who supported all aspects of the project. We also acknowledge with gratitude Global Access to Information staff Kari Mackey, Dan Schimmel, and Chris Hale for their continued work to advance the right of access to information for women around the world. Without their energy, this project surely would have faltered.

We thank our donors, particularly IrishAid and Making All Voices Count, whose trust in this work allowed the project to advance.

Finally, we proudly acknowledge the many men and women who met with our researchers and shared their stories. The enthusiasm of Bangladeshi women for a meaningful right to information is inspiring. We have been honored by the warm welcome from countless Bangladeshi people. We thank them for their generosity of time and spirit, and we look forward to partnering with them on the work ahead.

# FOREWORD

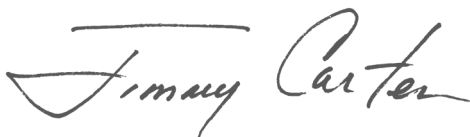
Jimmy Carter

Since 1999, the Carter Center’s Global Access to Information Program has been actively engaged in advancing the right of access to information, a fundamental human right necessary for the exercise of other essential rights. Access to information is the foundation upon which governments promote transparency, encourage participation, and make public administration more effective and efficient. Over the course of our work, we have observed that oftentimes the right to information is not benefiting marginalized populations, specifically women.

To ascertain whether women are able to exercise their right of access to information with the same frequency, ease, and rate of success as men, The Carter Center designed a mixed-methods study. We have applied the study in Liberia and Guatemala, and now Bangladesh, including a total of more than 1,700 interviews across the three countries. In all cases, the study has demonstrated a significant inequity in the exercise of the right to information as well as identifying the main obstacles that women face and the information most relevant for women’s increased economic empowerment and rights.

Bangladesh has made substantial strides in recent years—establishing itself as a middle-income country and working toward fulfillment of basic rights, including education for girls. Yet, as the findings of this study indicate, women in Bangladesh still face a number of social and structural impediments to exercise their fundamental human right to access information. With greater access to information for women, the possibilities for participation, voice, and empowerment will be greatly enhanced.

My Carter Center colleagues and I would like to thank the government of Bangladesh, our partner Manusher Jonno Foundation that led the research, and civil society organizations that were indispensable in the completion of this study, as well as the numerous Bangladeshi citizens who took the time to share their stories and insights with our researchers. Using this landmark report as a baseline, we welcome the opportunity to collaborate with all stakeholders to develop recommendations and implement innovative and meaningful solutions that address existing information inequities. By advancing the right of access to information for all, Bangladesh will continue to serve as a model of democratic progress and promise.



Jimmy Carter  
Former President of the United States  
Founder, The Carter Center



# FOREWORD

Golam Rahman

The Information Commission of Bangladesh is responsible for promoting and ensuring equitable access to information for all Bangladeshi citizens. As the Chief Information Commissioner, I am committed to continuing the Commission's important work to raise awareness about the value of access to information, to oversee compliance with the Right to Information (RTI) Act, and to engage with all partners in assuring that Bangladesh has one of the most successful and effective RTI laws in the world. Therefore, I am particularly pleased that the Information Commission was able to assist The Carter Center and Manusher Jonno Foundation to carry out this study on women and the right of access to information in Bangladesh.

This study is an integral step in identifying the barriers that women face in the pursuit of information necessary for their economic and social empowerment. The study includes input from community leaders, experts, public servants, and information seekers from six districts of Bangladesh: Dhaka, Khagrachari, Khulna, Rajshahi, Rangpur, and Sylhet. Findings from this study clearly demonstrate the necessity of improving access to information for women. Moreover, by identifying barriers that women face in exercising their right, the study serves as an excellent starting point for a conversation around potential engagements that can create meaningful progress toward more equitable access to information. The invaluable opportunity to use the findings of this study to fine-tune policies and to further support the implementing agencies and the RTI users is one that we intend on fully exercising.

The Information Commission will continue to work toward making access to information for women a priority, by raising awareness, building capacity, and adjusting strategies to assure that all efforts lead to an equitable right to information for all. We thank The Carter Center and Manusher Jonno Foundation for this important study, and reiterate our deep commitment to being champions of women's right of access to information.



Dr. Md. Golam Rahman  
Chief Information Commissioner, Information Commission, Bangladesh

# FOREWORD

Shaheen Anam

For over a decade, Manusher Jonno Foundation has been on the front lines of the fight to promote the right of access to information for all people. Along with our civil society colleagues in the Right to Information Forum, we were instrumental in the passage of the Right to Information Act in 2009 and since then have been determined advocates in promoting the importance of access to information for a truly open, transparent, and inclusive Bangladesh.

In partnership with the Carter Center's Global Access to Information Program, we are proud to present the findings from our recent study on Women and the Right of Access to Information in Bangladesh. This report illustrates that structural barriers and a lack of awareness—in concert with deeply entrenched cultural beliefs around gender roles—often prevent women from exercising their right of access to information with the same frequency, ease, and rate of success as men.

The right to information is a universally recognized human right. However, as has been demonstrated in this study, women are unable to enjoy the full benefits of the information that flows from this right, thus threatening their potential for increased economic empowerment and the promotion and protection of other human rights. At the Manusher Jonno Foundation, we are committed to assuring that all Bangladeshis can enjoy the promise of a meaningful right to information.

We are pleased to have contributed to this important body of work, which ultimately seeks to empower Bangladeshi women by ensuring that their rights are taken into consideration by the government, civil society, and society at large. The wealth of data collected from this study, gleaned from more than 500 interviews and first-hand observations, will help both government and civil society actors in Bangladesh better understand the importance of access to information for women as well as the obstacles women may face in exercising this right. The Manusher Jonno Foundation will continue to support all efforts for equity in the right of access to information, and is dedicated to assuring that this right is enjoyed equally by every Bangladeshi, regardless of gender.



Shaheen Anam  
Executive Director, The Manusher Jonno Foundation

# ABSTRACT

The following report outlines the findings of a study conducted by the Carter Center's Global Access to Information Program and the Manusher Jonno Foundation, with support from the Bangladesh Information Commissioner and the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in six districts of Bangladesh between April and December 2015. The study is part of a multicountry project to assess the hypothesis that women are not able to exercise the right to information with the same facility (frequency, ease, and rate of success) as men. More specifically, if an information asymmetry was demonstrated, the study went further to identify the cultural, structural, and legal barriers that women face that may impede access to public information, as well as to determine women's most critical information needs. Local researchers conducting the assessments collected three types of data: interviews with community leaders, expert opinion interviews, and nonparticipant observations at public agencies, with accompanying short interviews of civil servants and visitors to the agency. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected in six districts, including Dhaka, Khagrachari, Khulna, Rajshahi, Rangpur, and Sylhet, in both the sadar and rural upazilas in each district to provide a more complete view of the issues facing women in exercising the right to information. Secondary data was collected through desk research and triangulated with the other data sets. The findings were notable, indicating the perception of an asymmetry of information flows based on gender in many of the districts assessed. The study found that women face great challenges and myriad barriers in accessing government-held information critical for economic empowerment and the protection and fulfillment of fundamental rights. The data also illustrated the perception that information most important to women for gaining opportunities for advancement is often the most difficult to obtain. Through participatory validation processes in each of the districts in the study, additional contextual information and narratives were collected. The Carter Center, Manusher Jonno Foundation, and additional Bangladeshi partners, including civil society and government, will utilize this evidence base to promote creative solutions and actions to make the right of access to information more meaningful for women in Bangladesh.





Women drying paddy for husking at Sherpur.

Photo: Golam Rahman

# INTRODUCTION

Women's rights are human rights. The equal enjoyment of the benefits of culture and citizenship, regardless of gender, is a fundamental guarantee. Yet reality is a stark reminder of the gap between aspiration and practice, as many of the most basic rights, including the right of access to information, remain elusive for half of the world's population.

Since 1999, The Carter Center has served as a leader in advancing the passage, implementation, and enforcement of access to information regimes in the Americas, Africa, and China, and in raising the international profile of the value of the right to information. Through this work, the Center's Global Access to Information Program noted that too often women's organizations were not engaged in promoting the right to information and that important obstacles existed that may lead to a serious inequity in women's ability to exercise their fundamental right to information.

Though recent years have witnessed a plethora of research and programming related to voice, participation, and empowerment of women, access to information has been implied rather than explicitly identified as a core ingredient for success. Importantly, when focus is placed on a woman's ability to fully and effectively exercise her fundamental right to information, the considerable gender asymmetries become apparent. Continuing failure to engage in gender-sensitive policy making; lack of engagement from women's civil society organizations; information access and flows that exclude women; and long-standing obstacles such as illiteracy, overwhelming household responsibilities, cultural mora, and immobility all have played a role in creating gender asymmetries in the exercise of the right to information.

To demonstrate the hypothesis that women are not able to access information with the same facility (frequency, ease, and rate of success) as men, The Carter Center developed a quantitative and qualitative study. The study was first conducted in Liberia in 2013 and again in Guatemala in 2014. The Bangladesh study, conducted by Manusher Jonno Foundation in 2015, not only assessed whether women are able to exercise the right to information with the same facility as men but

also identified the main obstacles facing women in accessing information and the types of information most critical to women for economic empowerment and the protection of rights. With the study and recommendations developed based on the findings, this research will serve as a decisive step in assuring all people have an equal right of access to information.

## What Is the Right of Access to Information?

Access to information, also called right to information and freedom of information, is a fundamental human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and currently enjoyed by over 4 billion people in more than 100 countries around the world. Access to information allows the general public to seek and receive information held by governments (and often by private entities) that perform public duties or receive public funds. It is an important right that serves both governments and their citizens. For governments, an access to information regime helps increase citizen confidence as decision making becomes more transparent, assists public administration to become more efficient and effective as recordkeeping systems are organized and procedures are established, allows scarce resources to be properly applied and utilized, and can serve to increase foreign investment. Access to information also enables citizens to engage more meaningfully in public life, understand policies and help determine public priorities, and use the information to ensure the exercise of other human rights, including the rights to clean water, a safe environment, education, and health services. It is a tool that provides the power to ensure that social services reach the most disadvantaged and marginalized people, supports true social accountability, and promotes political and economic empowerment and the protection of individual rights.

## What Importance Does the Right to Information Hold For Women?

Often in our societies it is the most vulnerable and marginalized populations who suffer the greatest due to

limited access to information. This is particularly true for women. In many countries, one-half of the population may be limited in their full enjoyment of the right to information and the myriad benefits that it provides.

Women frequently face the double burden of generating and caring for their families. While women perform 66 percent of the world's work, they continue to form the largest block of the world's 1.3 billion people living in poverty.<sup>1</sup> Economic opportunities for women remain limited. Globally, only 50 percent of women of working age are in the labor force compared to 77 percent of men.<sup>2</sup> One independent study has calculated that "women could increase their income globally by up to 76 percent if the employment participation gap between women and men were closed, resulting in a global value of USD 17 trillion."<sup>3</sup> With relation to wages, for example, in urban labor markets in Bangladesh, the wage gap between men and women is considered to be at least 21 percent.<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, studies indicate that on a global scale women invest up to 90 percent of their income into their families and communities; in contrast, men invest an average of 35 percent of their income in these same areas.<sup>5</sup> And while over the past decades, enrollment of girls in primary education has increased, primary education is still far from universal. For girls/women in post-primary education there remains an even greater disparity, particularly for households with declining income. Not all education for girls/women is of the same quality as the education received by boys/men. Further, women are more susceptible to and affected by corruption, which flourishes with greater secrecy.

However, with genuine access to information, women can take advantage of opportunities to transform their lives, families, and communities. There are a multitude of examples throughout the world in which women have accessed information to achieve economic gains or protect fundamental rights. For instance, in Thailand a girl was told that she had failed the exams for entry into a prestigious state school. Her mother, suspecting foul play, used Thailand's Official Information Act to petition for access to the test scores. After a number of denials, the Supreme Court of Thailand ultimately ruled in the woman's favor, requiring the school to disclose the test scores. The results demonstrated that the girl had indeed passed and uncovered a network of cronyism and nepotism whereby wealthy families made payments or took advantage of political connections to ensure their children's entry into elite schools. Women in India have been using the Right to Information Act to obtain widow pensions owed to them by the government and to monitor government employment programs for proper functioning and equity. In 2006, women in the United





**Women gather around a computer to review information about community development.**

*Photo: Manusher Jonno Foundation*

Kingdom gained access to payroll records for the British Broadcasting Company (BBC), proving that female workers were being paid an average of £6,500 less than their male co-workers, causing the BBC to publicly change their practices.

**In sum, access to information:**

- ◆ Allows women to make more effective decisions; for example, with relation to property rights, education, and jobs
- ◆ Enables women to know and exercise their full range of rights, including the right to be free from violence
- ◆ Helps women to participate more fully in public life
- ◆ Is critical for holding government and service providers accountable and reducing corruption
- ◆ Bridges gender gaps and helps to shift power
- ◆ Provides opportunities for women's increased economic empowerment



Women gather after a training.

Photo: Shahnaz Karim

## SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

Thirty-seven years after the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), there has been measured progress. However, women around the world continue to lag behind men in terms of power, wealth, education, and opportunities. Despite passing the centenary celebration of the establishment of International Women's Day, gender equality and empowerment remain a distant goal. Women represent a disproportionate number of the world's impoverished and illiterate population.<sup>6</sup> Globally, educational opportunities remain elusive as girls are less likely than boys to attend school. Lack of access to basic care and medications, coupled with continuing gender-based violence and human trafficking, remain profoundly troubling issues. Recent global prevalence figures indicate that one in three women (35 percent) have experienced sexual violence in their lifetimes, and as many as 38 percent of murders of women are committed by an intimate partner.<sup>7</sup> Cutting across age, racial, cultural, economic, and geographical boundaries, gender-based violence negatively affects women's livelihoods and engagement in the greater society/community.<sup>8</sup> In the areas of participation and voice, women remain in the minority. As of August 2015, only 21 of the world's leaders and 22 percent of the world's members of Parliament were women.<sup>9</sup> Quotas and political party systems remain at odds as women strive to find a place in electoral democracies.<sup>10</sup>



# THROUGH GREATER ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, WOMEN'S RIGHTS CAN BE REALIZED.

## Status of Women in Bangladesh

Though women in Bangladesh have made critical strides in key sectors, they still face a steep climb toward equality. In Bangladesh, women make up 49.5 percent of the population<sup>11</sup> and yet fall behind men in acquiring basic access to property and formal employment.<sup>12</sup> According to the 2014 Human Development Report issued by the United Nations Development Program, Bangladesh has a Gender Inequality Index of 0.503, ranking 111th out of 155 countries.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, in the 2014 Gender Development Index, which measures gender gaps in human development achievements in health, education, and command over economic resources, Bangladesh is ranked 107th out of 161 countries.<sup>14</sup> As women confront great challenges to gain an equitable foothold in society, they often do so in the face of debilitating poverty in Bangladesh. According to a 2011 report by the United Nations, 60 percent of the world's population and 57 percent of the world's poor live in Asia, despite the fact that Asia has 30 percent of the world's arable land. Bangladesh alone has the fourth largest share of the world's poor, and 35 percent of the rural population is at national poverty lines.<sup>15</sup>

Even with advances in gender equity, women's means to economic empowerment—particularly in the workforce—are limited. In 2013, about 57.4 percent of the adult female population (15+ years old) in Bangladesh was a part of the labor force, compared to 84.1 percent of adult males.<sup>16</sup> Women work mostly in lower-paying jobs, such as in garment factories or in unpaid positions. Moreover, there remains an underrepresentation of women at all levels of government, even though the prime minister and leader of the opposition are both women. In the Bangladesh Parliament in 2015, women held just 20 percent of the seats, and only six of the 44 cabinet ministers were female.<sup>17</sup>

## Economic Empowerment

There is growing consensus of the need to empower women economically in order to improve their status globally. Through greater economic empowerment, women's rights can be realized and broader development goals—including the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals—can be achieved. Goal 5 is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, and Goal 16 calls for a more peaceful and inclusive society—can be achieved. The fulfillment of development goals would lead to economic growth, reduced poverty and food security, greater access to health care and education, and gender equality.<sup>18</sup> According to the International Center for Research on Women, studies have provided the following reasons for emphasizing women's economic empowerment:

- ◆ Economic empowerment is one of the most powerful routes for women to achieve their potential and advance their rights.
- ◆ Since women make up the majority of the world's poor, meeting poverty-reduction goals requires addressing women and their economic empowerment.
- ◆ Discrimination against women is economically inefficient. National economies lose out when a substantial part of the population cannot compete equitably or realize its full potential.
- ◆ Working with women makes good business sense. When women have the right skills and opportunities, they can help businesses and markets grow.
- ◆ Women who are economically empowered contribute more to their families, societies, and national economies. It has been shown that women invest extra income in their children, providing a route to sustainable development.<sup>19</sup>

Additionally, economic empowerment helps women to more fully participate and contribute to public life. As income and agency increases, women's beliefs and understanding related to issues such as education, health, marriage, family, politics, and the economy can improve, enabling women to take more control of their lives and



make more informed decisions. Economically empowered women are more likely to educate and empower their children, thereby contributing to the future progress of their nations. Furthermore, gender gaps are bridged and power is shifted more closely toward equilibrium.

In light of the status of women in Bangladesh and issues of specific importance to women's livelihoods, the following sections highlight the value of economic empowerment of women in relation to four thematic areas—education, land, business, and agriculture—as well as the value of information for the promotion and protection of fundamental rights.

## EDUCATION

Education is the foundation for economic empowerment. At the primary level, students learn skills in reading, writing, and mathematics as well as ways to think critically about the world around them. At the secondary level, students begin to solve more complex problems, building capacities for creativity and productivity. These skills are particularly important for girls and women, as educated girls are more likely to enter marriage later, have fewer children, and enjoy healthier families.<sup>20</sup> Education increases literacy rates and can help women better know their rights and make better-informed decisions for healthier, more productive families. Moreover, educating girls benefits the family and the entire community, as it ensures that half the population can more effectively enter the job market, stimulate the economy, and increase wealth.

Historically, women have had less access to education, often because of traditional household roles and discrimination. Around the world, girls are less likely to attend schools than boys, and for those who do attend, girls have a reduced rate of retention and completion. This appears to be reflective of the situation in Bangladesh, where from 2007—2013, the percentage of girls enrolled in primary and secondary education in Bangladesh was 80.8 percent, but that percentage dropped to 41.4 percent for tertiary education.<sup>21</sup> Though efforts in Bangladesh to increase enrollment of girls in primary school have borne fruit—with more girls than boys in primary education and 83.3 percent of girls ages 12—24 years being literate, compared to 78.9 percent of boys—there remains

a need to improve performance and retention.<sup>22,23</sup> Girls may be forced to drop out of school because of marriage, an inability to afford additional education, or the need to become a wage earner. Moreover, about 25 percent of women in the country aged 15—49 have no educational background.<sup>24</sup>

## LAND OWNERSHIP

Globally, more men than women own land,<sup>25</sup> and increasing women's access to land has long been considered a key strategy for economically empowering women.<sup>26</sup> Owning land provides women with a more stable area for agriculture and the production of other marketable goods and provides equity that can be used to access loans or to accumulate other assets such as farm equipment and livestock. Such assets increase women's access to credit, which can help women endure more difficult economic hardships.<sup>27</sup>

Due to rapid population growth and land scarcity, many of Bangladesh's poor and rural inhabitants are landless. Though data is scarce and rarely disaggregated by gender, women in Bangladesh are less likely to own land or to be in control of land holdings.<sup>28</sup> Not only are they often unaware of their rights to own land,<sup>29</sup> women also are less likely to claim their inheritance of land.<sup>30</sup> Lack of financial resources to purchase or maintain land and contraindicated cultural norms serve as additional obstacles to women's land ownership.<sup>31</sup>

## BUSINESS

The majority of women in the developing world maintain insecure, low-wage jobs, with a small minority of women enjoying senior positions. Such gender inequities in the work force negatively impacts access to land and loans, continues the cycle of economic dependence, and can exacerbate already limited levels of women's political participation.<sup>32</sup>

According to a 2015 article published by the World Bank, if female labor participation in Bangladesh increased from 33.7 percent to 82 percent (on par with male labor participation), the country's GDP would increase by 1.8 percent each year.<sup>33</sup> However, women in Bangladesh are still confronted with a gender-gap in pay;

**IF FEMALE LABOR PARTICIPATION INCREASED FROM 33.7 PERCENT TO 82 PERCENT, THE COUNTRY'S GDP WOULD INCREASE BY 1.8 PERCENT EACH YEAR.**

# A MEANINGFUL RIGHT OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION IS CRITICAL FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

the pay disparity remains at 21 percent less per-hour than men. Entrepreneurship is one key way for women to achieve economic empowerment. Starting and maintaining a business can provide women with higher wages, increased access to necessary resources, and greater food and personal security, such as protection from gender-based violence. Additionally, studies indicate that increasing the share of household income controlled by women changes spending in ways that benefit children and the entire family.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, women in Bangladesh face many obstacles on the path to starting their own businesses, not the least of which is their inability to secure bank loans due to a lack of collateral. Because most property is under their husband's or male relative's name, banks are reluctant to give loans to women in Bangladesh.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, women often do not have individual bank accounts in order to build credit. In fact, UN Women found that globally only 47 percent of women have any kind of account in a formal financial institution.<sup>36</sup>

## AGRICULTURE

In 2014, women comprised 43 percent of the agricultural labor force in developing countries—and in some parts of Asia, this number increases to 50 percent or more.<sup>37</sup> However, important disparities exist between men and women in the agricultural field. According to a brief from UN Women, “if women had the same access as men to productive assets, agricultural output in 34 developing countries would rise by an estimated average of up to four percent. This could reduce the number of undernourished people in those countries by as much as 17 percent, translating to up to 150 million fewer hungry people.”<sup>38</sup>

Agriculture is one of the most important sectors of Bangladesh's economy, accounting for approximately 20 percent of the national gross domestic product and employing 63 percent of the workforce in the country.<sup>39</sup> Yet the sector may be underperforming because women lack access to the resources and opportunities they need to be fully productive.<sup>40</sup> As of 2013, only around two percent of agricultural land holdings in Bangladesh were registered to women.<sup>41</sup> Because women rarely have ownership of the land they are farming, they do not have the ability

to make decisions regarding the use of that land. Additionally, women may be confined to less productive tasks or pushed out of certain agricultural positions by farming technologies that only men are allowed to operate.<sup>42</sup>

A meaningful right of access to information is critical for women's economic empowerment. With information, women can more effectively engage educational opportunities for their children, understand and invoke their rights to land, and access capital and make informed decisions related to starting a business. As Hillary Clinton, former U.S. Secretary of State, noted at the 2011 Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit, “We need to correct the problem of information asymmetry—making sure women are informed about opportunities for trade and orienting technical assistance programs so they serve women as well as men.”<sup>43</sup>

## Other Fundamental Rights

The umbrella of women's rights encompasses a broad range of issues, but globally three stand out as particularly significant for women: the right to be free from violence, the right to health, and labor rights.

### RIGHT TO LIVE FREE FROM VIOLENCE

The right to live a life free from violence is broadly recognized internationally as a fundamental right. In addition to the UN's Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, CEDAW, which was adopted in 1993, calls for an end to any “act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”<sup>44</sup> While Bangladesh ratified CEDAW on November 6, 1984, during the process the government sought to refrain from agreeing to two of the articles. The CEDAW committee deemed these reservations “impermissible” with the acceptance of the convention.<sup>45</sup> As such, Bangladesh (much like the United States)

currently remains a ratifying party but not yet a signatory to the convention.<sup>46</sup>

Violence against women results in physical, mental, sexual, reproductive, and other health ramifications, and increases a woman's vulnerability to HIV.<sup>47</sup> The World Health Organization lists among the specific consequences of violence against women: depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress syndrome, chronic pain syndromes, eating and sleeping disorders, and drug and alcohol abuse.<sup>48</sup> Beyond the ethical ramifications of the violation of a basic human right, violence against women has significant negative individual and social impacts. Globally, women who experience violence report more surgeries, doctor visits, and hospital stays than those without a history of abuse, and health effects may persist long after the violence ends.<sup>49</sup>

While the Constitution of Bangladesh protects equal rights for men and women in state and public life, it says nothing of private life. The study on Violence Against Women undertaken by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in 2011 reported as many as 87 percent of married women have experienced some form of physical, sexual, psychological, or economic violence by their current husband,<sup>50</sup> and about 24 percent reported experiencing nonpartner violence in their lifetime.

A study by the International Centre for Diarrheal Disease Research, Bangladesh found that nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) aimed at preventing violence against women face formidable obstacles in the country. These barriers include the rife societal view of women as inferior, the reluctance of victims to report their abuse, reprisals such as loss of custody or divorce, and threats to the NGO workers themselves.<sup>51</sup>

Related to violence against women, although certainly not equivalent, is the issue of child marriage. Child marriage presents a number of safety, social, and health issues for women. Girls who are married young tend to end their education, are more likely to die during childbirth, and are more likely to experience domestic violence from their spouses and in-laws.<sup>52,53</sup> Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world, with 29 percent of girls married before they are 15 years old and 65 percent of girls married by age 18.<sup>54</sup>

## RIGHT TO HEALTH

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25, provides that all people have “the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including . . . medical care.” Achieving the right to health is widely considered closely related to the fulfillment of other fundamental human rights. Unfortunately, “vulnerable and marginalized groups in societies are often less likely to enjoy the right to health. Three of the world's most fatal communicable diseases—malaria, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis—disproportionately affect the world's poorest populations, placing a tremendous burden on the economies of developing countries.”<sup>55</sup> Failure to assure adequate rights to health care is a particular problem for women, as adolescent girls are twice as likely to be at risk for HIV/AIDS as boys, girls suffer from chronic anemia at a much higher rate, women are afflicted with cervical and breast cancer, and almost 99 percent of maternal deaths (out of approximately 287,000 per year) occur in the developing world.<sup>56</sup> Bangladesh has made notable progress in health care provision, but serious inequities continue related to both gender and socio-economic status.<sup>57</sup>

In addition, as part of the right to health, women should enjoy sexual and reproductive rights. As the preamble of CEDAW asserts, “The role of women in procreation should not be a basis for discrimination.”<sup>58</sup> The International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994 used some basic principles of the CEDAW but also introduced a paradigm shift toward a reproductive health and rights approach that recognizes the intrinsic value of women and is genuinely concerned about their health and well-being.

Among the countries in the region, Bangladesh has indicated its willingness and intention to improve sexual and reproductive health and education in signing the Sustainable Development Goals, convention on the rights of the child, and in its national policies, whereby the Bangladeshi government has specified sexual education programs must be provided at the primary level and above.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, Bangladesh's National Population Policy (2005) refers to expansion of programs that encourage gender equity in sexual education.<sup>60</sup>

**BANGLADESH HAS MADE NOTABLE PROGRESS IN HEALTH CARE PROVISION, BUT SERIOUS INEQUITIES CONTINUE RELATED TO BOTH GENDER AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS.**

# UNDER THE 2009 RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT, ALL CITIZENS HAVE THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION FROM ANY GOVERNMENT OR PUBLIC AUTHORITY.

Despite government efforts to expand outreach activities related to reproductive rights throughout the country, culturally held norms related to women's status have led to pushback in some areas, particularly rural locations, and effective sexual education remains largely absent from many schools.<sup>61</sup>

## RIGHTS OF WORKERS (LABOR RIGHTS)

As outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "Everyone, without discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work." However, in the majority of the countries in the world, women's wages still represent only between 60 to 75 percent of men's, with even lower ratios in some Asian and Latin American countries.<sup>62</sup> Though the wage gap decreased approximately 31 percent in Bangladesh between 1999 and 2009,<sup>63</sup> women still earn, on average, between 21 and 23 percent less than men.<sup>64</sup> According to the 2015 Global Gender Gap Report, conducted annually by the World Economic Forum, Bangladesh ranks 126 out of 134 countries surveyed in wage equality for similar work.<sup>65</sup> However, as of 2013, 57 percent of the adult female population in Bangladesh was involved in the labor force, compared with 84 percent of the adult male population.<sup>66</sup> In Bangladesh's largest industry—agriculture—women only earn about 60–65 percent of what men do; 82 percent of this difference is unexplained, and could be due to labor market discrimination.<sup>67</sup>

Women constitute the majority of workers in one of Bangladesh's other largest industries, the ready-made garment sector, which provides job opportunities for women with little education or cultivation skills in rural areas of the country.<sup>68</sup> Notwithstanding the Bangladesh ready-made garment sector's substantial contributions to the economy and women's employment, it has been criticized for unsafe working conditions. The Bangladesh Fire Department reported that between 2006 and 2009, 414 garment workers were killed in at least 213 factory fires. Since 2013, over a thousand workers have been killed in multiple incidents at factories producing garments for international brands.<sup>69</sup>

With more equitable access to information, a greater number of women could be empowered to demand

enforcement of their rights to be free from violence as well as to health care and sexual and reproductive rights. Also they could be empowered to advocate for fair wages, equal earning power, and a safe work environment.

## Bangladesh Right to Information Act

The popular demand for a right of access to information did not gain traction in Bangladesh until the 1980s, when journalists began to fight against restrictions on press freedom. Momentum toward establishing right to information legislation slowed during the years of political upheaval, and it was not revisited again until 2002 when the Law Commission first presented a working paper on the right to information in Bangladesh. In 2006, Manusher Jonno Foundation, a leading human rights organization in Bangladesh, circulated a second-draft right to information bill. Following continued political conflict, a military-backed caretaker government came into power, and in 2008 it issued a right to information ordinance. In 2008, the Information Ministry collaborated with civil society on a draft of the Right to Information Act based on the existing ordinance. With minor amendments it was passed into law. The Right to Information Act went into effect in Bangladesh on July 1, 2009.<sup>70</sup>

Under the 2009 Right to Information Act, all citizens have the right to information from any government or public authority, and that authority is obligated to provide citizens with requested information, unless the information falls within an exemption, often related to intelligence services and national defense. The law also requires authorities to publish and preserve all information relevant to citizens. An Information Commission is required, and has been formed to lead and oversee the implementation of and compliance with the Act's provisions. Under the law, citizens do not need to provide the agency with a reason for their request but must provide personal information and any related information that may help the agency find the requested forms or documents. Requests must be made in writing but can be submitted electronically or through e-mail. All public authorities are required to appoint a designated Information Officer to answer requests. The officer must



oversee that the authority is properly preserving and computerizing information as well as following the guidelines and directives of the Information Commission.

The RTI Act mandates the relevant authority to provide information within 20 working days from the request date and within 10 days of the application for information, if the request will be denied. If the information is not given within 20 days, it is considered a rejection of the application. If the requester does not receive the information or is unhappy with the decision of the authority, they may appeal to the established appellate authority, which is the administrative head of its immediate superior office. The appellate authority then has 15 days to deliver a decision. If the appellate authority finds that the officer in charge should provide the requester with the information, that officer has five working days to provide it. The law allows a person to submit a complaint with the Information Commission if there is no responsible officer in the authority, if he or she was refused unjustifiably or not responded to, if he or she is asked to pay an unreasonable fee for the information, or if he or she feels the information given is incomplete.

Though the Right to Information Act in Bangladesh went into effect in 2009, its implementation has been slow, and there is little evidence that it is reaching the full population. While the government's pledge to advance the right of access to information is clear, there still remains a gap between commitment and full realization. In 2014, the Carter Center's Global Access to Information Program piloted the Access to Information Legislation Implementation Assessment Tool (IAT) in Bangladesh, designed to assess the specific activities/inputs that the public administration has engaged—or in some cases failed to achieve—in furtherance of a well-implemented law. Findings in Bangladesh revealed that there remain significant lags in the select agencies implementation and operationalization of the act.<sup>71</sup>

While strides have been made in advancing implementation of the right to information law in Bangladesh, the IAT pilot study found that “their preparedness in terms of demonstrating policy commitment, formulating detailed operational procedures, creating public awareness within and outside the agencies, setting internal mecha-

nisms, and mainstreaming records management procedures is insufficient for the effective fulfillment of its RTI mandates. As a result, current practices in many agencies seem to closely resemble those before the enactment of RTI legislation.”<sup>72</sup> The report also found that the assessed agencies lacked the critical capacity infrastructure necessary to accomplish RTI mandates, thus undermining the general right of access to information in Bangladesh, with even greater detriment to women.

**THOUGH THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION IN BANGLADESH WENT INTO EFFECT IN 2009, ITS IMPLEMENTATION HAS BEEN SLOW, AND THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE THAT IT IS REACHING THE FULL POPULATION.**





Bangladeshi women and children wait in long lines.

Photo: photo story / Shutterstock.com

## STUDY METHODOLOGY

The Carter Center and local partner Manusher Jonno Foundation conducted an innovative research study to identify the cultural, structural, and legal barriers that women face that impede access to critical information, and to determine women's information needs. The research study was designed to test the hypothesis that women are unable to exercise the fundamental right of access to information with the same facility (frequency, ease, and rate of success) as men and to identify the primary obstacles that women face in accessing information. Moreover, interview questions were posed to better understand women's knowledge of their range of rights, including the right of access to information, and where they presently receive information.

The research design utilizes multiple methods, relying on both existing secondary data and the collection of primary data through interviews with heads of key women's and thematic organizations, expert opinion interviews, and nonparticipant observation of access to information practices in relevant government ministries and agencies as well as accompanying interviews of the public servants and "customers" who enter the public offices. The data sets were then triangulated to develop the preliminary findings, which were shared in the study locations for validation. Importantly, the findings reflect the perceptions of those interviewed and illustrate trends, but without statistical sampling, they may not be fully representative.



## THE RESEARCH IS DESIGNED TO ALLOW FOR OTHER CRITICAL AREAS TO EMERGE, PARTICULARLY RELATED TO THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF OTHER FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS.

### Research Questions

The research questions were developed to assess women’s exercise of the right of access information as compared to men, identify extant barriers in accessing public information, and ascertain the priority types of information needed for increasing women’s economic empowerment and promoting and protecting rights. More specifically:

1. Are women able to access information with the same facility (frequency, ease, and rate of success) as men?
2. What are the main obstacles facing women in the exercise of the right to information?
3. What information is most important to women for increasing economic empowerment and promoting and protecting rights?

### Types of Data

*Secondary data* is collected in advance of beginning the in-country research and comes from desk research of existing studies, where they exist, of the situation facing women. Data on the locations of the study also were examined.

*Interviews with community leaders* were conducted with individuals, representing both women’s, men’s, and combined organizations. A series of structured and open-ended interview questions were developed and the interview schedule reviewed by the in-country research team for appropriate language and cultural references prior to commencing interviews.

*Expert opinion interviews* were gathered through interviews with thought leaders and thematic experts such as ministry officials, relevant NGOs or multilateral institutions, or university professors. Local researchers were

provided a brief questionnaire for quantitative responses as well as for asking open-ended, probing questions.

*Nonparticipant observation*, a source of primary data, included the in-country research team developing a list of potential public agencies to gather the data, assuring representation from each of the economic empowerment and rights substantive areas under review. Research teams visited the selected agency at least three times on different days and at various times of the day/week. In-country researchers noted who was obtaining the information (i.e., women or men) and barriers to access, if any, they observed. The field researchers also engaged in short interviews with the public servants working at the agency and the men and women visiting the agency for information/services.

Local researchers were trained by The Carter Center to conduct the assessments in a mix of rural and urban areas in six districts. At the conclusion of data gathering, a preliminary analysis of the findings was completed and shared with local stakeholders through a validation process in each locale where the research took place. The validation meeting provided an opportunity for the community to reflect on whether the findings were consistent with their own realities as well as to gather additional qualitative information from the discussion and comments. The validation meetings included stakeholders from government agencies, local experts, and civil society organization leaders.

Following the validation meetings, the full data sets and qualitative commentary were analyzed and findings readied for release. As part of the methodology, the initial release of the final findings include a multistakeholder meeting to provide an opportunity to discuss the results of the study, jointly consider the problems, and begin to develop considering potential solutions/recommendations for improvement. The areas of subsequent programming focus will be dependent on the priority findings from the study and the consensus recommendation.

# Focus Areas

Economic empowerment for women is a critical issue around the world. Thus, as a means of targeting the study and making it more understandable and meaningful for interview participants, much of the focus is on information for economic empowerment. However, we are aware that in certain contexts, other issues—such as violence against women, health, or access to justice—are of equal or overriding importance. As such, the research is designed to allow for other critical areas to emerge, particularly related to the promotion and protection of other fundamental human rights. Within the area of access to information for economic empowerment, we engaged four interconnected themes: education, land, business, and agriculture. We also explored women’s need for information on rights more generally.

# Mixed-methods Study

To date, The Carter Center has conducted two studies of this kind: the first in Liberia in 2013 and the second in Guatemala in 2014. The Bangladesh study was derived from the methodology of the prior two studies. However, some adjustments were made in order to improve the

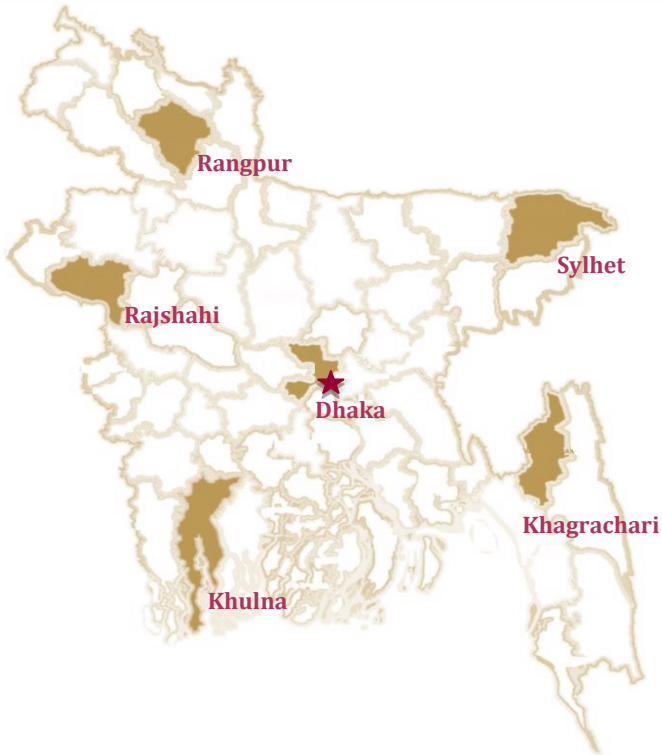
accuracy and quality of results, such as introducing questions about the impact of age on women’s ability to access information. Additionally, this study represents a move toward teasing out the practice of accessing information rather than solely understanding the laws surrounding it.

# Selection of Districts for Study

The study methodology called for regional sample diversity. By collecting full data sets within each region, a case study for each district and Dhaka was completed to identify variations in women’s access to information, key obstacles, and priority issues. This allowed a comparison of areas to see whether there are unique factors affecting women’s access to information. These regional findings were then aggregated to provide insights into the status of women and the right of access to information at the national level, identifying perceptions and trends across Bangladesh to the extent possible based on the limited sample size. While aggregate findings may indicate that overall women do not access information at the same rate as men, there are clear district variations on the prevalence of asymmetries as well as differences in barriers and information primacies. If examining only

Example of Focus Areas for Economic Empowerment and Promotion and Protection of Rights	
Education	Can women access information about educational policies and school budgets?
	Can women access information about study plans, personnel, materials, programs, including vocational?
	Can women access information about scholarships and educational opportunities?
Property Rights	Can women access information related to policies regarding land ownership?
	Can women access information related to rights of possessing or inheriting land?
	Can women access titles to property?
Business	Can women access information about government procedures related to starting a small business?
	Can women access policies and procedures for business licensing?
	Can women access the policies and procedures related to government-funded loans?
	Can women access information relevant to commercial/market interests such as: the number of similar businesses that exist, taxes, importation costs, etc.?
Agriculture	Can women access information about pricing of goods?
	Can women access information about government-sponsored programs for seeds and fertilizers?
	Can women access information about water policies?
Rights	Can women obtain information about advancing their rights; for example labor rights and the right to live free from violence, health, and sexual and reproductive rights?
	Can women access information about appealing to an authority in case their rights are violated?
	Can women access information/data/statistics about how/when/where there have been rights violations?

## THE COMMUNITY LEADERS WERE SELECTED BY LOCAL RESEARCHERS FAMILIAR WITH EACH PARTICULAR DISTRICT'S SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND CULTURAL CONTEXT.



aggregate findings, the specific contexts and priorities at the local level potentially can be overlooked.

In selecting the sample districts, we sought to promote inclusion of different geographic areas and religious and cultural groups making up the overall population of Bangladesh. Criteria for determining the counties included regional diversity, rural versus urban, existence of traditional societies, and other criteria. Based on consultations with Manusher Jonno Foundation, the Information Commission, and the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Khagrachari, Khulna, Rajshahi, Rangpur, and Sylhet were selected as the sample districts, in addition to metropolitan Dhaka. In each of the districts, interviews were conducted in the Sadar Upazila and one or two more rural upazilas. In addition to the five districts, the district of Dhaka was included in the study as the most populous and urban district in Bangladesh. Moreover, all primary ministry and agency buildings are located within Dhaka, and while most agencies have suboffices in each of the 64 districts, each agency is headquartered in the capital city.

## Data Collection

Manusher Jonno Foundation, with assistance from the Carter Center's Global Access to Information Program, was primarily responsible for ensuring data collection according to the research methodology and organizing validation activities to complete the study. A team of local researchers was trained to employ the research methodology in their particular districts. Each district team was made up of two or three researchers responsible for conducting interviews and field observations as well as transcribing data for analysis. An overall research manager and regional supervisors were engaged to oversee the data collection and review interview forms for completeness and accuracy.

Researchers collected three types of data: interviews with community leaders, expert opinion interviews, and non-participant observations. The field researchers were provided with forms to record the responses of the interviewees as well as to collect observational data. These forms enabled data to be collected more systematically and uniformly across districts. After the forms were collected and reviewed by the supervisors and research manager, data was translated and digitized. It was then manually input into an electronic spreadsheet for analysis.

### INTERVIEWS WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS

In total, 128 interviews were conducted with community leaders in six districts (Dhaka, Khagrachari, Khulna, Rajshahi, Rangpur, and Sylhet): 48 percent of interviewees were women, and 52 percent were men. The community leaders were selected by local researchers familiar with each particular district's social, political, and cultural context. Community leaders were defined as those representing key local organizations or positions, including but not limited to those leading women-focused groups, religious leaders, community development representatives, and other community leaders at the local level. The researchers identified the most relevant community leaders and sent the list to the research manager,

Manusher Jonno Foundation, and The Carter Center to assure diversity and representativeness. Once approved, the researchers began the data collection. A series of structured and open-ended interview questions were developed, and researchers were instructed to record answers verbatim to ensure that the respondent’s meaning and sentiments were carried through to analysis. Moreover, researchers were provided with a number of “prompts” for cases in which the interview subject did not understand the question.

## EXPERT OPINION INTERVIEWS

A total of 81 expert opinion interviews were conducted across the six localities; 37 percent of the experts interviewed were female, and 63 percent were male. Experts interviewed included university professors, NGO program staff, higher-level government representatives, and other individuals who had demonstrated expertise in one or more of the economic empowerment areas and/or women’s rights. These experts were asked a series of open-ended questions, many of which mirrored those asked of community leaders and employees at nonparticipating observation sites. Based on the expert’s background and experiences, the researchers also probed for their opinions on the links between the access to information and economic development and rights.

## NONPARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

The in-country research team developed a list of potential public agencies where the nonparticipating observation data gathering could take place. When developing this list, the Bangladeshi teams ensured representation from each of the four substantive economic empowerment areas under review as well as those related to fulfillment and protection of rights. The research manager, The Carter Center, and Manusher Jonno Foundation then worked with the researchers to finalize the site visit list. Once the public agency list was settled, researchers visited each of these sites three times, on different days, at different times. Researchers were instructed to vary the day and time in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding for what an average day at each site comprised in terms of interactions, presence of men versus women, and the types of information requested. Researchers took notes on gender of people entering the agency (i.e., women or men), experiences in requesting and receiving information, any variations in treatment by gender, and observation of any barriers to access. The form also provided brief interview questions for researchers to engage with public employees, and visitors to the agency. In total, researchers visited 49 public agencies and conducted brief interviews with 142 public workers and 222 visitors to the agency (120 men and 102 women).

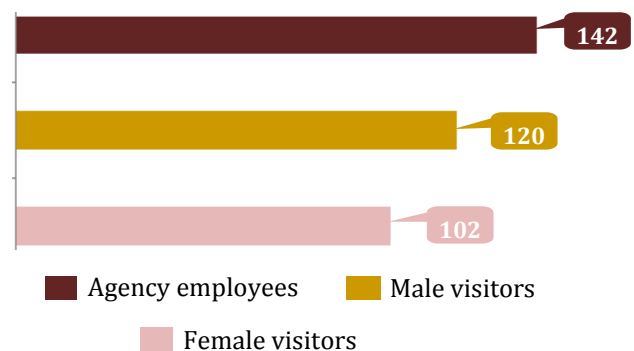
Public agency employees were asked what types of information men and women requested, in order to identify whether they were seeking similar types of information and documents. In addition, employees were asked to comment on whether women accessed information at a different rate than men, and if so, to explain their reasoning. Researchers were instructed to interview each employee only once, even if they encountered the same employee on multiple site visits. Male and female visitors to the agency were asked about the purpose of their visit and were asked to characterize their overall experience in engaging with the agency. Visitor engagement was intended to provide insight into frequency and ease of men and women gaining access to critical information at the sample agencies under observation.



### Gender Breakdown Community Leaders



### Nonparticipating Observation





## THE LOCAL VALIDATION MEETING IN EACH STUDY DISTRICT ENCOURAGED COMMUNITY AND PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK ON THE FINDINGS SPECIFIC TO THEIR REGION.

### Analysis

During the analysis phase, each data set was carefully reviewed and the multiple types of data triangulated. The outcomes from each source were compared against the other two sources—and to secondary data collected—to test the reliability of the findings, increasing the confidence that these findings accurately represent perceptions and sentiment on the ground regarding women and access to information.

The analysis process began by identifying emergent themes through a grounded-theory approach. Quantitative and qualitative data were included from all three data sets to derive the preliminary findings for each district. All data sets were reviewed through a quality assurance process to ensure the validity and reliability of the data for final analysis. Data sources were then analyzed for existing and recurring patterns. Analysts utilized an emic focus in reviewing qualitative content—ensuring the respondent’s point of view was kept intact as much as possible—through direct transcription from the survey instruments completed by the researchers, sensitivity to local language and meaning, and examination of context provided by researcher observations and information gained during the validation process.

Initial findings presented for validation after preliminary analysis provided (a) the perception of respondents on whether women access information with the same facility as men, (b) the key barriers identified by respondents to explain differential access, and (c) the types of information respondents believe to be the most critical to women’s economic empowerment and exercise of rights. With facilitation support from the research manager and Manusher Jonno Foundation, the Bangladeshi field research teams coordinated and executed a series of focus groups to validate the preliminary findings. The local validation meeting in each study district encouraged community and participant feedback on the findings specific to their region, and in most cases, included relevant government and administrative representation to capture their experiences and reflections. This process allowed researchers, participants, agency personnel/government representatives, and community stakeholders to discuss any limitations and follow-up questions based on the

initial analysis of the data; thereby contextualizing the findings. Any contradictions discovered during preliminary analysis or questions surrounding the findings also were presented to validation participants for clarification.



A young woman weaves a white sari with her brother.

Photo: KarimPhoto / Shutterstock.com

# FINDINGS

The findings below were derived through the collection and analysis of data in the six selected districts. We have presented both national aggregated data, in order to show macro trends and commonalities, as well as regionally specific data.

## Aggregate Findings

The process to collect the data included 128 community leader interviews, 81 expert opinion interviews, and non-participant observations at 49 public agencies. During non-participant observations, 142 agency employees, 102 female visitors, and 120 male visitors were briefly interviewed.

### COMMUNITY LEADERS

Of the 128 community leaders interviewed, 67 were men and 61 were women, representing 52 percent and 48 per-

cent respectively. Community leaders who participated in the study worked on a diverse range of issues, including but not limited to education (77 percent), local participation/community engagement (73 percent), human rights (66 percent), sexual and gender-based violence (53 percent), farming/agriculture (52 percent), starting a business (50 percent), reproductive rights (40 percent), and land (39 percent). When asked about the groups they serve, community leaders responded that eight percent serve only women, two percent serve only men, and 89 percent serve both men and women. One percent gave no response. Participants represented organizations and communities ranging from nine to 60,000 members and, in total, the 128 community leaders professed to serve/represent more than 585,000 people.



# THE AGGREGATE FINDINGS FROM COMMUNITY LEADERS AND EXPERT INTERVIEWS INDICATE THE PERCEPTION THAT WOMEN DO NOT ACCESS INFORMATION AS EASILY OR AS FREQUENTLY AS MEN.

## EXPERTS

A crucial element of this study was the 81 expert interviews conducted in the six districts. Of the total number of experts engaged, 50 were men and 31 were women, representing 63 percent and 37 percent, respectively. The experts came from a variety of backgrounds, including 12 percent from academia, 15 percent from NGOs or community-based organizations, and 56 percent from government. Seventeen percent were classified as “other.”<sup>73</sup> Regarding areas of expertise, a large number of experts expressed that they work on multiple issues. These issues included education (16 percent), human rights (15 percent), local participation/community engagement (15 percent), sexual and gender-based violence (13 percent), reproductive rights (nine percent), farming and agriculture (nine percent), starting a business (nine percent), and land (nine percent).

## NONPARTICIPANT OBSERVATIONS

Local researchers selected a number of agencies closely related to economic empowerment—specifically relevant to the areas of agriculture, education, land, and starting a business—and rights. Additionally, other offices relating to development or key economic issues were visited. Researchers visited each office on three separate occasions. The following agencies represent nonparticipant observation sites visited in at least one district during the study, with several having been visited in multiple districts:

Agriculture Office  
Bureau of Manpower, Employment, and Training  
City Corporation South: Social Welfare/Slum Dev.  
City Corporation North: Holding Number  
City Corporation North: Trade License  
Education Office  
Family Planning Office  
Fisheries Office  
Health Office  
Information Office  
Land Office  
Livestock Office  
Local Government Engineering Department  
Office of Chief Revenue Officer

Rural Development & Cooperatives Office  
Small and Cottage Industries Corporation  
Social Welfare Office  
Youth Development Office

At these agencies, researchers interviewed 142 employees who held positions ranging from office assistant to chief executive officer. During observations, researchers noted that there were 615 employees total at the agencies. Of the employees observed, 440 were men and 175 were women representing 72 percent male employees and 28 percent female.

A total of 222 interviews were conducted with people visiting the agencies, including 120 male visitors and 102 female visitors. Women and men were visiting the agencies for a number of reasons, including but not limited to seeking information and/or services, lodging formal complaints, or following up on pending cases.

## Inequities in Access to Information

All three respondent groups within the sample were asked whether women access information with the same facility (frequency, ease and rate of success) as men. The aggregate findings from community leaders and expert interviews indicate the perception that women **do not** access information as easily or as frequently as men. Though the percentages varied by district, government or public agency employees largely believed that women **do** access information with the same level of frequency, ease, and success as men.

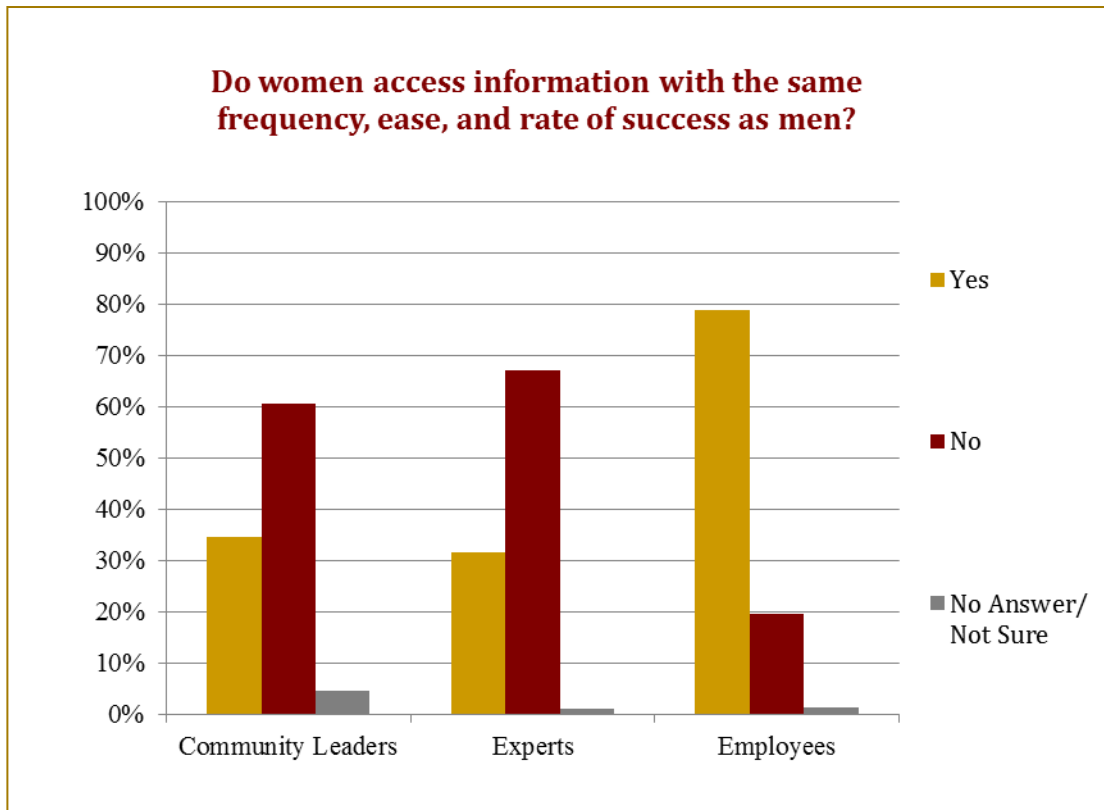
## COMMUNITY LEADER INTERVIEWS

Of the community leaders interviewed, 61 percent expressed the belief that women **do not** access information with the same facility as men. When community leaders are disaggregated by gender, more women indicated an

asymmetry of information flow than men. Nonetheless, more than half (57 percent) of the male community leaders interviewed expressed that women **do not** access information with the same facility as men. When Dhaka and Rangpur are removed from the aggregate, the perception of inequities is even more dramatic, with more than 73 percent of the respondents feeling that women are **not** able to access information with the same facility as men.

Community leaders noted: “Women face harassment while going to public agencies to get information;” “Our society is not warmly accepting women’s decision in any matters;” “This narrow mentality causes women to lag behind in our society;” and “Men can go everywhere, but as women cannot do so they cannot collect information easily.” These statements support the perception that women are not able to access information from public offices with the same ease as men.

In the six districts in which the study was conducted, Dhaka (65 percent) and Rangpur (70 percent) are the only two locations where a majority of community leaders expressed the belief that women **do** access government-held information with the same frequency, ease, and rate of success as men. However, when asked to explain their response to this question, one expert in Dhaka said while women *access* information with the same facility as men, women may not be able to *utilize* the information with the same success as men. In Rangpur, similar conflicts emerged from qualitative responses: While a majority of community leaders believe women access information with the same facility as men, their corresponding explanations included perceptions that not all women are allowed the same access as men and that women are not as proactive as men in seeking out information.



**MORE THAN HALF (57 PERCENT) OF MALE COMMUNITY LEADERS EXPRESSED THAT WOMEN DO NOT ACCESS INFORMATION WITH THE SAME FACILITY AS MEN.**

## COMMUNITY LEADERS NOTED THAT NOT KNOWING HOW/WHERE TO GO TO ASK FOR INFORMATION AND SOMEBODY IN THE FAMILY IMPEDING OR NOT BEING SUPPORTIVE WERE LARGE BARRIERS THAT WOMEN ENCOUNTER.

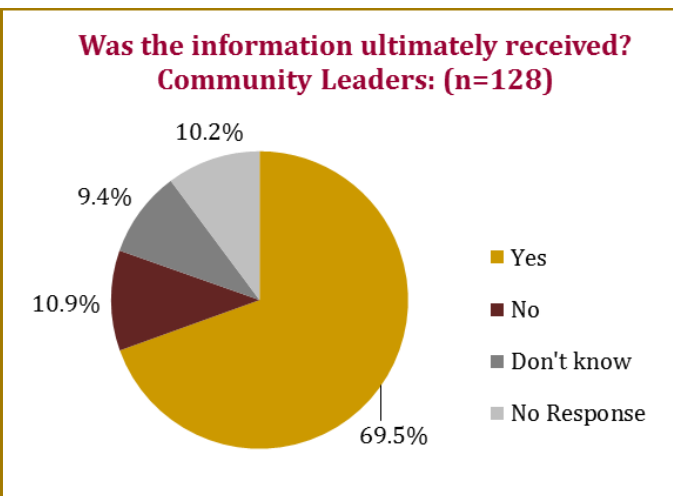
When asked to recall an experience in which they had attempted to access government-held information, 70 percent of community leaders said that the information they had attempted to access was ultimately received. Eleven percent said the information was never received, nine percent said they did not know, and 10 percent did not provide a response. Though the majority of those surveyed indicated they did eventually receive information, there appeared to be a distinct discrepancy between information received for the community leaders themselves compared to information received by other individuals whom they were assisting. This discrepancy may be attributed to their perceived status or to recognition within the local community. During the validation exercises, this distinction was highlighted. Validation participants emphasized that women leaders, those representing organizations or communities, and those with perceived higher status were more successful in exercising the right to information than women who do not benefit from this profile.

their perceptions, a number of experts noted that women are hindered by a lack of awareness about where and how to access information. Additionally, prevalent among the expert qualitative responses was the idea that social norms and paternalism play a major role in stopping women from accessing information. One expert said that women often are “not allowed” to leave their homes, while others expressed the belief that women who do travel outside of their homes are subject to harassment and judgement. In one interview, an expert noted that women face “different questions while going to public spaces. Sometimes they are being stigmatized by society.”

When asked what impact inequity in access to information could have on women, one expert noted that without equitable access “women will not be able to be empowered. As a result, development of the country and the nation will be hampered.” A number of responses echoed this perception and reinforced the importance of access to information for women’s participation and economic development.

### NONPARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

At public agencies included in the sample, civil servants perceived women’s exercise of the right to information quite differently from experts and community leaders. As expected, when asked if women have the same right under the law as men to access information/documents from their office, 99 percent of employees responded that they do. However, civil servants’ responses were distinguished from other data sets when asked if **in practice** women access information/documents from their agency with the same frequency, ease, and rate of success as men. Once again there was a very strong perception, with 79 percent of employees responding affirmatively (that women are able to access information with the same facility as men). A number of potential explanations for the positive response related to equities might be that (a) civil servants are referring more to equal coverage under the law or internal policies at their agency for administering the Right to Information Act rather than practice, or (b) agents are considering only what happens when women enter the office rather than



### EXPERT INTERVIEWS

Sixty-seven percent of experts (and the majority of experts in five of the six districts interviewed) responded that women **do not** access government-held information with the same frequency, ease, and rate of success as men. Only in Dhaka was this not the case. In explaining



barriers that confront women in reaching public agencies. Particularly, they may perceive that (c) women are not community leaders (the vast majority of civil servant respondents are men) or that the asymmetry perceived by community leaders and experts is not vast.

In the validation meetings, particularly in Dhaka, participants expressed that government officers do not treat women and men equally due to a mind-set and attitude by male and female government officers. Participants suggested that there would be no issue if government officers provided the information exactly according to the law. However, ultimately, women have a fear of using the RTI Act because there is an overall perception that government officers are not interested in providing information.

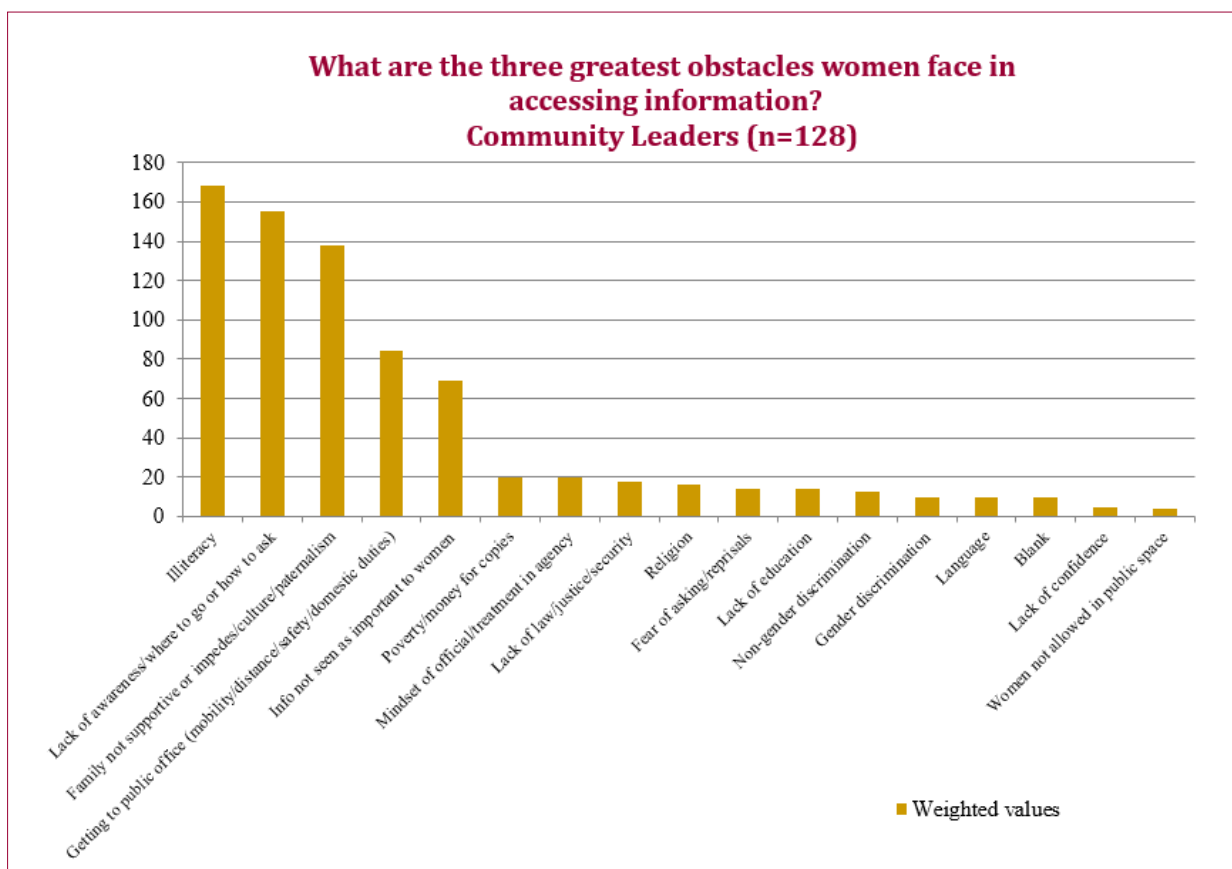
## Barriers to Access to Information

To identify barriers that women face in accessing information in Bangladesh, a number of data points were collected from participants in the study. Community leaders were provided with a list of 15 potential barriers to consider (see appendix I-A) and also were offered the opportunity to identify any additional barriers to women

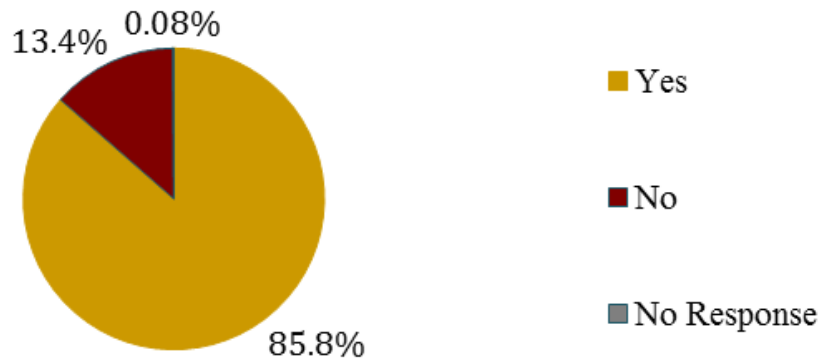
exercising their right to information. They were then asked to consider each barrier individually and to assess whether that barrier was a small barrier that could be overcome, a large barrier that was nearly impossible to overcome, or not a barrier at all. The responses were then weighted based on how large a barrier they were considered to be by the community leaders and the number of times the barrier was mentioned as one of the top three obstacles facing women in the exercise of the right to information.

When listing the potential barriers, 90 percent of the community leaders indicated that “illiteracy” is a large barrier to overcome. Additionally, community leaders noted that “not knowing how/where to go to ask for information” (81 percent), and “someone in the family impeding or not being supportive” (61 percent) were large barriers that women encounter.

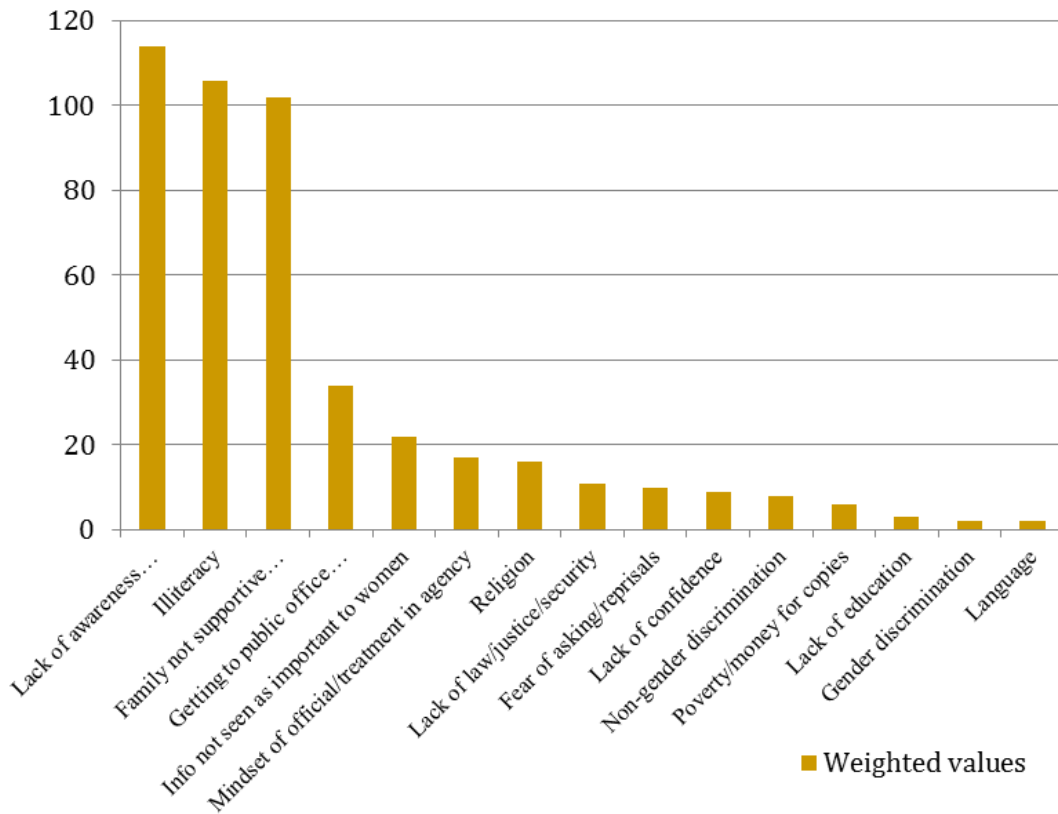
Once the magnitude of each barrier was assessed, community leaders were asked to select the three greatest barriers facing women in accessing information in their region. These responses were weighted based on ranking and number of times the obstacle was mentioned. Like responses were then combined into composite categories. For example, the category “lack of awareness/where to go or how to ask” was aggregated as the root cause of the barrier—lack of awareness—and the potential response/solution would be similar.



**Do you think women are interested in accessing information held by the government?  
Community Leaders (n=128)**



**What are three greatest obstacles women face in accessing information?  
Experts (n=81)**



When ranking the obstacles, community leaders across all six districts identified the following obstacles as most significant:

1. Illiteracy
2. Lack of awareness of the right to information or where to go/how to ask for information
3. Someone in the family is not supportive or impedes/culturally not appropriate/patriarchy/paternalism

Other obstacles often cited included issues related to time and mobility. It was noted that household demands and distance to the office (as well as safety in travel) serve as important impediments to women seeking public information. Moreover, there was the perception that others (including public officials) may not see information as important to or for women.

While some people interviewed noted that women are not interested in information, when asked specifically, more than 85 percent of community leaders perceived that women are, in fact, interested in public information. For the expert data set, 81 percent said that women are interested in accessing government-held information, thus belying one of the commonly held myths regarding women not caring about information.

Experts also were asked to rank the top barriers facing women in the exercise of their right to information, and the aggregate of the six districts found that the most frequently identified barriers were:

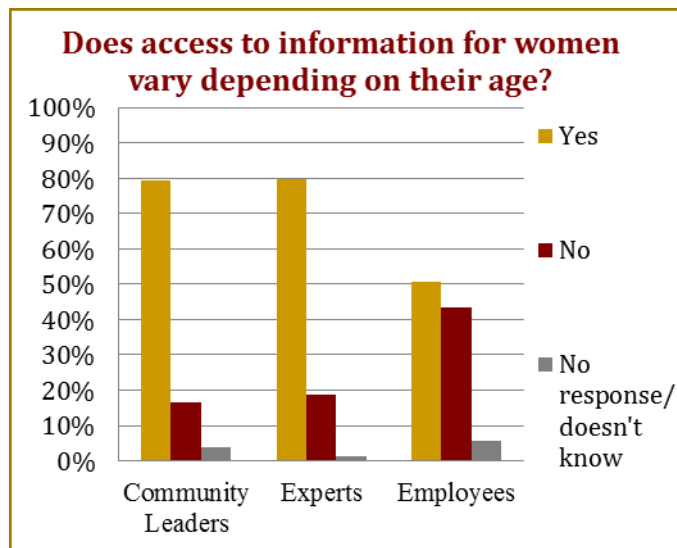
1. Lack of awareness/where to go/how to ask for information
2. Illiteracy
3. Someone in family not supportive/impedes women

In qualitative responses, experts offered thoughts about what they perceived to be the impact of barriers to information for women, including:

- ◆ Negative social and economic impact has repercussions in the family, with lower standards of living for all.
- ◆ A cycle of exclusion is transmitted through women to their children, and that perpetuates a lack of awareness for many generations.
- ◆ Development of the country is compromised: the majority is denied an opportunity to participate, benefit from social programs, and be more productive economically.
- ◆ When women don't have information, it represents inefficiency and, ultimately, a cost in the provision of public services.

## Age and Women's Access to Information

Community leaders, experts, and agency employees were asked if they believed that access to information for women varied depending on their age group. In the aggregate, the majority responded that age **does** impact access. Eighty percent of community leaders, 80 percent of experts, and 51 percent of employees responded that women's access to information varies depending upon their age group.



Employee responses about the impact of age varied greatly by district. The vast majority of employees interviewed at agencies in Khulna (83 percent), Rajshahi (74 percent), and Rangpur (74 percent) said that the age group of women **does** make a difference in their ability to access information. However, 77 percent of employees interviewed in Sylhet and 78 percent in Dhaka said that the age group of women **does not** make a difference.

Some employee comments indicated the perception that younger women are more aware of information available to them, while older women have reduced access to information because they have lower literacy rates than younger women who seek information and are "less interested." Others noted that a woman's age can have an effect on the information she is seeking. For example, experts noted that younger women tend to seek information related to training and personal development opportunities, while elderly women tend to seek information regarding benefits and other social services more often.

During the validation meetings, participants noted that marital status also plays a role in women's facility to



exercise the right to information, as married women have more responsibilities and, potentially, more restrictions. Moreover, it was expressed that education may be contributing factor, with younger women being more educated—and, theoretically, more successful in the exercise of the right to information—as well as more “progressive” and more likely to seek information related to increased economic empowerment.

Importantly, community leaders (81 percent) and experts (84 percent) both agreed that the barriers and potential solutions differed based on a woman’s age group. Additionally, 81 percent of experts responded that the type of information most valuable for women varies depending on their age group.

## Priority Information for Women’s Economic Empowerment and Promotion and Protection of Rights

In considering information most relevant for women’s economic empowerment and promotion and protection of rights, researchers first asked community leaders whether they felt that the government held important information for women. Approximately, 90 percent of all respondents affirmed that the government does possess critical information, serving as a powerful rebut to the notion that women do not need or want information.

When asked what information was the **most** valuable for women’s increased economic empowerment and the promotion and protection of rights, based on weighted values, community leaders said information related to education was three times more than the next most important, land/property. Unfortunately, community leaders also identified education, land-related information, and employment-related information among the top types of information most difficult for women to access.

## Awareness of Rights

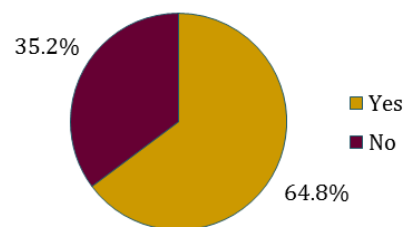
Within each district, community leaders were asked to comment on women’s awareness of their rights. Specifically, community leaders were asked to assess various rights (see appendix I-A) on the following scale: women not at all aware; somewhat aware; or very aware. According to their responses, in none of the categories did the community leaders identify women as **very** or **not at all** aware of their rights.

Community leaders indicated that women are **somewhat aware** of their rights across all of the following categories:

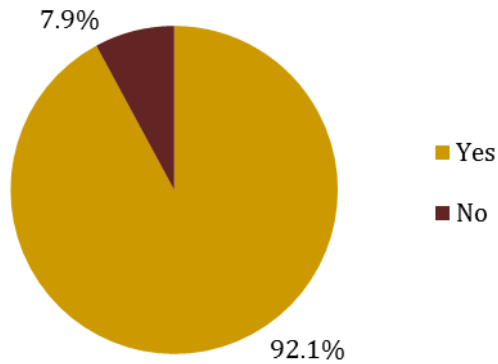
- ◆ Right to be free from violence—domestic, violence against women and other (77 percent)
- ◆ Right to be treated equally with all others—free from discrimination (75 percent)
- ◆ Right to work, under good working conditions/ reasonable working hours (72 percent)
- ◆ Right to information (68 percent)
- ◆ Right to be able to join groups/association (63 percent)
- ◆ Right to own property (59 percent)
- ◆ Right to education, including beyond the classroom (57 percent)
- ◆ Right to be able to go to court if any rights are violated (52 percent)

Though community leaders identified the right to information as one in which women were less aware, when asked if they themselves had heard about the Right to Information Act, 65 percent responded affirmatively, while 35 percent were not aware.

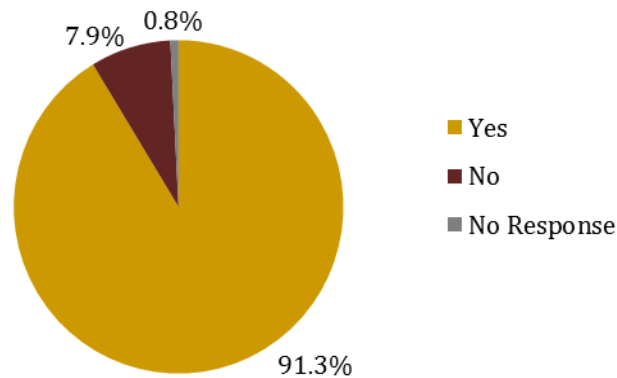
**Have you heard about the Right to Information Act? Community Leaders (n=128)**



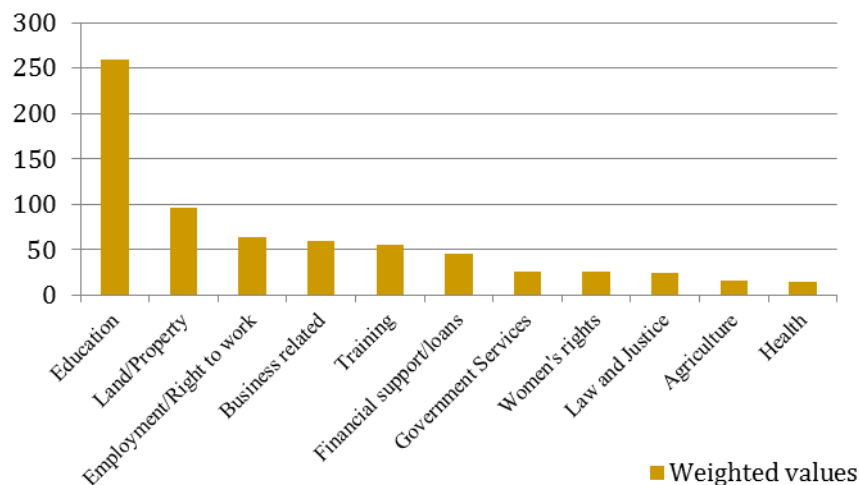
**Do you think that the national government holds information women need to better their lives?  
Community Leaders (n=128)**



**Do you think that the local government holds information women need to better their lives?  
Community Leaders (n=128)**



**What information would be most valuable to women for economic empowerment and promotion and protection of rights?  
Community Leaders (n=128)**



## COMMUNITY LEADERS AND EXPERTS AGREED THAT THE BARRIERS AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS DIFFER BASED ON A WOMAN'S AGE GROUP.

### Current Information Resources

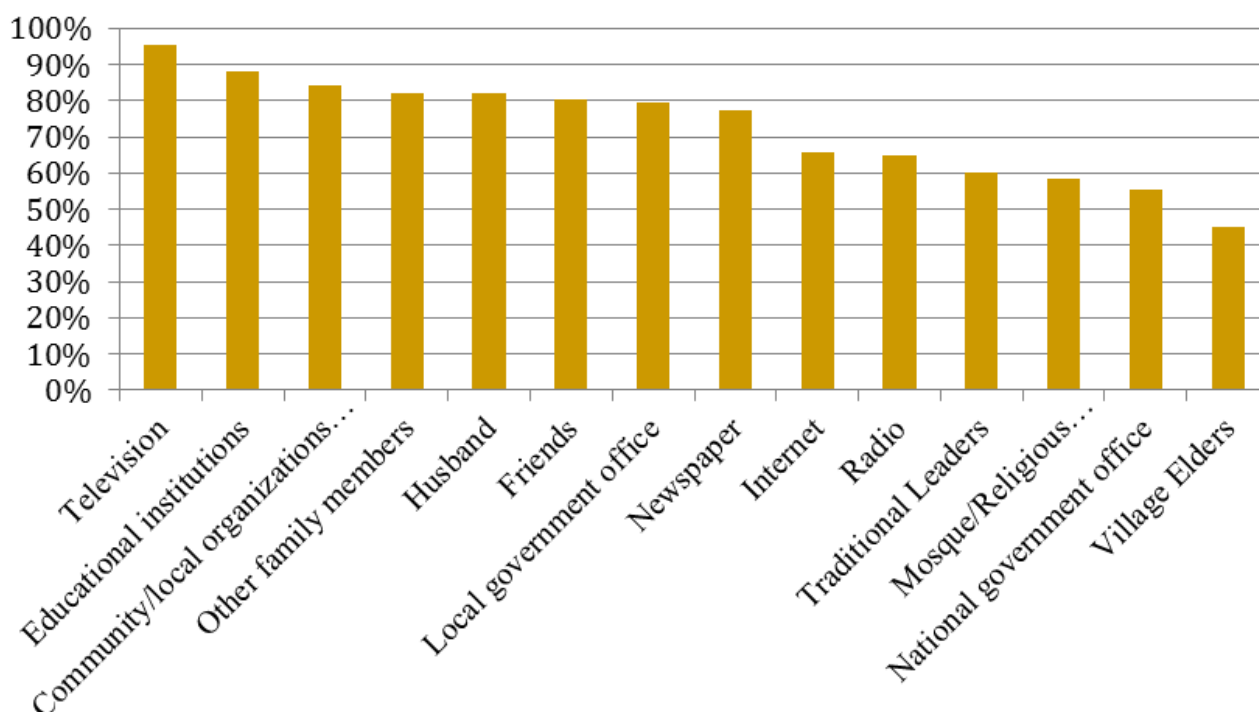
The study also sought to identify where women presently receive their information. A list of options was provided, and respondents could choose as many as applied. Community leaders indicated that women rely heavily on television (95 percent), educational institutions (88 percent), and community/local organizations/NGOs (84 percent).

Notably, 82 percent of respondents said that women get information from their husbands and/or from other family members. This coincides with interviews and validatees comments that women in Bangladesh rely heavily on their families for information and guidance.

### District Findings

The following findings represent the disaggregated data and analysis from the six specific study locations: Dhaka, Khagrachari, Khulna, Rajshahi, Rangpur, and Sylhet. There are a number of similarities among the various locations' findings but also unique results characteristic of the location, communities, and culture.

**Where do women currently get information?  
Community Leaders (n=128)**





# DHAKA DISTRICT

## DHAKA DISTRICT FINDINGS

In Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, 20 community leaders (five women, 15 men) and 11 experts (four women, seven men) were interviewed. Additionally, nine government agencies were visited on three different occasions, and interviews were conducted with 27 employees (21 men and six women) and with 54 visitors to the agencies. There were 22 participants at the validation meeting, consisting of experts, government officials, and representatives of different NGOs working on access to information, women's empowerment, and governance to discuss the preliminary findings.

### *Inequities in Access to Information*

Unlike the other districts, community leaders (65 percent) and experts (55 percent) in Dhaka said they believe that women **do** access information at the same rate as men. Additionally, agency employees (100 percent) in Dhaka overwhelmingly agreed that women and men access information at the same rate. Notably, when disaggregating the community leaders and experts' responses by gender of the person interviewed, slightly more women community leaders felt that there is an inequity. For experts, there is a marked difference in perception based on the gender of the respondent, with 75 percent of the men saying that women receive access to information with the same facility as men, and only 25 percent of the female experts agreeing.

While validation participants in Dhaka agreed that women may be more likely to request information in this district, a number of workshop attendees commented that government officers do not treat men and women equally because of a difference in mind-set and attitude by male and female government officials. Also, they noted that women are afraid of using the RTI Act, because there is an overall perception that government officers are not interested in providing them with information. Agency officials attending the validation workshop noted that while they attend to requesters similarly, regardless of gender, women do not come to the offices very often to seek information nor do the women that do come represent a valid cross-section of women in Bangladesh.

### *Barriers to Women's Access to Information*

When researchers read a list of potential obstacles that women might face when exercising the right of access to information, 85 percent of the community leaders in Dhaka identified illiteracy as the largest barrier. Eighty percent cited "do not know how/where to go to ask for information" as a large barrier, and 65 percent agreed that domestic duties are a significant barrier impeding access to information for women.

In listing the three greatest barriers to women, community leaders in Dhaka identified:

1. Illiteracy
2. Difficulty in accessing public offices because of domestic duties/mobility
3. Someone in the family not supportive/culturally not appropriate/paternalism.

The lack of mobility and safety in movement noted by community leaders is interesting, as the issue in Dhaka appears to be more related to fear and insecurity than availability of transport.

When experts were provided the list of 15 potential barriers facing women in the exercise of the right to information, 73 percent agreed that "illiteracy" and "do not know how or where to go to ask for information" are two large barriers nearly impossible to overcome.

When asked to list their own ideas for the greatest barriers facing women, the responses varied slightly with the three greatest barriers being:

1. Illiteracy
2. Lack of awareness of the right to information and/or where to go or how to ask for information
3. Someone in family not supportive/impedes, culturally not appropriate, paternalism/patriarchy

Interestingly, experts ranked "lack of law/justice/security" as the fourth largest barrier. However, community leaders did not include this barrier as one of the top three faced by women attempting to use their right of access to information.

Validation participants largely agreed with the barriers noted by the community leaders and experts, though they also spoke of the negative impact that many civil servants held toward women requesters. When asked to select the top three obstacles that prevent women from accessing information, validation participants most commonly chose (a) noncooperation from the family, (b) transportation and communication, (c) fear of asking for information/not knowing where to go to seek information, and (d) the influences of a patriarchal society.

Both community leaders (85 percent) and experts (73 percent) in Dhaka overwhelmingly responded that access to information for women varies depending on their age. In contrast, agency employees (78 percent) in Dhaka responded that age **does not** impact access to information. Validation participants stated that while age is an important factor socio-economic status has a greater impact on women’s access to information.

**Priority Types of Information**

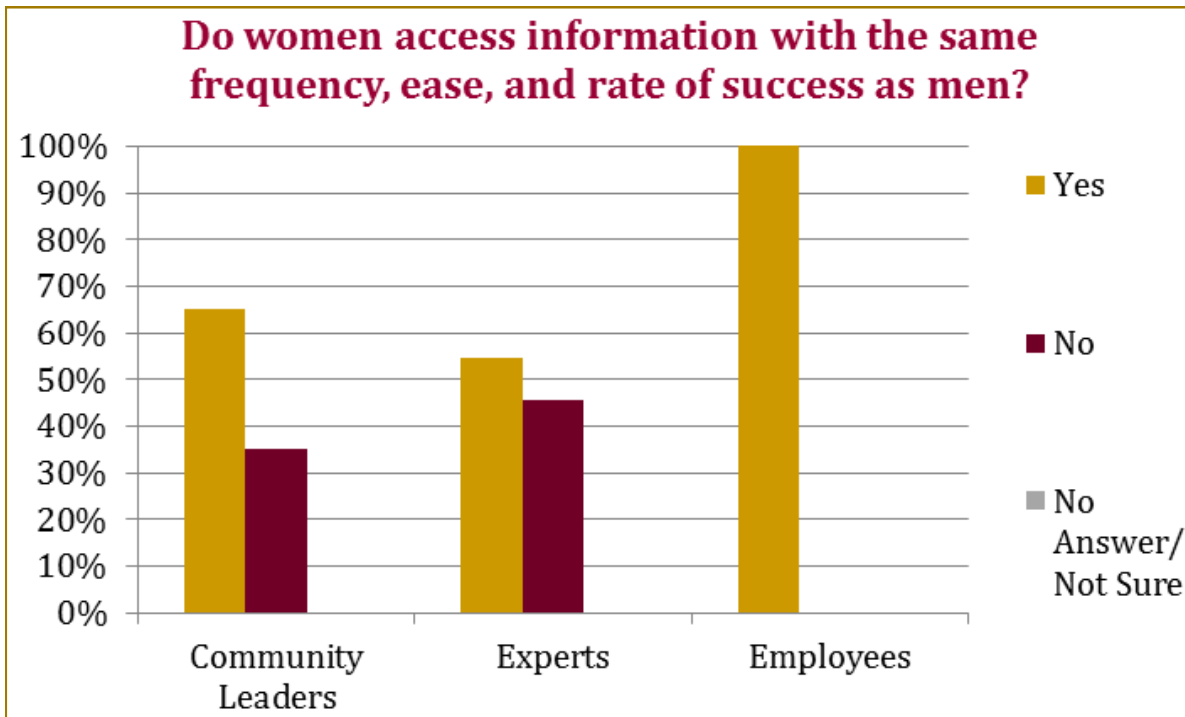
Notably, all community leaders in Dhaka (100 percent) said they believe that national and local governments hold information that is important for women. When asked about the most valuable kinds of information for women to achieve greater economic empowerment and

rights, community leaders identified the following:

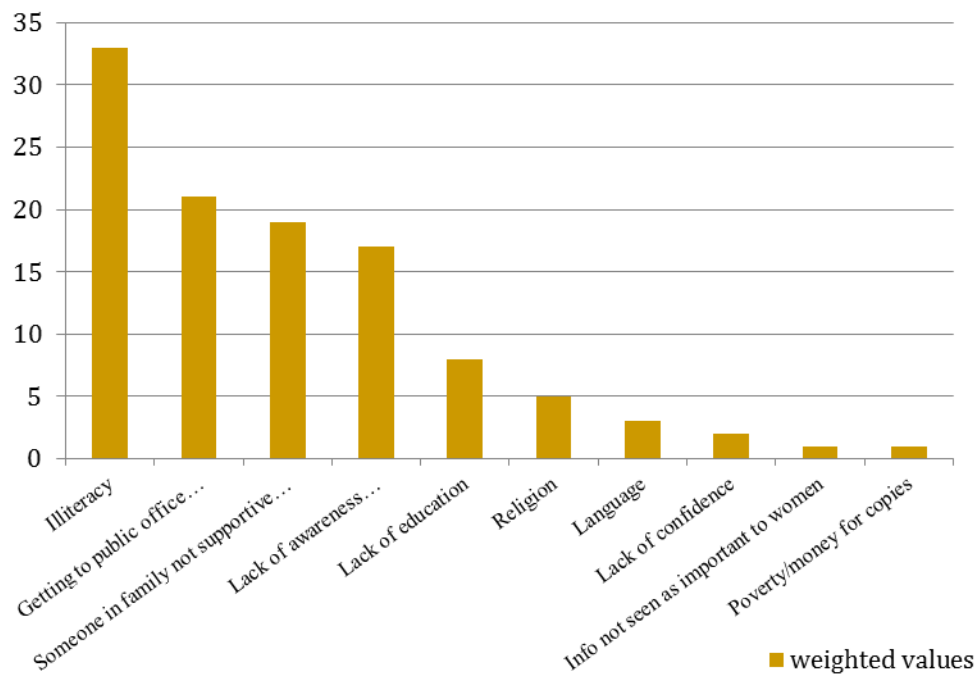
**What information would be most valuable to women for economic empowerment and promotion and protection of rights?**

- 1. Education**
- 2. Land/Property**
- 3. Business related/Trade**

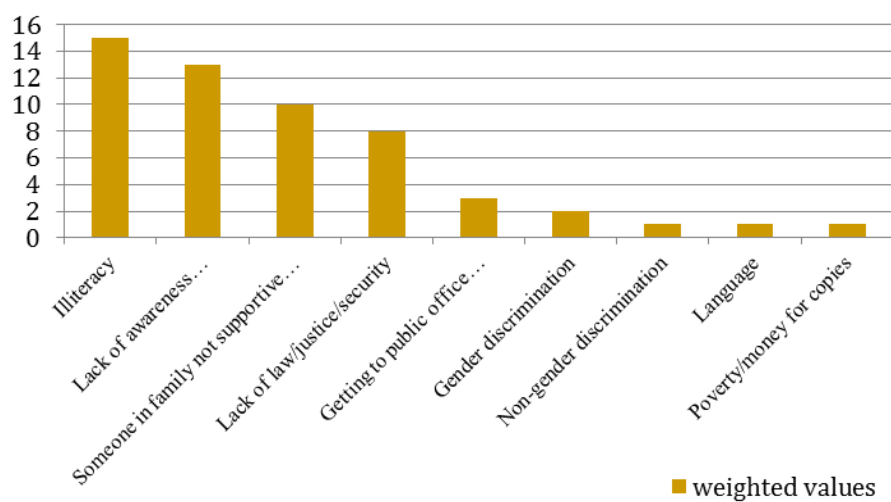
Validation participants agreed that women’s information needs are usually context-specific. Some participants stated that information itself is as important as service provision for women; others noted that the value of information is highly dependent on what it can do for women and is only important when women know how to use it. Participants suggested that some of the most important types of information for women in Dhaka are related to property rights, child marriage, family rights, other legal rights, and safety-net related/economic empowerment information (education, training, financing, and employment generation).



**What are the three greatest obstacles women face in accessing information?  
Dhaka Community Leaders (n=20)**



**What are the three greatest obstacles women face in accessing information?  
Dhaka Experts (n=11)**





# KHAGRACHARI DISTRICT

## KHAGRACHARI DISTRICT FINDINGS

In Khagrachari, 22 community leaders (10 men, 12 women) and 14 experts (nine men, five women) were interviewed. Visits were made to eight government agencies, three separate times each. Researchers conducted 23 interviews (20 men, three women) with agency employees and 31 interviews with visitors to the agency. Validation participants (nine men, nine women) met to discuss the study's preliminary findings in Khagrachari.

### *Inequities in Access to Information*

The majority of community leaders (73 percent) and experts (64 percent) agreed that women **do not** access information at the same frequency, ease, and rate of success as men. Agency employees (100 percent) overwhelmingly said that they felt women and men **do** access information with the same facility as men.

When asked to describe their experiences in attempting to gain access to government-held information, only 32 percent of community leaders in Khagrachari reported that the information they sought was ultimately received. However, 59 percent did not respond to this question, and nine percent did not know whether the information was received or not.

Experts in Khagrachari spoke of societal norms, mindset of the public officials, and gender discrimination. For example, one expert noted that “since the present society does not see both men and women equally, women cannot collect information easily and successfully as men.” On the other hand, agency employees (100 percent) overwhelmingly said that they felt women and men **do** access information with the same frequency, ease, and rate of success. Employees also responded that women **do** come into the office for information/documents/services as often as men (96 percent).

During the validation workshop, participants examined the preliminary findings through plenary and small group discussions. The participants—individuals representing civil society, local government, elders, teachers, and students—expressed the belief that while there have been good laws, there remain large gaps in how they are being implemented.

### *Barriers to Women's Access to Information*

When researchers read to community leaders a list of potential obstacles that women might face when exercising the right of access to information, the three greatest obstacles facing women that emerged were lack of awareness of the right to information or where to go or how to ask for information; illiteracy; and information not seen as important to women, tied with someone in the family not supportive/impedes women from accessing information.

However, when these same community leaders were asked to develop their own list of the three greatest barriers, they noted:

1. Lack of awareness of the right to access information, where to go, or how to ask for information
2. Illiteracy
3. Getting to public office (mobility/distance/safety/domestic duties)/lack of law, justice, and security

Nonparticipant observation supported the community leaders' representation that mobility, distance, and time were factors in women's access inequities. The interviews conducted with “users” at the agency revealed that many of the women had to travel long distances to get to the office. While some women were able to travel by car, those who could not said it took them a long time to reach the agency, and one woman said that she could only reach the office by walking a long way. Walking also served as a deterrent for others.

Experts were read the same list of 15 potential obstacles facing women and were asked to note whether the barrier was large, small, or not a barrier. Based on the professed list, experts identified not knowing where to go or how to ask for information, illiteracy, and nongender discrimination (including ethnicity, religion, class, and race) as the largest obstacles to women's exercise of the right to information in Khagrachari. However, when asked to name what they felt were the greatest barriers, the experts maintained the first two as “lack of awareness” and “illiteracy” but identified “someone in the family not supportive/impedes access/culturally not appropriate” as the third most significant obstacle.

Validation participants were of the opinion that women’s access to information was impacted by an overall lack of equal treatment or cooperation from families/society; an inability to get proper information; and poverty, which restricts mobility to public agencies. When asked to select the top three obstacles to women getting information from a given list, the most commonly selected choices were “noncooperation from the family,” “do not know where to go to seek information”, and “social obstacles.” Participants noted the importance of taking a collective approach with both men and women as well as including all stakeholder groups—governments, elites and others—in order to improve access to information for women.

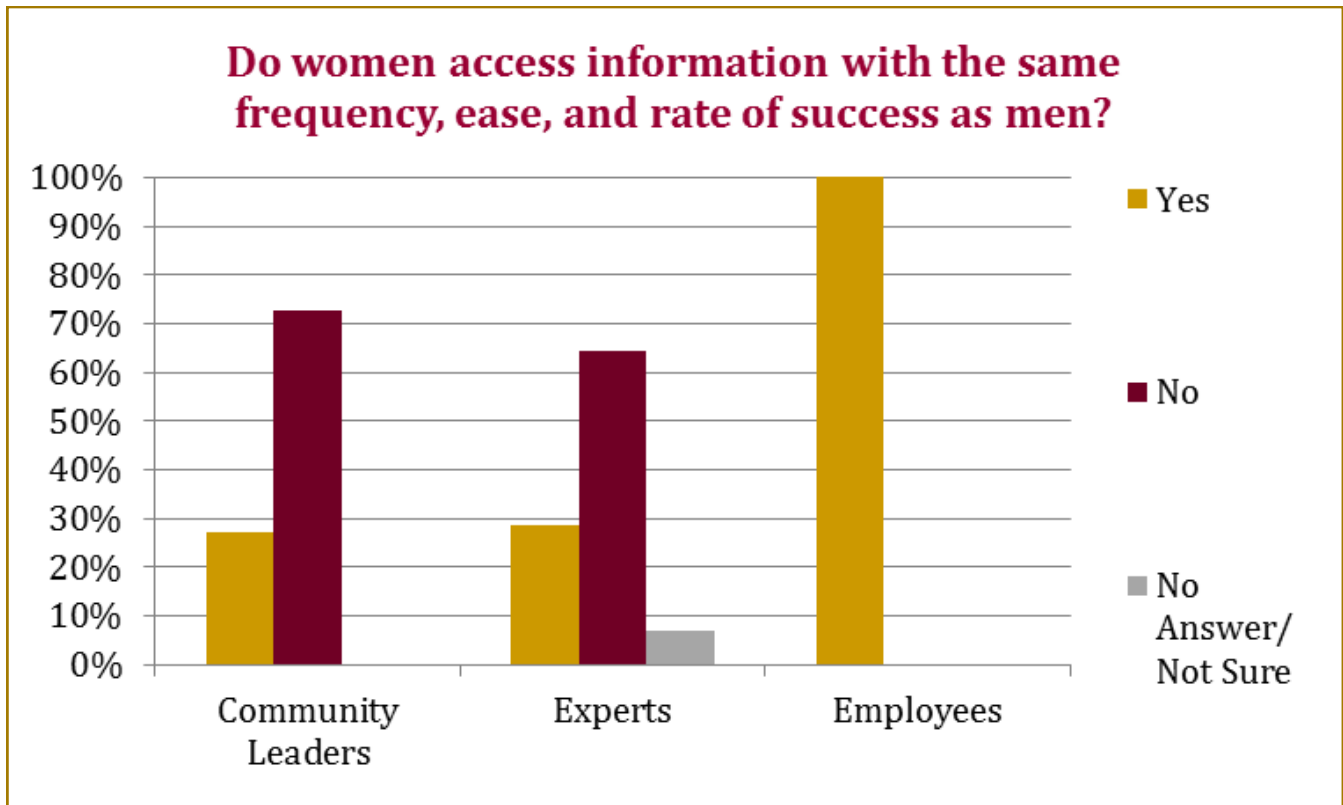
With relation to the impact of age, community leaders (77 percent), experts (86 percent), and agency employees (39 percent) responded that age plays a role in women’s access to information. It is noteworthy that a high number of agency employees (26 percent) in Khagrachari provided “no response/doesn’t know” for this question.

**Priority Types of Information**

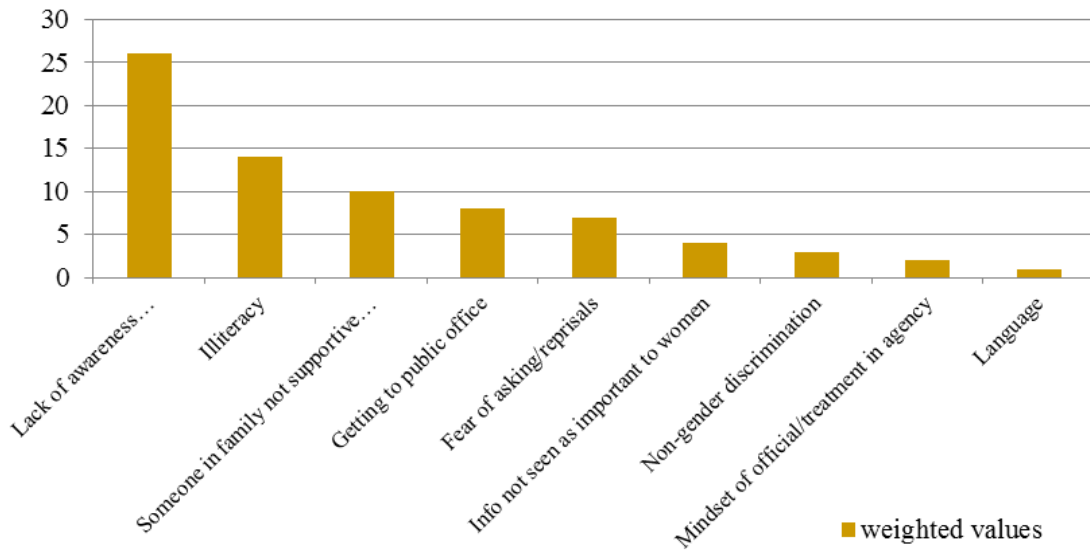
Community leaders in Khagrachari were asked what information would be most important to women for increasing economic empowerment and fulfillment of rights. The community leaders cited the following as priorities areas for greater information:

- What information would be most valuable to women for economic empowerment and promotion and protection of rights?**
- 1. Education**
  - 2. Training**
  - 3. Land/Property**

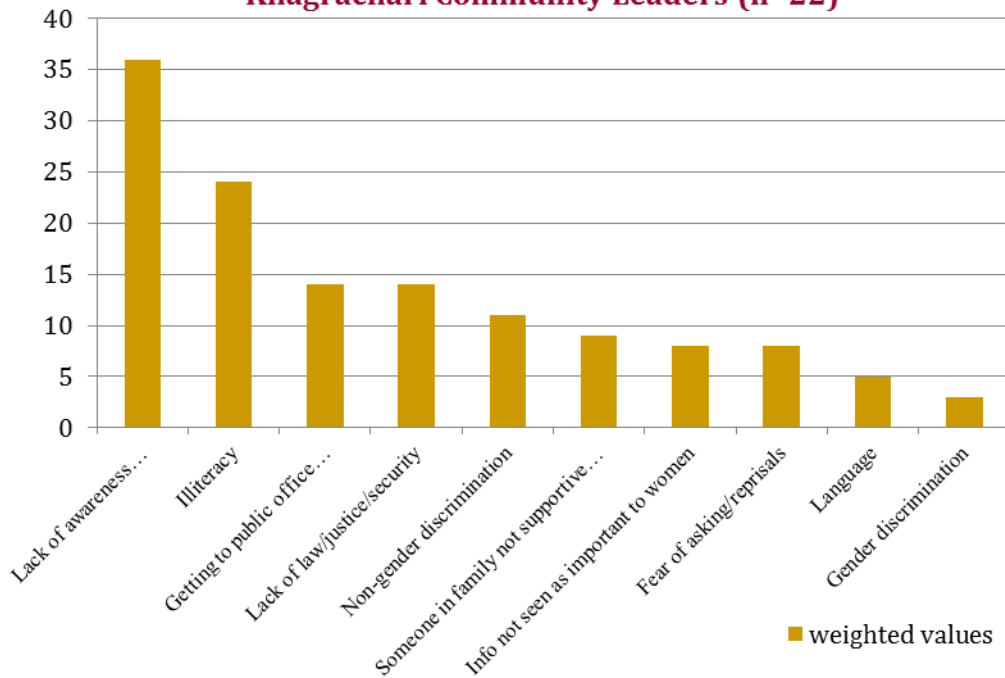
At the validation stage, participants agreed that information related to education is a priority, specifically noting that education refers both to academic and non-institutional settings, as well as to information about trainings and business opportunities for women. Participants also noted the importance of information about trainings, including financing training opportunities, financial stability, and basic rights.



**What are the three greatest obstacles women face in accessing information?  
Khagrachari Experts (n=14)**



**What are the three greatest obstacles women face in accessing information?  
Khagrachari Community Leaders (n=22)**





# KHULNA DISTRICT

## KHULNA DISTRICT FINDINGS

In Khulna, 20 community leaders (nine men, 11 women) and 12 experts (nine men, three women) were interviewed. Eight government agencies were visited by researchers on three different occasions each, with interviews conducted 24 civil servant interviews (17 men, seven women) and 34 visitors to the agencies. Of the validation participants who met to discuss the preliminary study findings in Khulna, 12 were men and 11 were women.

### *Inequities in Access to Information*

The majority of community leaders (75 percent), experts (75 percent), and employees at observation sites (58 percent) said that women **do not** access information at the same rate as men in Khulna. Notably, none of the community leaders responded “yes” to this question; rather 25 percent either had no response or did not know. Khulna was the only district in which the majority of civil servants interviewed perceived a gender inequity.

The community leaders spoke of societal constraints for women and patriarchy, noting that while, in theory, women should have access to information, in practice this does not happen. This sentiment was echoed during the nonparticipant observation interviews with civil servants. When agency employees in Khulna were asked if women have the same right as men to access information **under the law**, 96 percent of employees said that they do. However, when employees were asked if women access information/documents from their office **in practice** with the same facility as men, affirmative responses dropped to 42 percent. This was the largest discrepancy between responses for these two questions in any of the districts.

The validation participants agreed with the results from the three sets of interviews that women **do not** receive information at the same frequency, ease, and rate of success as men. Overwhelmingly, community leaders (80 percent), experts (83 percent), and employees (83 percent) said that access to information for women varies depending on their age.

### *Barriers to Women’s Access to Information*

In response to the researchers pre-determined list of 15 potential obstacles, community leaders said that the “illiteracy,” “lack of awareness/not knowing where to go or how to ask”, and “information not seen as important to women” were the greatest barriers to women’s access to information. However, when provided the opportunity to designate what they believe to be the three greatest barriers to women’s equitable right to information, they said that “information not seen as important to women,” “lack of awareness/where to go/how to ask/value of information,” and “someone in family not supportive/impedes/culturally not appropriate/patriarchy/ patriarchy.”

While community leaders observed that “information not seen as important to women” is a significant barrier, it appears that this perspective is from men, government officials, or women who previously had been excluded from information flows. As one leader said, difficulties/rejection from government office have resulted in women not being interested in accessing information held by the government. When asked specifically whether women are interested in information, 55 percent of the community leaders said “yes.”

The 15 experts interviewed initially noted “illiteracy” and “do not know where to go or how to ask” as the main obstacles for women’s access to information. With an opportunity to express their own list of priority obstacles, experts listed a “lack of awareness of the right and/or where and how to ask for information,” “someone in the family is not supportive/impedes/culturally inappropriate/patriarchy,” and “religion” as the foremost barriers. Interestingly, Khulna is the only district where “women are not interested” and “religion” were ranked as such significant obstacle. Conversely, illiteracy was not noted as one of the key barriers to women’s access to information.

Participants at the validation disagreed with the idea that women might not be interested in information, affirming that women are interested but that mind-set of women and officials, difficulties of getting to the office, gender discrimination, and lack of confidence to seek information served as additional challenges. Moreover there was concurrence that barriers are unique depending on a

woman’s socio-economic status and geographical location. For instance, women from urban areas may not face the security related challenges of travel to public agencies that rural women face. Participants additionally noted the importance of being connected; that, in general, women do not get easy access to information unless they are a community leader/well known at the office.

As with many of the other districts, access to information based on the age of the women was perceived to play a significant role. When asked in the interview, 80 percent of community leaders and 83 percent of both experts and civil servants affirmed that age was a contributing factor to women’s exercise of the right to information. In the validation, participants in Khulna noted that the specific obstacles facing women vary depending on age. For example, “a married women faces obstacles related to household duties but an unmarried woman may not face this challenge. Instead, she may face security related challenges while attempting to get information.”

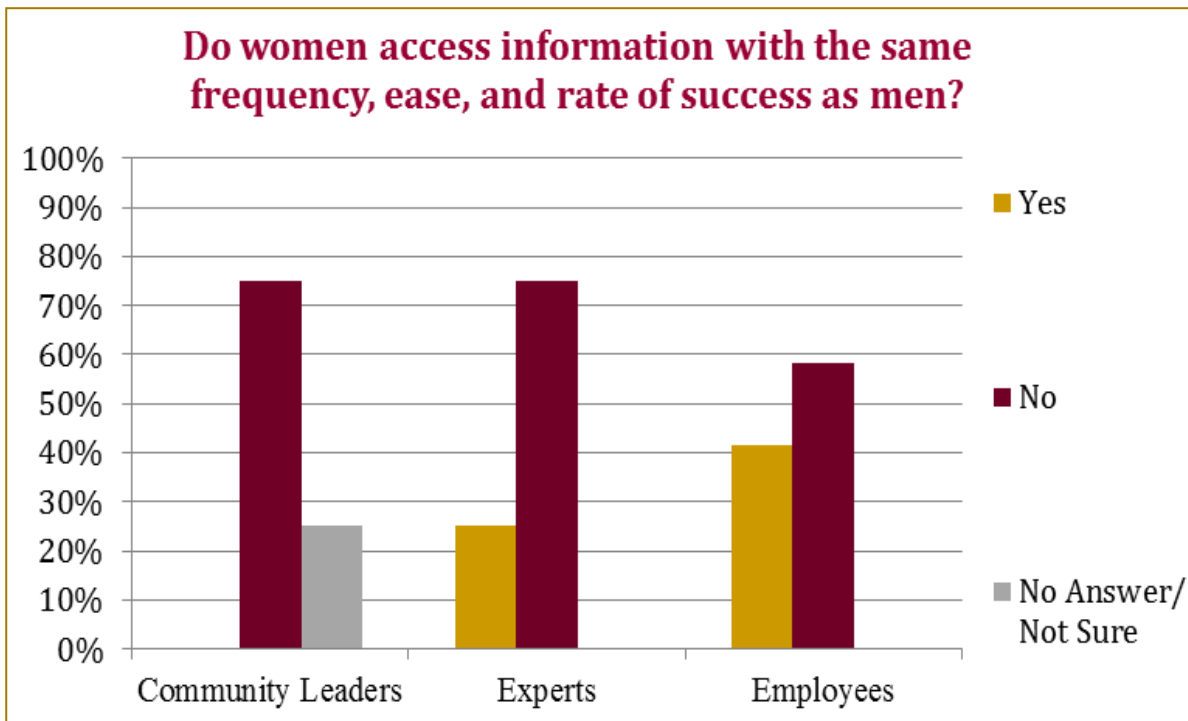
**Priority Types of Information**

The information that community leaders in Khulna identified as most valuable to women for achieving

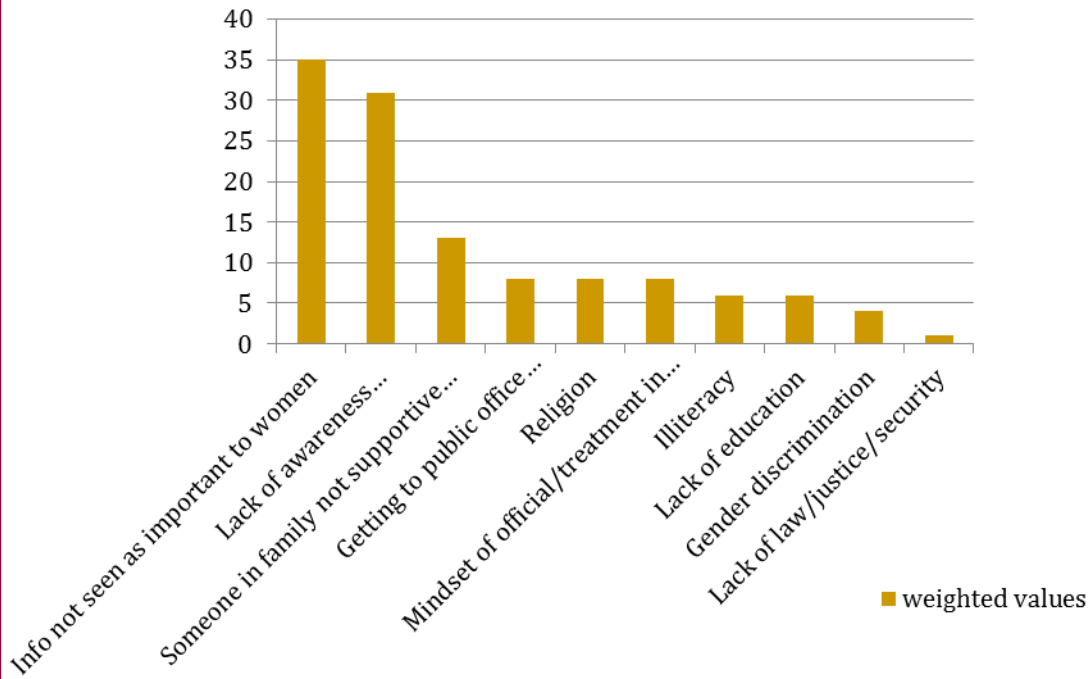
economic empowerment and the promotion and protection of rights are:

- What information would be most valuable to women for economic empowerment and promotion and protection of rights?**
- 1. Education**
  - 2. Business related/Trade**
  - 3. Employment/Right to work**

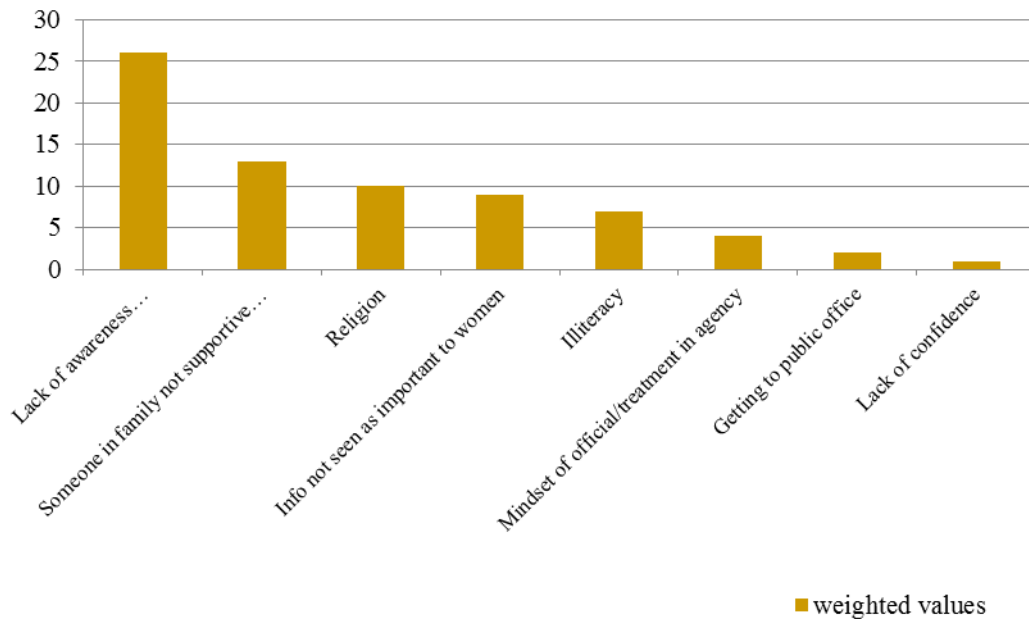
Validation participants were in agreement with community leaders but additionally noted the importance of agriculture; health; and social services information for women.



**What are the three greatest obstacles women face in accessing information?  
Khulna Community Leaders (n=20)**



**What are the three greatest obstacles women face in accessing information?  
Khulna Experts (n=14)**



# RAJSHAHI DISTRICT

## RAJSHAHI DISTRICT FINDINGS

In Rajshahi District, 22 community leaders (10 men, 12 women) and 15 experts (seven men, eight women) were interviewed. A total of eight government agencies were visited on three different dates, and researchers conducted 23 interviews with civil servants (five women, 18 men) and 25 interviews with visitors to the agencies were conducted. Twenty (12 men, eight women) validation participants met to discuss the preliminary study findings.

### *Inequities in Access to Information*

The majority of community leaders (64 percent) and experts (74 percent) agreed that women **do not** access information at the same rate as men. Agency employees (91 percent) overwhelmingly said that they felt women and men **do** access information at the same rate.

During the interviews community leaders suggested that women do not exercise their right to information with the same facility as men because women are not treated the same as men in the agencies, face harassment in getting to the agency, and are confronted with societal mora that inhibit the frequency with which they may seek information. A number of experts spoke of the stigmatization that women may face in exercising the right to information, both from her family and society writ large. Many of these same themes were echoed during the validation workshop, where participants largely agreed with the finding that women are not able to exercise the right to information with the same frequency, ease, and rate of success as men.

Consistent with other districts, community leaders (96 percent), experts (93 percent), and employees (74 percent) in Rajshahi said that access to information for women varies depending on their age.

### *Barriers to Women's Access to Information*

When presented with a list of potential barriers and asked to identify which obstacles serve as large barriers to women's access to information which may be difficult to overcome, the community leaders most often noted

that women do not know where to go for information or how to ask for it, that someone in the family is not supportive or impedes access, and illiteracy. A majority of community leaders also perceived cultural barriers to play an important role in diminishing women's access to information.

Community leaders were asked to list the three greatest obstacles facing women. In this exercise they identified "illiteracy," "someone in family not supportive or impedes access," and "lack of awareness/where to go or how to ask" as the main barriers facing women in exercising the right to information.

In the interviews, community leaders noted that women are less aware of their right to information. This observation was confirmed during the validation exercise, with participants noting that both government and NGOs should be involved in the process of distributing information about access to information and that all stakeholders need to be more aware of the right.

In presenting the 15 potential barriers to the experts in Rajshahi, "illiteracy," "someone in the family is not supportive or impedes," and "lack of awareness of where to go or how to ask" emerged as the three greatest obstacles to women's access to information. While in a different order of significance, these are the same barriers noted by community leaders when responding to the predetermined list of obstacles. When the experts were asked to list the three most substantial obstacles facing women in the exercise of the right to information, the same three barriers emerged with illiteracy presenting as the greatest challenge.

Validation participants agreed that these were critical obstacles, additionally noting lack of financial independence, the mind-set of men and society (patriarchy), religious norms, women's lack of knowledge as to information held by government, and fear of security while getting to agencies, among others. Participants emphasized that for women to fully exercise the right to information, she would need the support of both her family and society noted.



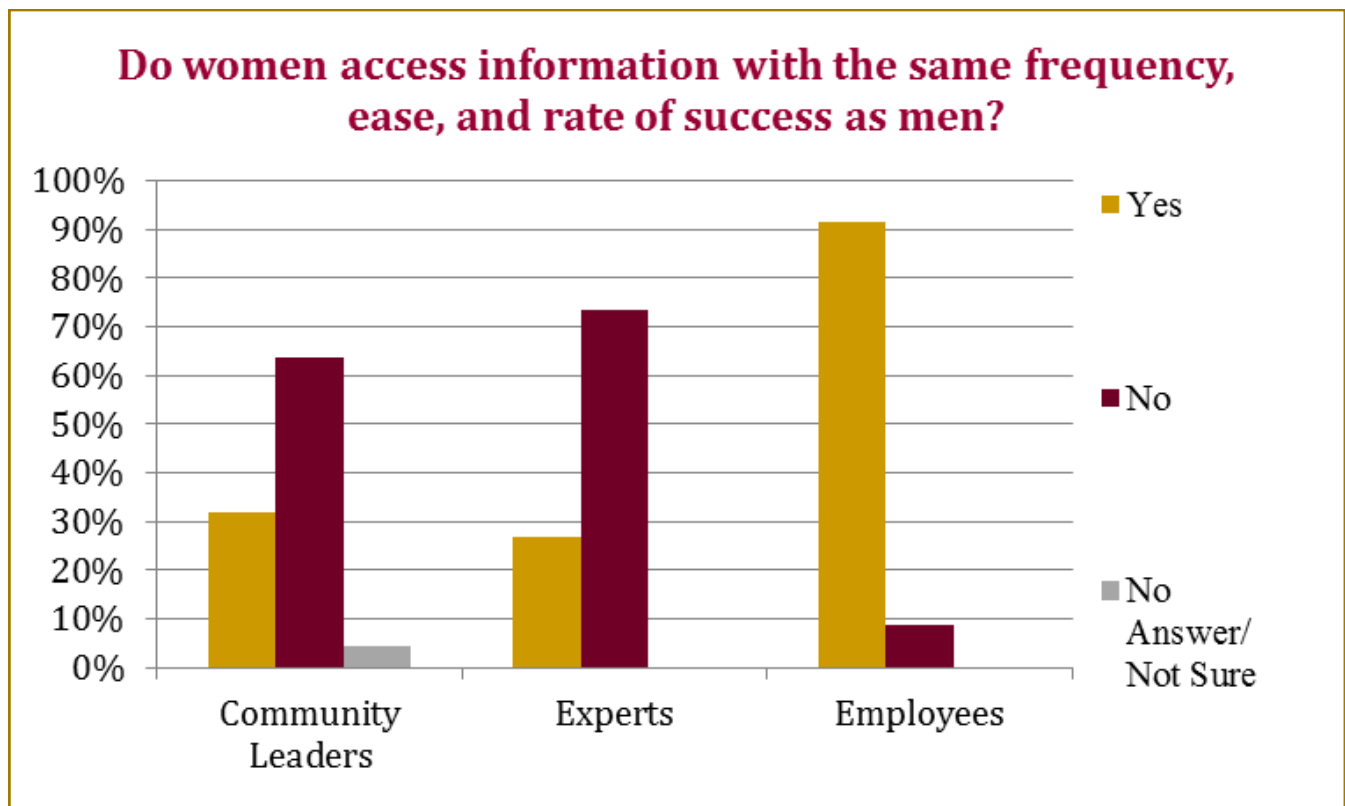
## Priority Types of Information

Community leaders in Rajshahi perceived that the information most valuable to women for achieving greater economic empowerment and rights relates to the following:

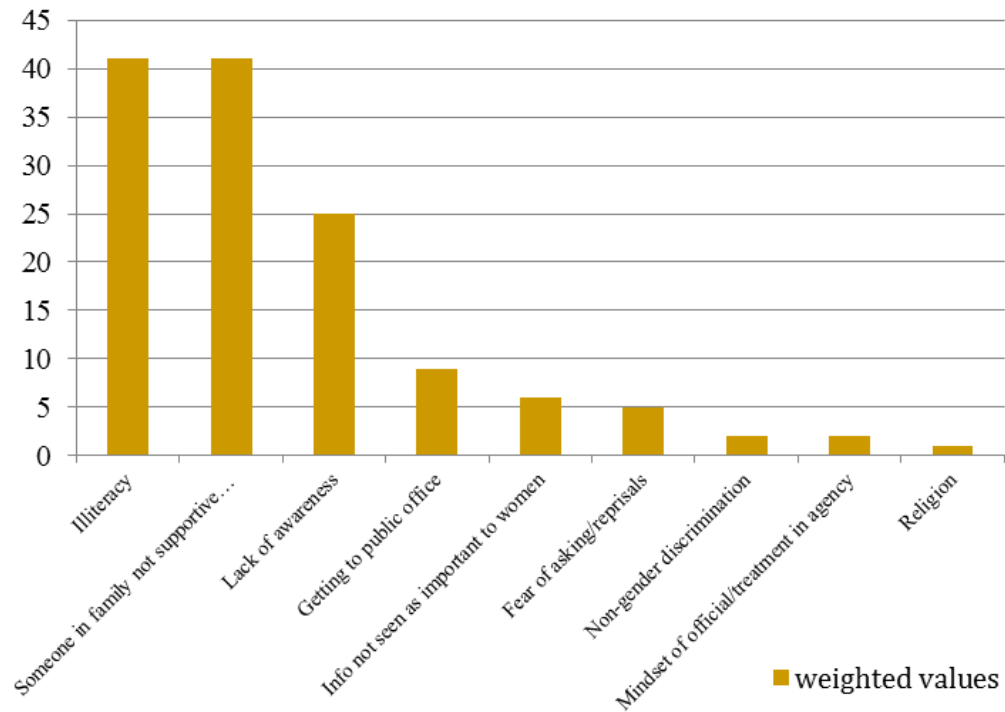
**What information would be most valuable to women for economic empowerment and promotion and protection of rights?**

1. Education
2. Land/Property
3. Employment/Right to work

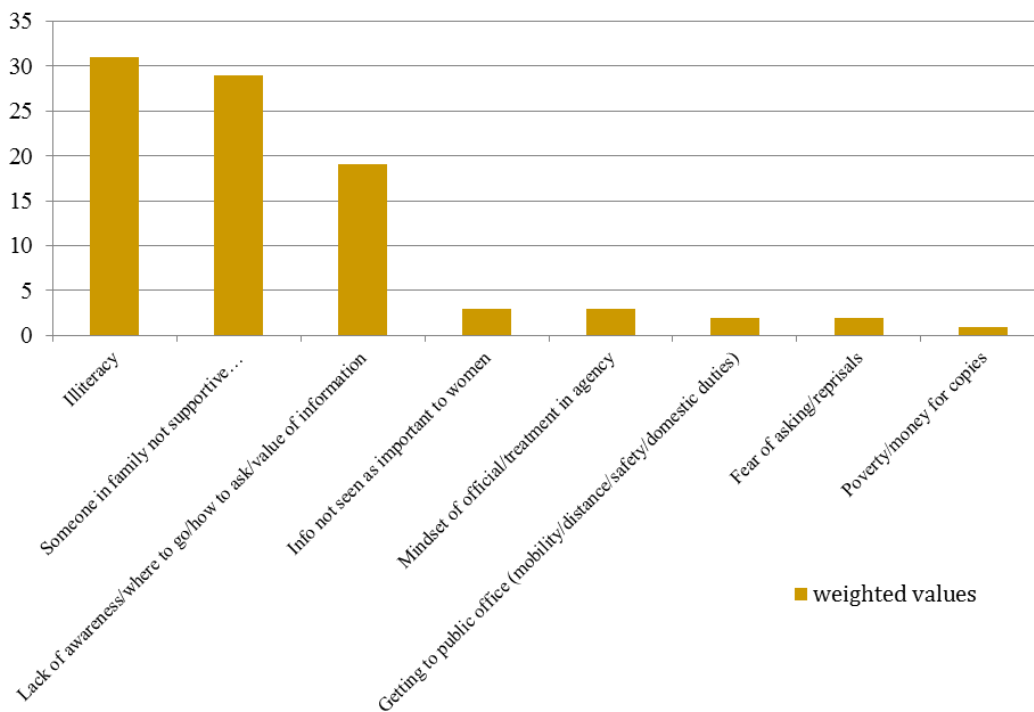
When asked what kind of information women want most, validation participants agreed that education and business information are priorities, adding that women want to know how to apply for different allowances and social safety net funds, medical services, and income generating activities including loans and training.



**What are the three greatest obstacles women face in accessing information?  
Rajshahi Community Leaders (n=22)**



**What are the three greatest obstacles women face in accessing information?  
Rajshahi Experts (n=15)**



# RANGPUR DISTRICT

## RANGPUR DISTRICT FINDINGS

In Rangpur, 20 community leaders (12 men, 8 women) and 13 experts (9 men, 4 women) were interviewed. Researchers visited a total of eight government agencies three times each and conducted 23 interviews with civil servants (9 women, 14 men) and 41 interviews with visitors to the agencies. Validation participants (11 men, six women) met to discuss the preliminary findings in Rangpur in October 2015.

### *Inequities in Access to Information*

Both community leaders (70 percent) and agency employees (52 percent) responded that they believe that women **do** access information with the same frequency, ease, and rate of success as men. Experts (70 percent) responded that they believed women **do not** access information as easily as men. This is notable as it is the only district in which more community leaders perceived women as having the same facility to exercise the right to information as did either the experts or the civil servants. While the validation participants largely agreed with the findings, they did emphasize a difference between women living in urban versus rural areas, with the more remote women having very little access to information or services.

In Rangpur, 96 percent of the civil servants interviewed said that **under the law**, women do have the same right as men to access information. However, when asked if women, **in practice**, access information/documents from their office with the same frequency, ease, and rate of success as men, only a slim majority (52 percent) responded affirmatively. Rangpur had the second lowest percentage of employees that responded women do access information with the same facility as men. This makes for an even greater juxtaposition with the positive perceptions of the community leaders.

Of the female visitors interviewed in agencies in Rangpur, 61 percent responded that they did receive the documents they came for, while nearly 40 percent responded they did not. All three groups of respondents, community leaders (55 percent), experts (70 percent) and employees (74 percent) responded that access to information for women **does** vary depending on their age.

### *Barriers to Women's Access to Information*

When presented with a list of 15 potential barriers to women's access to information, community leaders identified "illiteracy," "lack of awareness of where to go or how to ask" for information, and "information is not seen as important for women" as the greatest challenges, which they thought nearly impossible to overcome. A majority of the community leaders also indicated that fear of asking/fear of reprisal have a chilling effect on women's exercise of the right to information.

When asked to list the obstacles that they perceive to have the greatest negative impact on women's access to information, the community leaders identified illiteracy, lack of awareness of the right to information/where to go or how to ask for information, and someone in the family is not supportive and/or impedes/culturally not appropriate/patriarchy.

In considering the list of potential barriers, the experts in Rangpur largely agreed with the community leaders, although a majority noted that domestic duties, such as housework, child care, etc., and the time that this takes serves as a significant obstacle almost impossible for women to overcome. Similarly, a majority of experts signaled women's lack of confidence as a critical impediment to accessing information.

When responding to the interview question asking them to list the three most significant barriers to women's access to information, the experts proposed that lack of awareness/where to go or how to ask for information, illiteracy, and someone in the family is not supportive/impedes/culturally not appropriate/paternalism/patriarchy are the most challenging obstacles that prevent women from fully exercising the right of access to information.

Validation participants were in agreement with community leaders and experts; however, they also said that low socio-economic status and patriarchal norms, whereby men are seen as the primary decisionmakers, were additional barriers facing women's access to information. They noted that the frequency of getting information in Rangpur has increased and that the government is performing better but that poor and rural women are not

benefitting from these improvements at the same rate as others. “The women are trying to be self-dependent, but they have not yet learned how to walk. It is because they lack education and awareness.”

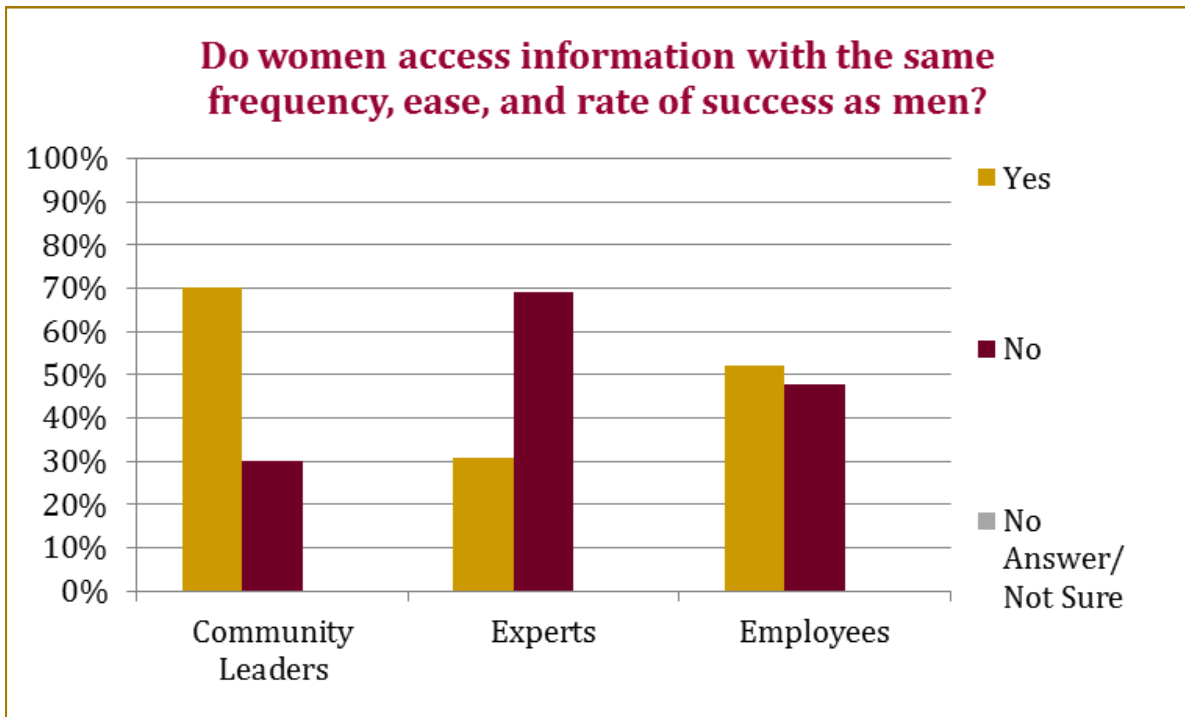
### ***Priority Types of Information***

Community leaders in Rangpur considered the information that would be most valuable to women for achieving greater economic empowerment and rights was information related to the following:

The validation participants’ responses agreed with study findings. Participants responded that the most important types of information for women’s increased economic empowerment and promotion and protection of rights is land/property, education, employment, and information related to public services and basic rights (i.e. how to get healthcare and medicines).

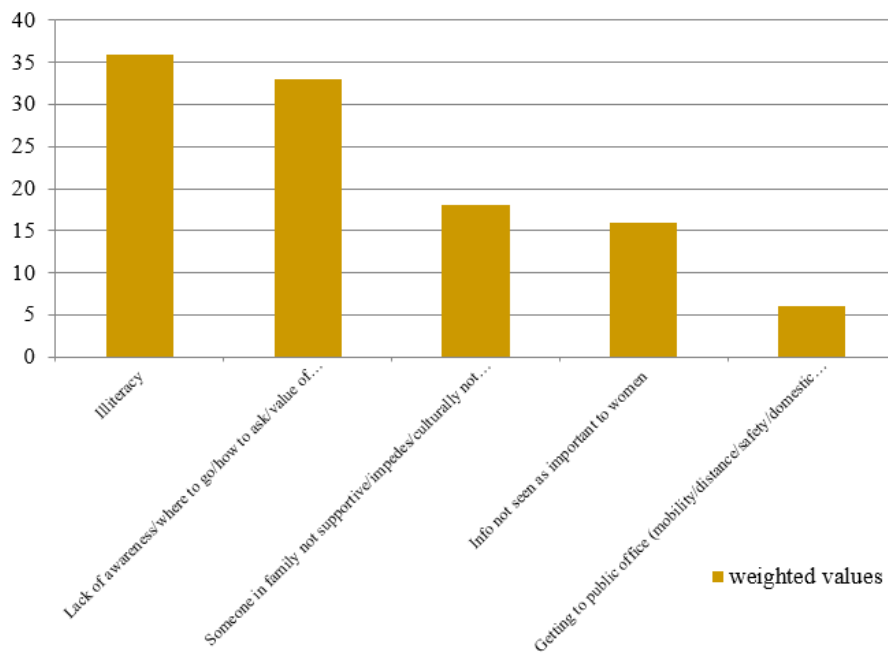
#### **What information would be most valuable to women for economic empowerment and promotion and protection of rights?**

- 1. Education**
- 2. Land/Property**
- 3. Employment/Right to work**

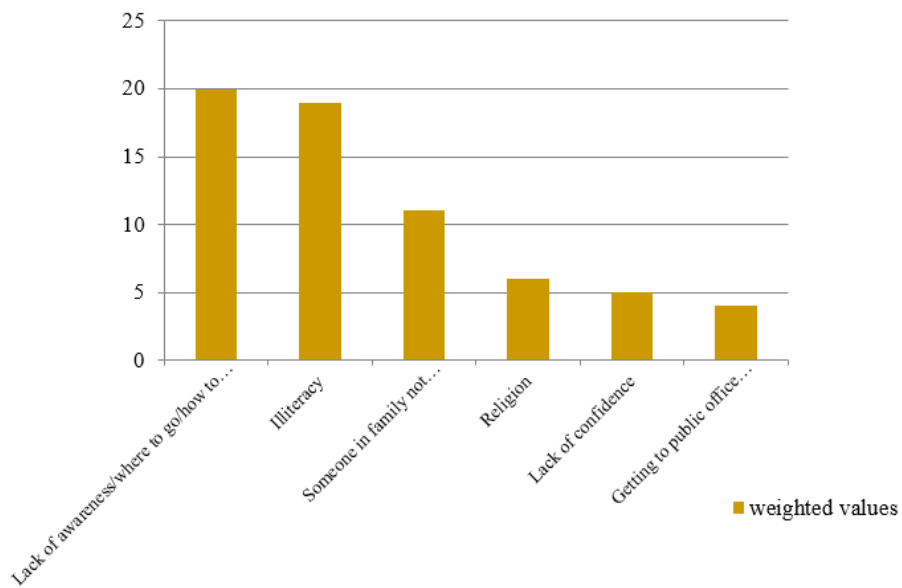




**What are the three greatest obstacles women face in accessing information?  
Rangpur Community Leaders (n=20)**



**What are the three greatest obstacles women face in accessing information?  
Rangpur Experts (n=13)**



# SYLHET DISTRICT

## SYLHET DISTRICT FINDINGS

In Sylhet, 24 community leaders (11 men, 13 women) and 16 experts (nine men, seven women) were interviewed. A total of eight government agencies were visited three times each. During these visits, interviews were conducted with 22 employees (18 men, four women) and 37 visitors to the agencies. Validation participants (10 men, 19 women) met to discuss the preliminary results for the study.

### *Inequities in Access to Information*

The majority of community leaders (79 percent) and experts (69 percent) agreed that women **do not** access information at the same frequency, ease, and rate as men. Agency employees (86 percent) responded that they believe women **do** access information at the same rate as men. Notably, during the interviews with agency personnel, approximately one-third indicated the belief that women **do not** come into the public office as often as men, as compared to just one in ten identifying the same in the aggregated numbers. Overall, the validation participants said that they agreed with the perceptions of inequity voiced by the community leaders and experts.

Both community leaders (83 percent) and experts (69 percent) believed that access to information varies for women depending on their age. Employees (77 percent) overwhelmingly responded that they did not believe access to information varied for women based on their age.

### *Barriers to Women's Access to Information*

Ninety percent of the community leaders in Sylhet, when presented with the list of 15 potential barriers, perceived illiteracy to be an obstacle almost impossible for women to overcome, and 85 percent noted someone in the family not supportive/impeding access to be a significant challenge. A majority of community leader respondents also highlighted not knowing where to go for information or how to ask and domestic duties, including housework and childcare, as critical impediments facing women.

When community leaders were asked to delineate the three most significant obstacles facing women, the weighted responses were someone in family not supportive/impedes, illiteracy, and getting to the public office, including issues of mobility/distance/safety/and domestic duties.

When the experts in Sylhet were presented with the list of potential obstacles facing women in the exercise of the right to information, 100 percent of the respondents said that illiteracy was a significant barrier almost impossible to overcome. Someone in the family not being supportive or impeding was identified as a significant barrier by 94 percent of the experts, and a majority also indicated that not knowing where to go or how to ask, domestic duties, culturally not appropriate, and distance to the office serve as critical challenges to women's exercise of the right of access to information. Of all the potential barriers, the experts believed that the most considerable are: someone in the family not supportive/impedes/culturally not appropriate/patriarchy, illiteracy, and getting to the public offices, including mobility, distance, safety, and domestic duties.

Validation participants included all of these barriers in their discussion but also mentioned women's lack of confidence to seek/request information, the mindset of agency officers, and social perceptions about women as additional challenges. In general, the validation participants were quite laudatory of the government efforts, saying that the policies/plans are excellent, but less than a quarter are fully implemented, including the RTI Act. Furthermore, participants noted that Sylheti women may not be as advanced as women in other districts, and thus extra efforts/inputs are required to support their effective exercise of the right to information.

### *Priority Types of Information*

The types of information that community leaders identified as most valuable to women for achieving greater economic empowerment and promotion and protection of their socioeconomic rights were:

**What information would be most valuable to women for economic empowerment and promotion and protection of rights?**

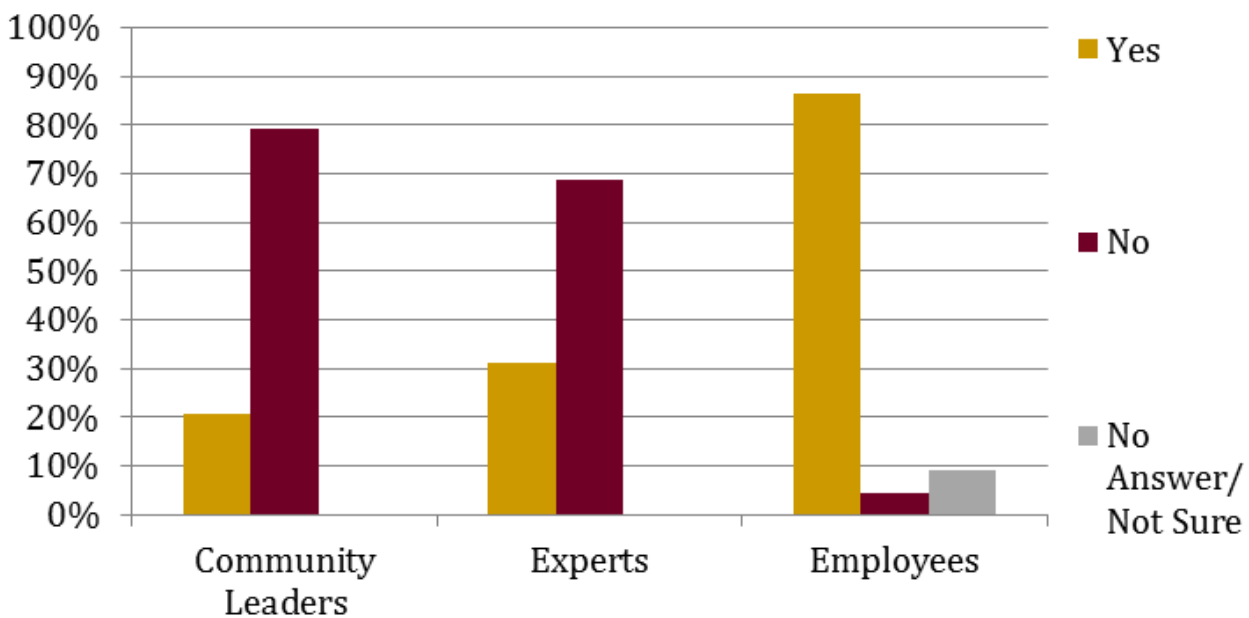
**1. Education**

**2. Training, Financial support/Loans, and Law and justice (three-way tie)**

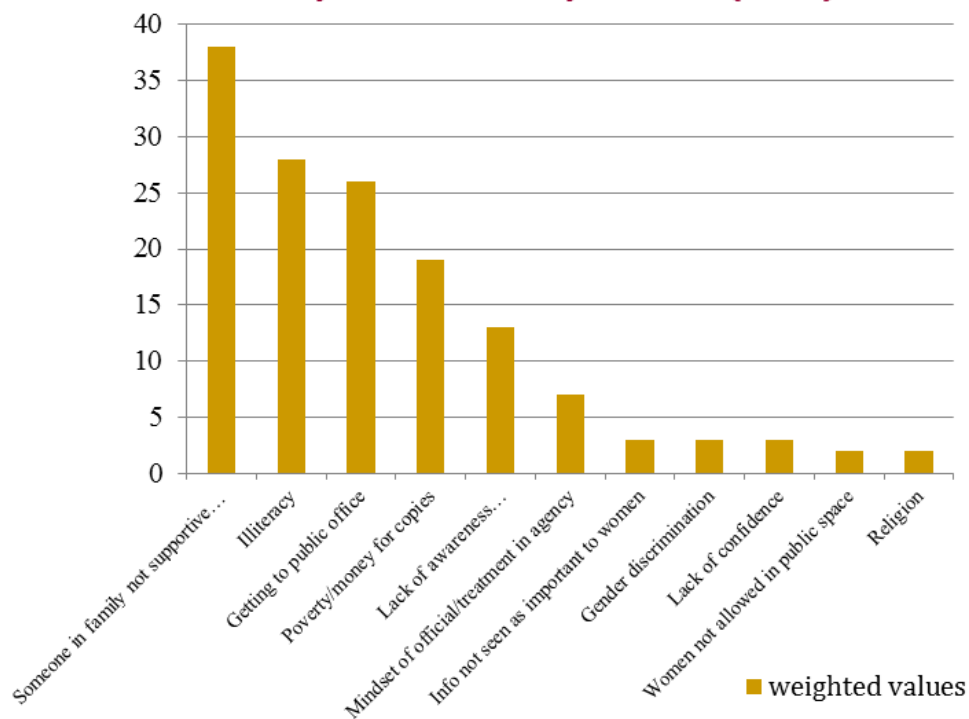
There was a three-way tie among training, financial support/loans, and law and justice for second most important type of information for women.

The validation participants agreed with the community leaders in regard to the importance of information about loans, as well as training and employment, but additionally emphasized the importance of information related to information and communications technology. Participants considered the priority rights for women in Sylhet to be the right to education, rights related to receiving medical care, and social rights—effectively expressing the same beliefs as community leaders. Information related to these rights was determined critical, along with family support.

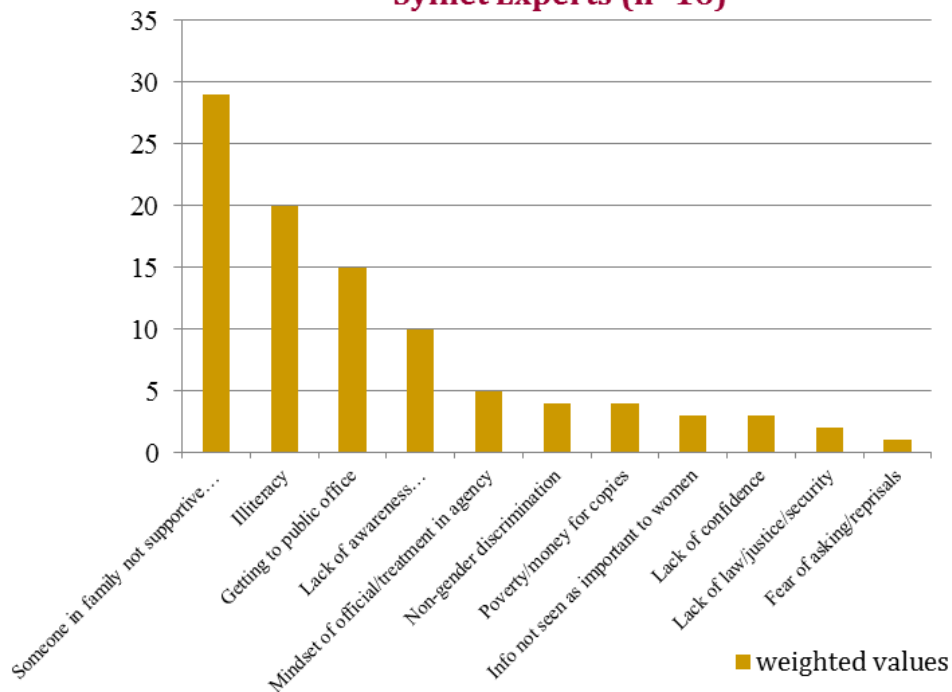
**Do women access information with the same frequency, ease, and rate of success as men?**



### What are the three greatest obstacles women face in accessing information? Sylhet Community Leaders (n=24)



### What are the three greatest obstacles women face in accessing information? Sylhet Experts (n=16)





# KEY FINDINGS

- ◆ The interviews and observational data collected during the study illustrate both differential access—that women are not accessing information with the same facility as men—and numerous barriers facing women in accessing government-held information in Bangladesh. While the aggregate of the districts for both community leaders and experts demonstrated the perception that women are not able to exercise the right with the same frequency, ease, and rate of success as men, there were a few notable districts where these inequities were not discerned.
- ◆ Though public employees were more likely to say that women access information with the same facility as men, observational data and feedback from validation meetings illustrated that women experience challenges or delays more often than their male counterparts.
- ◆ With the exception of one district's civil servants, all community leaders, experts, and public officials perceived a difference in women's access to information based on age. Validation participants considered age to serve as a proxy for impacts of education and marital status, with younger women having more

schooling and therefore being more aware of the right and value of information, and married women having more responsibilities and less time to access information.

- ◆ Community leaders and experts across the six districts agreed that women are interested in accessing information and that both the national and local government hold important information for women.
- ◆ The aggregate data demonstrated a multitude of obstacles facing women in exercising the right to information, including:
  - ◆ Illiteracy
  - ◆ Lack of awareness/where to go or how to ask
  - ◆ Someone in family not supportive/impedes/culturally not appropriate/paternalism/patriarchy
  - ◆ Getting to public office (mobility/distance/safety/domestic duties)
- ◆ Though women who reach the agency are often satisfied with the response/receive requested information, the validation participants emphasized that this success largely is attributable to the characteristics of women entering public offices. They were described as leaders of community organizations, well-known to the public officials, and/or of greater socio-economic status/education.
- ◆ The most important information for the economic empowerment of Bangladeshi women relates to education, land/property, and employment/right to work. This was firmly expressed in every district in which the study was conducted. Community leaders also noted a need for greater information on starting a business, training, financial support/loans, government/social services, women's rights, and law and justice.

# Limitations of Study and Considerations

- ◆ The methodology design, including lack of randomized sampling, results largely in perception-based findings that demonstrate the hypothesis that inequities exist and highlight trends related to women's access to information. It is not an exhaustive study, and results may vary based on interview subject and location.
- ◆ Nonparticipant observation sites were selected to provide illustrative examples of the interactions that take place within agencies representing key economic empowerment areas and rights. Due to variations in agency structures, the number of employees working on any given day, and other external factors, more interviews may have occurred at certain agencies, compared to other agencies in the sample.
- ◆ Employees at nonparticipant observation sites were asked to comment only on access to information within the context of their agency or office. Therefore, in responding to the interview questions, employees may not have been considering barriers to women's access to information that occur outside of the agency's walls. Had the question been formulated to generate speculation about external barriers, it is possible employees might have been less likely to answer that women access information at the same rate as men.
- ◆ All data collection occurred in the field with limited supervision from the Carter Center's Access to Information team. Once researchers had been fully trained on the methodology and best research practices, researchers independently implemented the methodology in their districts of origin. As such, variation in the application of the methodology may have occurred. When these variances were identified, The Carter Center attempted to mitigate their impact when possible.
- ◆ The selection of civil society and expert participants, in some cases, may have colored the nature of responses. Community leaders may have responded more from their own experience than on behalf of their communities. Also, both community leaders and experts may have highlighted their own areas of expertise.
- ◆ Women interviewed at the agencies may not be representative of the general population of women in Bangladesh. During the validation exercise, participants noted that women entering government offices often are more well-known and well-connected than women in general.
- ◆ For nonparticipant observation, researchers did not follow the methodology of interviewing multiple civil servants on each visit. While this reduced the number of interviews and may have impacted the magnitude of the trends identified, it does not negate the perceptions of those interviewed. There also were some errors in counting the number of people visiting the agencies and their gender disaggregation. Therefore, we have not included this data in the report.
- ◆ The study methodology does not include focal groups of unaffiliated women or individuals less likely to seek information/visit public offices. Interviews of civil society leaders who represent larger and more diverse populations were utilized in an attempt to capture the realities of these women as were validation exercises that incorporated additional people from the study locale. However, this proxy may not always have been fully effective.
- ◆ The findings presented in this report were gathered through a careful analysis of the data. However, the interviews and nonparticipation reflections were initially done in Bangla and then translated into English. In so doing, some of the nuances of the interviews and researchers' considerations may have been lost.





A woman rears cows at Inani, Cox's Bazar.

Photo: Golam Rahman

## CONCLUSION

Information is a crucial ingredient for democratic accountability, civic engagement, and the exercise of human and Socio-economic rights. Yet, this study has demonstrated the hypothesis that for many Bangladeshi women, important obstacles exist to accessing the necessary information to increase economic empowerment and protect and exercise their fundamental rights.

The study on Women and the Right of Access to Information strived to identify cultural, structural, and legal barriers that generate information asymmetry. In collecting data through interviews and non-participant observation and augmenting our understanding of the findings through validation workshops, we have begun to highlight perceptions of inequities and pinpoint obstacles. Barriers such as illiteracy; lack of awareness; cultural obstacles; difficulty in getting to the public office because of mobility, safety, and time; and mindset of predominantly male public officials all have played a role in deterring women's full and effective exercise of the right to information. Amplifying these obstacles are faulty underlying gender-based concepts such as inequality, lack of interest in information, or failure to understand its value. Notwithstanding, if these obstacles can be overcome or minimized, the vast majority of respondents confirmed that access to public information would lead to women becoming more economically empowered, resulting in better overall development outcomes for her family, the community, and Bangladesh as a country.

Intentionally, this study does not provide prescriptive conclusions but rather serves to demonstrate perceived inequities, illuminate challenges, and contribute to the discussion that will lead to potential solutions. With the completion of this study and the dissemination of its findings, The Carter Center hopes to collaborate with key government agencies, Manusher Jonno Foundation, and civil society partners to jointly identify and apply creative means to better ensure that all of people, including women, may enjoy a meaningful and equitable right of access to information.





# ENDNOTES

1. See estimates from U.N. Women; U.N. Millennium Development Goals; and “Our Work Toward Gender Equality,” Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, March 2011. <http://www.sida.se/English/how-we-work/our-fields-of-work/gender-equality/>
2. UN World's Women Report, 2015; [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/downloads/WorldsWomen2015\\_report.pdf](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/downloads/WorldsWomen2015_report.pdf)
3. Actionaid, 2015, “Close the Gap! The cost of inequality in women’s work,” p. 9. [http://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/womens\\_rights\\_on-line\\_version\\_2.1.pdf](http://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/womens_rights_on-line_version_2.1.pdf)
4. Ibid, 23.
5. “Clinton Global Initiative: Empowering Women and Children,” (Clinton Global Initiative, n.d.). <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/phlntrpy/notes/clinton.pdf>
6. See estimates from UNWomen; UN Millenium Development Goals; and “Our Work Toward Gender Equality,” (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, March 2011). <http://www.sida.se/English/how-we-work/our-fields-of-work/gender-equality/>
7. “Violence against women: Intimate partner and sexual violence against women,” Fact Sheet No. 239 (World Health Organization, 2014). <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/>
8. “The Contribution of UN Women to Prevent Violence against Women and Expand Access to Services,” (UN Women, 2013). [http://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/~/\\_media/9450DD6E14244DA082D642AAF734448E.ashx](http://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/~/_media/9450DD6E14244DA082D642AAF734448E.ashx)
9. “Facts and Figures: Leadership and Political Participation.” (UN Women, n.d.). <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>
10. Goetz, A.M. “Women in Politics and Gender Equity in Policy: South Africa and Uganda,” *Review of African Political Economy*, 25 No. 76 (June 1998), 241-262. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03056249808704312?journalCode=crea20#.VagcUvIVhBc>
11. Data on Bangladesh population published by The United Nations Population Division's World Population Prospects, The World Bank, (2016). <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS>
12. “Women’s Inheritance Rights to Land and Property in South Asia: A Study of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.” A report by the Rural Development Institute of the World Development Project. (2009), 32; [http://www.landesa.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/RDI\\_Report\\_WJF\\_Womens\\_Inheritance\\_Six\\_South\\_Asian\\_Countries\\_December\\_2009.pdf](http://www.landesa.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/RDI_Report_WJF_Womens_Inheritance_Six_South_Asian_Countries_December_2009.pdf)
13. See rankings in “Table 4: Gender Inequality Index,” *Human Development Reports*. United Nations Development Programme, 2014; <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-4-gender-inequality-index>
14. See rankings in “Table 5: Gender-related Development Index,” *Human Development Reports*. United Nations Development Programme (2014). <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-5-gender-related-development-index-gdi>
15. Rao, Nitya. “Women’s Access to Land: An Asian Perspective.” Expert paper prepared for UN Women (2011), 1. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw56/egm/Rao-EP-3-EGM-RW-30Sep-2011.pdf>
16. Data on Bangladesh published on UNdata by the United Nations Statistics Division, [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr\\_theme/country-notes/BGD.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/BGD.pdf)
17. Ibid
18. “Women’s Economic Empowerment: Guidance Note.” (Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada, n. d.). <http://www.seepnetwork.org/women-s-economic-empowerment-guidance-note-resources-1335.php>
19. Golla, A. M., et al., “Understanding and Measuring Women’s Economic Empowerment: Definitions, Framework and Indicators,” (International Center for Research on Women, 2011). <http://www.icrw.org/publications/understanding-and-measuring-womens-economic-empowerment>
20. “Is Education the Best Contraceptive?” (Population Reference Bureau, n. d.). <http://www.prb.org/Publications/Reports/2000/IsEducationtheBestContraceptive.aspx>
21. Data on Bangladesh published on UNdata by the United Nations Statistics Division, <https://data.un.org/>

- CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Bangladesh
22. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.1524.LT.FE.ZS/countries/BD-8S-XN?display=graph>.
  23. “Stipend programme enhances primary school enrollment – dropout and efficiency remain challenging”, UNICEF, 2014 [http://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/meda\\_8674.htm](http://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/meda_8674.htm).
  24. National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT), Mitra and Associates, and ICF International. Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2014: Key Indicators. (Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: NIPORT, Mitra and Associates, and ICF International, 2015), 9. <http://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/PR56/PR56.pdf>
  25. Doss, Cheryl, et. al. “Gender inequalities in ownership and control of land in Africa: Myth and reality.” *Agricultural Economics* 46:3 (2015). <http://ebrary.ifpri.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15738coll5/id/4861>
  26. “The Issue: Women’s Assets and Property Rights,” (International Center for Research on Women, 2010). <http://www.icrw.org/what-we-do/property-rights>
  27. Ibid.
  28. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. “The State of Food and Agriculture. Women in Agriculture: Closing the gender gap for development.” 23-24 (2011), <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2050e/i2050e.pdf>
  29. The World Bank. “Women and Land Rights: Legal Barriers Impede Women’s Access to Resources.” 5 (2013) <http://www.trust.org/contentAsset/raw-data/1440891e-13ac-434a-bc73-9264e9aabbbf/file>
  30. Arens, A.M.J. “Women, land and power in Bangladesh: Jhagrapur revisited.” University of Amsterdam (2011), 43. <http://dare.uva.nl/document/2/92145>
  31. Sourav, Raisul Islam. “Unjust Land Right of Women in Bangladesh” *International Research Journal of Interdisciplinary & Multidisciplinary Studies* (2015), 6. <http://www.researchinformation.org/files/Raisul-Islam-Sourav.pdf>
  32. “Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment,” (UN Women, n.d.). <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>
  33. “Bangladesh's ICT Industry: A Boon for Women’s Employment.” The World Bank (2015). <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2015/05/08/bangladeshs-ict-industry-a-boon-for-womens-employment>
  34. “World Development Report: Gender Equality and Development.” (The World Bank, 2012), 5. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2012/Resources/7778105-1299699968583/7786210-1315936222006/Complete-Report.pdf>
  35. “Access to Credit: Women Entrepreneurs in Bangladesh.” (The Asia Foundation, 2010). Video.
  36. Compared to 55 percent of men. “Women and Financial Inclusion” *The Global Findex Database*. 9 (World Bank, April 2013).
  37. “The State of Food and Agriculture.” (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2014), 35. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4040e.pdf>
  38. “Economic Empowerment of Women” (UN Women, n.d.), 2. [http://www2.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2013/12/un%20women\\_ee-thematic-brief\\_us-web%20pdf.ashx?v=3&d=20141013T121456](http://www2.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2013/12/un%20women_ee-thematic-brief_us-web%20pdf.ashx?v=3&d=20141013T121456)
  39. “Bangladesh – Major Sectors of Economy.” (International Business Forum of Bangladesh, n.d.). [http://www.ibfb.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=23&Itemid=56](http://www.ibfb.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=23&Itemid=56)
  40. Naved, Ruchira Tabassum, PhD, Khanm Nur Newaz, Rahman, Md. Harisur. Ali, Khandker Llakat. “A Rapid Assessment of Gender in Agriculture of Bangladesh” (International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh. Sept. 2011).
  41. “Who owns Bangladesh?” *The Economist*. <http://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2013/08/women-and-property-rights>
  42. Naved, Ruchira Tabassum, PhD, et. al. “Rapid Assessment of Gender” (2011); Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. “The State of Food and Agriculture. Women in Agriculture: Closing the gender gap for development.” 23-24 (2011), <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2050e/i2050e.pdf>
  43. Lemon, Gayle Tzemach. “Hillary: Global Economy Depends on Women” (The Daily Beast, 2011) <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/09/16/hillary-clinton-s-apec-speech-women-are-key-to-global-economy.html>
  44. *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*. (United Nations, December 1993). <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm>
  45. “Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women” (United Nations, 2011), 3. <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/co/CEDAW-C-BGD-CO-7.pdf>
  46. United Nations Treaty Collection, [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en)

47. "Violence against women" (World Health Organization, 2014). <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/>
48. Garcia-Moreno, Claudia, Guedes, Alessandra, Knerr, Wendy. "Understanding and Addressing Violence Against Women: Overview" (World Health Organization, 2012), 2-3. [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/77433/1/WHO\\_RHR\\_12.35\\_eng.pdf?ua=1](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/77433/1/WHO_RHR_12.35_eng.pdf?ua=1)
49. Ibid.
50. Hossen, Alamgir, Md. "Measuring Gender-based violence: Results of the Violence Against Women (VAW) survey in Bangladesh." (United Nations, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2014). [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/Mexico\\_Nov2014/Session%203%20Bangladesh%20paper.pdf](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/Mexico_Nov2014/Session%203%20Bangladesh%20paper.pdf)
51. "NGO workers challenged to adequately respond to violence against women and girls," (icddr,b, Feb 2015). <http://www.icddr.org/media-centre/news?id=711>
52. Ibid.
53. "Bangladesh: Girls Damaged by Child Marriage." (Human Rights Watch, 2015). <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/06/09/bangladesh-girls-damaged-child-marriage>
54. Barr, Heather. "Marry Before Your House is Swept Away: Child Marriage in Bangladesh." (Human Rights Watch, June 2015). <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/06/09/marry-your-house-swept-away/child-marriage-bangladesh>
55. World Health Organization, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs323/en/>
56. World Health Organization, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs334/en/>
57. Bangladesh Health System Review, Health Systems in Transition Vol. 5 No. 3 2015, [http://www.wpro.who.int/asia\\_pacific\\_observatory/hits/series/bgd\\_health\\_system\\_review.pdf](http://www.wpro.who.int/asia_pacific_observatory/hits/series/bgd_health_system_review.pdf)
58. Text in English of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. (United Nations, 1979). <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>
59. "Review of Policies and Strategies to Implement and Scale up Sexuality Education in Asia and the Pacific" (UNESCO Bangkok, 2012), 18. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002150/215091e.pdf>
60. Ibid.
61. Bhuiyan, Mohammad Kowsar, "Inclusion of Sex Education in School Curriculum of Bangladesh: Parents' Attitude." *IOSR Journal of Research and Method in Education* 4:5 (2014): 33. [http://www.academia.edu/9096127/Inclusion\\_of\\_Sex\\_Education\\_in\\_School\\_Curriculum\\_of\\_Bangladesh\\_Parents\\_Attitude](http://www.academia.edu/9096127/Inclusion_of_Sex_Education_in_School_Curriculum_of_Bangladesh_Parents_Attitude)
62. "Economic Empowerment of Women" (UN Women, n.d.), 1. [http://www2.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2013/12/un%20women\\_ee-thematic-brief\\_us-web%20pdf.ashx?v=3&d=20141013T121456](http://www2.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2013/12/un%20women_ee-thematic-brief_us-web%20pdf.ashx?v=3&d=20141013T121456)
63. Ahmed, Salma, McGillivray, Mark. "Human Capital, Discrimination, and the Gender Wage Gap in Bangladesh," *World Development* 67 (2015), 507. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X14003283>
64. Kapsos, Steven. "The gender wage gap in Bangladesh," *ILO Asia-Pacific Working Paper Series* (International Labour Organization, 2008). [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms\\_098063.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_098063.pdf)
65. "The Global Gender Gap Report 2015" (World Economic Forum, 2015), 100. <http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR2015/cover.pdf>
66. See UN Data: Bangladesh, "Economic Indicators," <http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Bangladesh>
67. Ibid.
68. Rahman, Rushidan I. et.al, "Female labour force participation in Bangladesh: trends, drivers and barriers." (ILO Asia-Pacific Working Paper Series, 2013), 14-15. [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-new\\_delhi/documents/publication/wcms\\_250112.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-new_delhi/documents/publication/wcms_250112.pdf)
69. Theuws, Martje. et.al, "Fatal Fashion: Analysis of recent factory fires in Pakistan and Bangladesh: A call to protect and respect garment workers' lives" (SOMO & CCC, 2013), 5. <http://www.cleanclothes.org/resources/publications/fatal-fashion.pdf>
70. "Citizen's Access to Information in South Asia: Regional Synthesis Report" (The Asia Foundation, 2014), 3-4. <https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/CitizensAccessToInformationinSouthAsia.pdf>
71. "The Carter Center's Access to Information Implementation Assessment Tool, Pilot Findings from Select Agencies in Bangladesh," The Carter Center, November 2014; <http://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/ati/bangladesh-iat-pilot-phase-country-report.pdf>
72. Ibid.
73. Only 24 of the 56 percent of government officials self-identified as such during interviews. Many categorized themselves as "other" and gave their title but either held elected or appointed local government positions. For the purposes of the breakout above, the Carter Center has placed them in the category of government officials based on their title. This percentage is potentially even higher.





# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Survey Instruments

### COMMUNITY LEADER QUESTIONNAIRE

#### A. Community Leader Questionnaire

Interview Information	
Name of Interviewer (Your Name):	
Name of District:	
Place of Interview:	
Date of Interview:	
Time of Interview	
Questions 1-7 – Background Information	
1. What is your name?	
2. Interviewee Gender:	<input type="radio"/> Female <input type="radio"/> Male
3. What organization do you work with/which community do you represent?	
4. What is your position in this organization/community?	
5. What kind of issues does your organization/you work on? (mark all that apply)	<input type="radio"/> Human Rights <input type="radio"/> Sexual and gender-based violence <input type="radio"/> Reproductive rights <input type="radio"/> Land <input type="radio"/> Starting a business <input type="radio"/> Farming/agriculture <input type="radio"/> Education <input type="radio"/> Local participation/community engagement <input type="radio"/> Other: please describe
6. Does your organization/community serve men, women or both genders?	
7. About how many individual people are served by or are members of your organization/community?	



**QUESTION 8: Women and their Rights**

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS WITH YOUR MEMBERS/THE WOMEN YOU SERVE IN MIND. UNLESS SPECIFIED THESE ARE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE WOMEN IN YOUR COMMUNITY, RATHER THAN YOUR OWN INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE.

In general, how informed are women about their rights?

**Right to be treated equally with all others (free from discrimination)**

- Very;
- Somewhat;
- Not at all

**Right to be free from violence (domestic, violence against women etc.)**

- Very;
- Somewhat;
- Not at all

**Right to be able to join groups/association**

- Very;
- Somewhat;
- Not at all

**Right to own property**

- Very;
- Somewhat;
- Not at all

**Right to information**

- Very;
- Somewhat;
- Not at all

**Right to education (Note: the right to education extends beyond the classroom)**

- Very;
- Somewhat;
- Not at all

**Right to work, under good working conditions/reasonable working hours**

- Very;
- Somewhat;
- Not at all

**Right to be able to go to court if any rights are violated**

- Very;
- Somewhat;
- Not at all

Question 9: Access to Information
<p>9. Do you think women are interested in accessing information held by the government?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p>
Please explain your answer:
<p>10. Do you think that the <u>national</u> government holds information that is important for women?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p>
Please explain your answer:
<p>11. Do you think that the <u>local</u> government holds information that is important for women?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p>
Please explain your answer:
<p>12. Do you think women access government-held information with the same frequency, ease and rate of success as men?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p>
Please explain your answer:
<p>13. Do you think that access to information for women varies depending upon their age group?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p>
Please explain your answer:
<p>14. Please think of one specific time you, or someone you serve, tried to get information from a government agency or local authority/local leader. Are you responding for yourself or someone you serve?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Answering for myself</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Answering for someone I serve</p>
<p>What information was being sought?</p> <p>Response:</p>
<p>15. What was the reason for trying to access the information?</p> <p>Response:</p>
<p>16. Was the information ultimately received?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p> <p><input type="radio"/> I don't know</p>
<p>17. What happened when trying to get this information?</p> <p>Response:</p>
<p>18. Please think of a specific time when you, or someone you serve, did <u>not</u> try to get information you needed. Are you responding for yourself or someone you serve?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Answering for myself</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Answering for someone I serve</p>
<p>What information were you/they interested in?</p> <p>Response:</p>
<p>19. Why was the information <u>not</u> sought?</p> <p>Response:</p>

**20. Where do women currently get information? (mark all that apply)**

- Community/local organizations (NGOs)
- National government office
- Local government office
- Educational institutions
- Mosque/Religious leaders/Places of Worship
- Traditional Leaders
- Village Elders
- Husband
- Other family members
- Friends
- Radio
- Television
- Newspaper
- Internet
- Other:

<b>Questions 21-25: Barriers</b>			
<b>21. I am going to read to you a list of issues. Please let me know how significant a barrier each issue is with regards to women accessing information. For each issue I read to you, please let me know if you think it is: a large barrier, a small barrier, not a barrier.</b>			
<b>Obstacle</b>	<b>1) A large barrier</b>	<b>2) A small barrier</b>	<b>3) Not A barrier</b>
Don't know how/where to go to ask for information			
Domestic duties (childcare, housework, etc.)			
Getting to the public offices (mobility, distance, safety)			
Money for photocopies			
Confidence to make requests/ask government for information/self-esteem			
Fear of asking/fear of reprisals for asking			
Mind-set of government official/RTI Officer			
Someone in family not supportive (impedes)			
Women not allowed into public buildings			
Women ignored/treated poorly when go into public building/office			
Culturally not appropriate/allowed (paternalism, women not supposed to ask for information)			
Non-gender discrimination (ethnicity, religion, class, race)			
Illiteracy			
Language (documents only in official language/public officers only speak official language)			
Information not seen as important for women			



22. In your experience, what other barriers exist that I did not mention? For each barrier, can you let me know if you believe it is a large or small barrier? <i>Barrier (write the barriers the interviewee mentions below)</i>	
Barrier	<input type="radio"/> A large barrier <input type="radio"/> A small barrier
Barrier	<input type="radio"/> A large barrier <input type="radio"/> A small barrier
Barrier	<input type="radio"/> A large barrier <input type="radio"/> A small barrier
23. Of the barriers mentioned from the previous two questions (Q21 and Q22), which three are the most significant barriers facing women with respect to accessing information. Please list in order of significance: largest barrier; second largest barrier; third largest barrier	
Largest barrier:	
Second largest barrier:	
Third largest barrier:	
24. What would be some potential solutions to these barriers?	
Response:	
25. Do the barriers and potential solution, differ based on the women's age group?	
<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	
Please explain:	
<b>Questions 26-30: Information and Empowerment</b>	
I AM GOING TO BE ASKING YOU ABOUT WOMEN'S INFORMATION NEEDS. I AM PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN INFORMATION THAT WOMEN NEED TO ASSURE THEIR RIGHTS AND TO ACHIEVE GREATER ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.	
26. What information would be most valuable for women for promoting, protecting, and assuring her rights?	
Response:	
27. What information would be most valuable to women for achieving greater economic empowerment?	
Response:	
28. Based on your responses to the previous two questions (Q26 and Q27) please rank the top three types of information that are most important to women for promoting/protecting rights and achieving economic empowerment.	
Most important:	
Second most important:	
Third most important:	
29. Does the type of information most valuable for women differ based on their age group?	
<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	
Please explain:	
30. What kinds of information, which are valuable for rights and economic empowerment, are women generally <u>not</u> able to access?	

**Questions 31-33: Right to Information Act**

31. Have you heard about the Right to Information Act?

- Yes
- No

32. What do you know about the Right to Information Act?

Response:

33. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about women's access to information?

Response:

For the interviewer: Do not read this section out loud. After the interview has been completed please write down any thoughts or recollections that you had from the interview:

**EXPERT OPINION  
QUESTIONNAIRE**

Interview Information	
Name of Interviewer (Your Name):	
Name of District:	
Place of Interview:	
Date of Interview:	
Time of Interview	
<b>Type of Expert Being Interviewed (mark all that apply):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> NGO/International Community</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Government Official</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Academic/Professor</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Other (please describe)</li> </ul>	
Interviewee Gender:	<input type="radio"/> Female <input type="radio"/> Male
Questions 1 – 4 – Background Information	
1. What is your name?	
2. What organization do you work with?	
3. What is your position in this organization?	
<b>4. What kind of issues does your organization/you work on? (mark all that apply)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Human Rights</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Sexual and gender-based violence</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Reproductive rights</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Land</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Starting a business</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Farming/agriculture</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Education</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Local participation/community engagement</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Other: please describe</li> </ul>	
Questions 5-12: Access and Barriers	
<b>5. Do you think that women are interested in accessing information held by the government?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Yes</li> <li><input type="radio"/> No</li> </ul>	
Please explain your answer:	
<b>6. Do you think women access government-held information with the same frequency, ease and rate of success as men?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Yes</li> <li><input type="radio"/> No</li> </ul>	
Please explain your answer:	
<b>7. Do you think that access to information for women varies depending upon their age group?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Yes</li> <li><input type="radio"/> No</li> </ul>	
Please explain your answer:	

**8. I am going to read to you a list of issues. Please let me know how significant of a barrier each issue is with regards to women accessing information. For each issue I read to you, please let me know if you think it is: a large barrier; a small barrier; not a barrier.**

<b>Obstacle</b>	<b>1) A large barrier</b>	<b>2) A small barrier</b>	<b>3) <i>Not</i> A barrier</b>
Don't know how/where to go to ask for information			
Domestic duties (childcare, housework, etc.)			
Getting to the public offices (mobility, distance, safety)			
Money for photocopies			
Confidence to make requests/ask government for information/self-esteem			
Fear of asking/fear of reprisals for asking			
Mind-set of government official/RTI Officer			
Someone in family not supportive (impedes)			
Women not allowed into public buildings			
Women ignored/treated poorly when go into public building/office			
Culturally not appropriate/allowed (paternalism, women not supposed to ask for information)			
Non-gender discrimination (ethnicity, religion, class, race)			
Illiteracy			
Language (documents only in official language/public officers only speak official language)			
Information not seen as important for women			



9. In your experience, what other barriers exist that I did not mention? For each barrier, can you let me know if you believe it is a large or small barrier? <i>Barrier (write the barriers the interviewee mentions below)</i>	
Barrier	<input type="radio"/> A large barrier <input type="radio"/> A small barrier
Barrier	<input type="radio"/> A large barrier <input type="radio"/> A small barrier
Barrier	<input type="radio"/> A large barrier <input type="radio"/> A small barrier
10. Of the barriers mentioned from the previous two questions (Q21 and Q22), which three are the most significant barriers facing women with respect to accessing information. Please list in order of significance: largest barrier; second largest barrier; third largest barrier	
Largest barrier:	
Second largest barrier:	
Third largest barrier:	
11. What would be some potential solutions to these barriers?	
Response:	
12. Do the barriers and potential solution, differ based on the women's age group?	
<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	
Please explain:	

<b>Questions 13-18: Information and Empowerment</b>	
13. What information would be most valuable for women for promoting, protecting, and assuring her rights?	
Response:	
14. What information would be most valuable to women for achieving greater economic empowerment?	
Response:	
15. Based on your responses to the previous two questions (Q13 and Q14) please rank the top three types of information that are most important to women for promoting/protecting rights and achieving economic empowerment.	
Most important:	
Second most important:	
Third most important:	
16. Does the type of information most valuable for women differ based on their age group?	
<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	
Please explain:	
17. What kinds of information, valuable for rights and economic empowerment, are women generally <u>not</u> able to access?	
18. If women have less access to government-held information, what do you see as the impact of this?	
Response:	
<b>Question 19: Conclusion</b>	
19. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about women's access to information?	
Response:	

## NONPARTICIPANT OBSERVATION FORM

Interview Information
Name of Interviewer (Your Name):
Name of District:
Date of site visit, including day of the week:
Time of arrival at agency:
Time of departure from agency:
Background Information
1. What is the name of the agency you are visiting? If you are visiting a specific office within this agency, please note the name of the office:
2. What is the primary function of the agency?
3. Describe in some detail what the office looks like. We are interested in the physical aspects of the office, including the layout, how one enters, security etc. Response:
4. Are people able to enter the office freely? Response:
5. How many employees were present during your observation? Women: Men: Total:
6. How many people visited the office during your observation? Women: Men: Total:
7. How many of the women counted above were accompanied by a man?
8. Describe in some detail what is taking place in the office. We are interested in the interactions between the employees and those individuals visiting the office. Response:
Employee Interviews
Are there one or more employees in the office that you could speak to? If so, in whatever way you feel is appropriate, approach the employee and see if you could ask them a few questions
1. Title of Employee:
2. Gender of Employee: <input type="radio"/> Woman <input type="radio"/> Man
3. Do women come into the office for information/documents/services as often as men? <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
4. What kinds of information/documents are men asking for when they come to your office? Response:
5. What kinds of information/documents are women asking for when they come to your office? Response:
6. Under the law, do women have the same right as men to access information/documents from your office? <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> I'm not sure
7. In practice, do women access information/documents from your office with the same frequency, ease and rate of success as men? <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No Please explain your answer:
8. Does the age group of the woman make a difference? <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No Please explain your answer:
9. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about women's access to information? Response:

Visitor Interviews
VISITOR INTERVIEWS: For all of the following interviews, please ensure that visitors are at the agency to access information/documents. If they are there for any other reason, please thank them for their time, make a note below, and move on to the next visitor.
Please indicate how many female visitors you spoke with who were NOT seeking information:
Male Visitor Interview
1. What kind of information/document did you come for today? Response:
2. Who came with you to the agency today or did you come alone?  <input type="radio"/> With a man/men <input type="radio"/> With a woman/women <input type="radio"/> Alone
3. What is your age?
4. Did you experience any difficulties in getting to the agency?  <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No Please explain:
5. How would you describe your experience in dealing with the agency? Response:
6. Did you get the information/documents that you came for?  <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No Please explain:
7. Is there anything else you would like to add?
Female Visitor Interview
1. What kind of information/document did you come for today? Response:
2. Who came with you to the agency today or did you come alone?  <input type="radio"/> With a man/men <input type="radio"/> With a woman/women <input type="radio"/> Alone
3. What is your age?
4. Did you experience any difficulties in getting to the agency?  <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No Please explain:
5. How would you describe your experience in dealing with the agency? Response:
6. Did you get the information/documents that you came for?  <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No Please explain:
7. Is there anything else you would like to add?
Researcher Reflections
For the researcher: After the site visit has been completed please write down any thoughts or reflections that you had from the visit.

# Appendix B: Select Frequency Tables\*

## COMMUNITY LEADER RESPONSES

Interviewee Gender			
District	Woman	Man	%
Dhaka (n=20)	5	15	75%
Khagrachari (n=22)	12	10	45.50%
Khulna (n= 20)	11	9	45
Rajshahi (n= 22)	12	10	45.5
Rangpur (n=20)	8	12	60
Sylhet (n=24)	13	11	45.8
<b>TOTALS (n=128)</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>52.3</b>

What kind of issues does your organization work on?																		
District	Human Rights		Sexual and gender-based violence		Reproductive rights		Land		Starting a business		Farming / Agriculture		Education		Local participation/ community engagement		Other	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Dhaka (n=20)	15	75	7	35	7	35	8	40	10	50	8	40	12	60	14	70	8	40
Khagrachari (n=22)	11	50	7	31.8	2	9.1	4	18.2	11	50	15	68.2	16	72.7	14	63.6	6	27.3
Khulna (n= 20)	18	90	16	80	13	65	14	70	16	80	12	60	18	90	17	85	5	25
Rajshahi (n= 22)	20	90.9	16	72.7	12	54.5	13	59.1	14	63.6	14	63.6	19	86.4	18	81.8	19	86.4
Rangpur (n=20)	13	65	16	80	12	60	10	50	10	50	16	80	20	100	19	95	16	80
Sylhet (n=24)	7	29.2	6	25	5	20.8	1	4.2	3	12.5	2	8.3	14	58.3	11	45.8	11	45.8
<b>TOTALS (n=128)</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>65.6</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>53.1</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>39.8</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>39.1</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>50.0</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>52.3</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>77.3</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>72.7</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>50.8</b>

\*For all frequency tables, please contact The Carter Center at [laura.neuman@cartercenter.org](mailto:laura.neuman@cartercenter.org)

Do you think women are interested in accessing information held by the government? n=128 in total						
District	Yes	%	No	%	No Response	%
Dhaka (n=20)	19	95	1	5	0	0
Khagrachari (n=22)	17	77.3	5	22.7	0	0
Khulna (n=20)	11	55	9	45	0	0
Rajshahi (n=22)	22	100	0	0	0	0
Rangpur (n=20)	20	100	0	0	0	0
Sylhet (n=24)	21	87.5	2	8.3	1	4.2
TOTALS (n=128)	110	85.8	17	13.4	1	0.8

AGGREGATED DATA: In general, how informed are women about their rights? n=128 in total								
TOTALS (n=128)	Right to be treated equally with all others (free from discrimination)		Right to be free from violence (domestic, violence against women etc.)		Right to be able to join groups/association		Right to own property	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Not at All	7	5.50%	10	7.80%	30	23.40%	21	16.40%
Somewhat	96	75.00%	98	76.60%	81	63.30%	76	59.30%
Very	25	19.50%	20	15.60%	15	11.70%	29	22.60%
No Answer	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	2	1.60%	2	1.60%

AGGREGATED DATA: In general, how informed are women about their rights? n=128 in total								
TOTALS (n=128)	Right to Information		Right to education (Note: the right to education extends beyond the classroom)		Right to work, under good working conditions/reasonable working hours		Right to be able to go to court if any rights are violated	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Not at All	21	16.40%	2	1.60%	15	11.70%	45	35.20%
Somewhat	87	67.90%	73	57.00%	92	71.80%	67	52.30%
Very	18	18.00%	53	41.40%	20	15.60%	16	12.50%
No Answer	2	1.60%	0	0.00%	1	0.80%	0	0.00%



Do you think women access government-held information with the same frequency, ease and rate of success as men? n=128 in total						
District	Yes	%	No	%	No Response	%
Dhaka (n=20)	13	65	7	35	0	0
Khagrachari (n=22)	6	27.3	16	72.7	0	0
Khulna (n= 20)	0	0	15	75	5	25
Rajshahi (n= 22)	7	31.8	14	63.6	1	4.6
Rangpur (n=20)	14	70	6	30	0	0
Sylhet (n=24)	5	20.8	19	79.2	0	0
TOTALS (n=128)	45	34.6	77	60.6	6	4.7

Do you think that access to information for women varies depending upon their age group? n=128 in total						
District	Yes	%	No	%	No Response	%
Dhaka (n=20)	17	85	3	15	0	0
Khagrachari (n=22)	17	77.3	4	18.2	1	4.5
Khulna (n= 20)	16	80	1	5	3	15
Rajshahi (n= 22)	21	95.5	0	0	1	4.5
Rangpur (n=20)	11	55	9	45	0	0
Sylhet (n=24)	20	83.3	4	16.7	0	0
TOTALS (n=128)	102	79.5	21	16.5	5	3.9

I am going to read to you a list of issues. Please let me know how significant of a barrier each issue is with regards to women accessing information. For each issue I read to you, please let me know if you think it is: 1) a large barrier; 2) a small barrier; 3) not a barrier. n=128 in total

TOTALS (n=128)	Don't know how/where to go to ask for information	%	Domestic duties (childcare, housework, etc.)	%	Getting to the public offices (mobility, distance, safety)	%	Money for photocopies	%	Confidence to make requests/ask government for information/self-esteem	%	Fear of asking/fear of reprisals for asking	%
1	104	81.2	49	38.2	55	42.9	17	13.3	39	30.5	55	42.9
2	20	15.6	55	42.9	57	44.5	60	46.9	66	51.5	59	46.1
3	4	3.1	22	17.2	16	12.5	49	38.2	21	16.4	14	10.9
No Response	0	0	2	1.6	0	0	2	1.6	2	1.6	0	0

TOTALS (n=128)	Mind-set of government official/RTI Officer	%	Someone in family not supportive (impedes)	%	Women not allowed into public buildings	%	Women ignored/treated poorly when go into public building/office	%	Culturally not appropriate/allowed (paternalism, women not supposed to ask for information)	%	Non-gender discrimination (ethnicity, religion, class, race)	%
1	51	39.8	78	60.5	12	9.3	32	25	53	41.4	50	39.3
2	57	44.5	42	32.5	46	35.7	64	50	51	39.8	38	29.9
3	19	14.8	9	6.9	71	55	30	23.4	21	16.4	37	28.3
No Response	1	0.8	0	0	0	0	2	1.6	3	2.3	3	2.3

TOTALS (n=128)	Illiteracy	%	Language (documents only in official language/public officers only speak official language)	%	Information not seen as important for women	%
1	115	89.8	23	17.9	64	49.6
2	11	8.6	58	45.3	51	39.5
3	2	1.6	45	35.2	14	10.8
No Response	0	0	2	1.6	0	0

Have you heard about the Right to Information Act? n=128 in total						
District	Yes	%	No	%	No Answer	%
Dhaka (n=20)	16	80	4	20	0	0
Khagrachari (n=22)	19	86.4	3	13.6	0	0
Khulna (n= 20)	5	25	15	75	0	0
Rajshahi (n= 22)	13	59.1	9	40.9	0	0
Rangpur (n=20)	11	55	9	45	0	0
Sylhet (n=24)	19	79.2	5	20.8	0	0
<b>TOTALS (n=128)</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>64.8%</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>35.2%</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

## EXPERT RESPONSES

Interviewee Gender				
District	Woman	%	Man	%
Dhaka (n=11)	4	36.4	7	63.6
Khagrachari (n=14)	5	35.7	9	64.3
Khulna (n= 12)	3	25	9	75
Rajshahi (n= 15)	8	53.33	7	46.67
Rangpur (n=13)	4	30.8	9	69.2
Sylhet (n=16)	1	43.75	9	56.25
<b>TOTALS (n=81)</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>39.24</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>60.75</b>

Type of expert being interviewed*								
District	NGO/ International Community	%	Government Official	%	Academic/ University Professor	%	Other	%
Dhaka (n=11)	3	27.3	5	45.5	2	18.2	1	9.0
Khagrachari (n=14)	2	14.3	8	57.1	3	21.5	1	7.1
Khulna (n= 12)	1	8.3	8	66.7	1	8.3	2	16.7
Rajshahi (n= 15)	1	6.7	10	66.7	2	13.3	2	13.3
Rangpur (n=13)	3	23.1	5	38.5	2	15.4	3	23.1
Sylhet (n=16)	2	12.5	9	56.3	0	0	5	31.2
<b>TOTALS (n=81)</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>14.8</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>55.6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12.3</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>17.3</b>

\* Only 24 of the 56 percent of government officials self-identified as such during interviews. Many categorized themselves as “other” and gave their title, but either held elected or appointed local government positions. For the purposes of the breakout above, the Carter Center has placed them in the category of government officials based on their title. This percentage is potentially even higher.

Do you think women are interested in accessing information held by the government? n=81 in total						
District	Yes	%	No	%	No Response	%
Dhaka (n=11)	9	81.8	2	18.2	0	0
Khagrachari (n=14)	8	57.1	6	42.9	0	0
Khulna (n=12)	9	75	3	25	0	0
Rajshahi (n=15)	13	86.67	2	13.33	0	0
Rangpur (n=13)	13	100	0	0	0	0
Sylhet (n=16)	14	87.5	2	12.5	0	0
TOTAL (n=81)	66	81	15	19	0	0

Do you think women access government-held information with the same frequency, ease and rate of success as men? n=81 in total						
District	Yes	%	No	%	No Response	%
Dhaka (n=11)	6	54.5	5	45.5	0	0
Khagrachari (n=14)	4	28.6	9	64.3	1	7.1
Khulna (n=12)	3	25	9	75	0	0
Rajshahi (n=15)	4	26.67	11	73.33	0	0
Rangpur (n=13)	4	30.77	9	69.23	0	0
Sylhet (n=16)	5	31.25	11	68.75	0	0
TOTAL (n=81)	26	31.6	54	67.1	1	1.2

Do you think that access to information for women varies depending upon their age group? n=81 in total						
District	Yes	%	No	%	No Response	%
Dhaka (n=11)	8	72.7	3	27.3	0	0
Khagrachari (n=14)	12	85.7	2	14.3	0	0
Khulna (n=12)	10	83.3	2	16.7	0	0
Rajshahi (n=15)	14	93.33	1	6.67	0	0
Rangpur (n=13)	9	69.23	4	30.77	0	0
Sylhet (n=16)	11	68.75	4	25	1	6.25
<b>TOTAL (n=81)</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>79.7</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18.9</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1.2</b>

**OBSERVATIONAL  
DATA**

Approximately how many male employees were working in the office when you arrived?	
Averages	
Dhaka	2.926
Khagrachari	1.167
Khulna	2.917
Rajshahi	5.208
Rangpur	2.541
Sylhet	3.208

Approximately how many female employees were working in the office when you arrived?	
Averages	
Dhaka	1.407
Khagrachari	0.208
Khulna	1.333
Rajshahi	2.042
Rangpur	1.708
Sylhet	0.333



<b>Employee Interview: Does the age group of the woman make a difference? n=142 in total</b>						
<b>District</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No Response</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Dhaka (n=27)</b>	6	22.2%	21	77.8%	0	0.0%
<b>Khagrachari (n=23)</b>	9	39.1%	8	34.8%	6	26.1%
<b>Khulna (n=24)</b>	20	83.3%	4	16.7%	0	0.0%
<b>Rajshahi (n=23)</b>	17	74.0%	6	26.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Rangpur (n=23)</b>	17	73.9%	6	26.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Sylhet (n=22)</b>	3	13.6%	17	77.3%	2	9.1%
<b>TOTAL (n=142)</b>	72	50.7%	62	43.6%	8	5.6%

# Appendix C: District Profiles

## Dhaka District

**Division:** Dhaka

**Capital:** Dhaka (city)

**Population:** 12,043,977 (2011)

**Literacy Rates:** 73.6% Male, 66.9% Female

**Language and Dialects:** Bengali (Bangla), Garo

**Religion:** 94.67% Muslim, 4.69% Hindu, 0.51% Christian, 0.11% Buddhist, 002% Other

**Governance:** 46 upazilas, 86 unions, 1999 villages

**Main industries:** Agricultural (paddy, jute, wheat, potato, peanut); Manufacturing (ceramics, beverages, press and publication, garments, footwear, textile mills, etc.); wholesale and retail trade; community, social, and personal services; public administration and defense



## Khagrachari District

**Division:** Chittagong

**Capital:** Khagrachari town

**Population:** 613,917 (2011)

**Literacy Rates:** 51.9% male, 40.1% Female

**Language and Dialects:** Bengali (Bangla), Chakma, Chittagonian, Marma, Tippera (Tripura), various tribal languages

**Religion:** 44.67% Muslim, 16.81% Hindu, 37.68% Buddhist, .66% Christian, .18% Other

**Governance:** 8 upazilas, 38 unions, 1702 villages

**Main Industries:** Agricultural (paddy, corn, ginger, and turmeric); Wholesale and retail trade; manufacturing (rubber processing, rice mill, flour mill, sawmill, and others); hotels and restaurants; community, social, and personal services



## Khulna District

**Division:** Khulna

**Capital:** Khulna (city)

**Population:** 2,318,527 (2011)

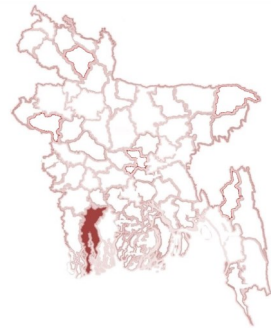
**Literacy Rates:** 64.3% Male, 55.9% Female

**Language and Dialects:** Bengali (Bangla)

**Religion:** 76.63% Muslim, 22.68% Hindu, .66% Christian, .004% Buddhist, <.03% other

**Governance:** 14 upazillas, 70 unions, 1122 villages

**Main Industries:** Agricultural (paddy, jute, sesame, betel nut, and vegetables); Wholesale and retail trade; manufacturing (jute mill, match factories, shipyards, steel mills, cable mills, etc.); education; community, social, and personal services



## Rajshahi District

**Division:** Rajshahi

**Capital:** Rajshahi (city)

**Population:** 2,595,197 (2011)

**Literacy Rates:** 55.8% Male, 50.1% Female

**Language and Dialects:** Bengali (Bangla), Kol, Sadri (Oraon), Santhali, Sauria Paharia

**Religion:** 93.64% Muslim, 4.72% Hindu, 1.07% Christian, .01% Buddhist, .56% Other

**Governance:** 13 upazilas, 71 unions, 1727 villages

**Main Industries:** Agricultural (paddy, wheat, jute, sugarcane, turmeric); Wholesale and retail trade; manufacturing (silk mills, textile mills, flour and rice mills, cold storage, pharmaceuticals); education; community, social, and personal services



## Rangpur District

**Division:** Rangpur

**Capital:** Rangpur (city)

**Population:** 2,881,086 (2011)

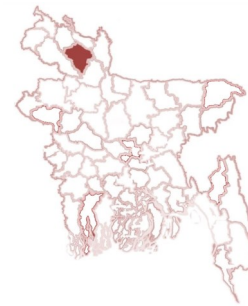
**Literacy Rates:** 51.2% male, 45.9% Female

**Language and dialects:** Bengali (Bangla), Hajong, Kurux, Rangpuri, Santhali

**Religion:** 90.39% Muslim, 8.98% Hindu, .07% Buddhist, .23% Christian, .34% other

**Governance:** 8 upazilas, 84 unions, 1492 villages

**Main Industries:** Agricultural (paddy, tobacco, sugarcane, wheat, corn); Wholesale and retail trade; manufacturing (garments, rice mills, steel and engineering, aluminum, jute); education; community, social, and personal services



## Sylhet District

**Division:** Sylhet

**Capital:** Sylhet (city)

**Population:** 3,434,188 (2011)

**Literacy Rates:** 53.5% Male, 48.9% Female

**Language and dialects:** Bengali, Bishnuprya (Sylhet city), Garo, Hajong, Khasi (Sylhet city), Meitei (Sylhet city), Pnar, Sylheti, War Jain-tia

**Religion:** 89.89% Muslim, 9.95% Hindu, .07% Christian, .02% Buddhist, .06% Other

**Governance:** 12 upazilas, 102 unions, 3206 villages

**Main Industries:** Agricultural (paddy, mustard, betel nut); Wholesale and retail trade; manufacturing; community, social, and personal services; hotels and restaurants



**For additional information, contact:**

**Laura Neuman**

Director

Global Access to Information Program

The Carter Center

One Copenhill

453 Freedom Parkway

Atlanta, GA 30307

Phone: +1-404-420-5146

Email: [laura.neuman@cartercenter.org](mailto:laura.neuman@cartercenter.org)

[www.cartercenter.org/accesstoinformation](http://www.cartercenter.org/accesstoinformation)

THE  
CARTER CENTER



**COVER PHOTO:** A woman rears cows at Inani, Cox's Bazar.

*Photo: Golam Rahman*

