



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

# **FINAL REPORT**

## **MIDTERM PERFORMANCE EVALUATION OF STRENGTHENING POLITICAL LANDSCAPE (SPL) IN BANGLADESH ACTIVITY**

**July 17, 2023**

This document was produced by ME&A, Inc. at the request of the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared independently by the USAID/Bangladesh Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (BMEL) Activity.

# **FINAL REPORT MIDTERM PERFORMANCE EVALUATION OF STRENGTHENING POLITICAL LANDSCAPE (SPL) IN BANGLADESH ACTIVITY**

**July 17, 2023**

Contract No./Order No. GS-10F-154BA/72038819M00001

USAID Bangladesh Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (BMEL) Activity

Prepared by

ME&A, Inc.

4350 East-West Highway, Suite 210

Bethesda, MD, 20814 USA

## **DISCLAIMER**

This report is made possible by the support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the sole responsibility of ME&A, Inc. and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	1
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 Political Background .....	1
1.2 The Strengthening Political Landscape Activity (2017–2024) .....	2
1.3 Evaluation Purpose .....	5
2. METHODOLOGY .....	6
2.1 S047 SPL Midterm Performance Evaluation .....	6
2.2 Online Client Satisfaction Survey.....	8
2.3 Data Analysis .....	9
3. EVALUATION LIMITATIONS.....	9
4. EVALUATION FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS .....	10
4.1 EQ1: To what extent has SPL been successful in achieving Activity objectives (IR 1 and IR 2)? .....	10
4.2 EQ2: How can activities like SPL engage women and youth more effectively in the future?.....	19
4.3 EQ3: How efficient is the SPL Activity implementation with planning, organization, resource mobilization, and adaptive management? .....	24
4.4 EQ4: To what extent are the Activity’s objectives still relevant to the current development circumstances in Bangladesh?.....	26
4.5 EQ5: How can activities like SPL support political parties to be more effective and peaceful leaders in accordance with USAID’s Political Party Assistance Policy? .....	31
4.6 EQ6: Sustainability: What measures should be taken to promote the sustainability of Activity achievements? .....	33
5. RECOMMENDATIONS.....	37
ANNEXES .....	41
Annex 1: Scope of Work (SOW) .....	42
Annex 2: Bibliography .....	49
Annex 3: SPL Results Framework.....	51
Annex 4: Data Collection Tools .....	52

# LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Number of trained and active MTs by party ..... 12

Figure 3. Master Trainers (MTs) and course attendees by party ..... 13

# LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. SPL Intermediate Results and Activities ..... 3

Table 2. Participants reached by SPL initiatives (most recent updates) ..... 4

Table 3. SPL Target Locations..... 4

Table 4. Distribution of national and district level KIIs/GIs by stakeholder type ..... 6

Table 5. Distribution of the sample by political party affiliation and beneficiary type..... 8

# ACRONYMS

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Definition</b>
AAR	After-Action Review
AOR	Agreement Officer's Representative
AL	Awami League
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BMEL	Bangladesh Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
CLA	Collaborating, Learning and Adapting
COP	Chief of Party
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DCOP	Deputy Chief of Party
DEC	Development Experience Clearinghouse
DI	Democracy International
DO	Development Objective
DPR	Democratic Participation and Reform
DQA	Data Quality Assessment
DRG	Office of Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance
EQ	Evaluation Question
ET	Evaluation Team
ETL	Evaluation Team Lead
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GI	Group Interview
GOB	Government of Bangladesh
ILO	International Labour Organization
IP	Implementing Partner
IR	Intermediate Result
JP	Jatiya Party
KII	Key Informant Interview
LA	Learning Agenda
LG	Local Government
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
ME&A	ME&A, Inc.
MAF	Multiparty Advocacy Forum
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Definition</b>
MPE	Midterm Performance Evaluation
MT	Master Trainer
Nextgen	Next Generation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
QA	Quality Assurance
PADN	Peace Ambassador District Network
PAR	Promoting Advocacy and Rights
PAVE	People Against Violence Everywhere
PEA	Political Economy Analysis
PFG	Peace Facilitator Group
PMP	Performance Management Plan
PPAP	Political Party Assistance Policy
QA	Quality Assurance
RAP	Research Apprenticeship Program
RF	Results Framework
RPO	Representation of the People's Order
SLFP	Senior Leaders Fellowship Program
SOW	Scope of Work
SPL	Strengthening Political Landscape
SPPM	Single Party Planning Meeting
SPW	Strategic Planning Workshop
THP	The Hunger Project
TL	Team Lead
TOC	Theory of Change
ToT	Training of Trainers
UP	Union Parishad
U.S.	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government
YLFP	Young Leaders Fellowship Program

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The Strengthening Political Landscape (SPL) Activity (2017–2024) is designed to support improved transparency and inclusivity in the decision-making processes within Bangladeshi political parties and advance youth and women’s political participation and leadership opportunities. The Activity is funded by USAID/Bangladesh and implemented by Democracy International (DI). In February 2023, USAID/Bangladesh commissioned Bangladesh Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (BMEL) to conduct a Midterm Performance Evaluation (MPE) of SPL.

This MPE addresses the following Evaluation Questions (EQs):

**EQ1:** To what extent has SPL been successful in achieving Activity objectives (Intermediate Result [IR] 1 and IR 2)?

**EQ2:** How can activities like SPL engage women and youth more effectively in the future?

**EQ3:** How efficient is SPL Activity implementation with planning, organization, resource mobilization, and adaptive management?

**EQ4:** To what extent are the Activity’s objectives still relevant to the current development circumstances in Bangladesh?

**EQ5:** How can activities like SPL support political parties to be more effective and peaceful leaders in accordance with USAID’s Political Party Assistance Policy?

**EQ6:** What measures should be taken to promote the sustainability of Activity achievements?

The Evaluation Team (ET) used a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methodologies to conduct this evaluation—including a desk review of 43 documents, 54 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Group Interview (GIs) (37 at the district level and 17 at the national level), and 12 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) at the district level. The ET conducted fieldwork for this evaluation in eight divisions, representing SPL’s 21 districts.

## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

**EQ1:** *To what extent has SPL been successful in achieving Activity objectives (IR 1 and IR 2)?*

The Youth Leaders Fellowship Program (YLFP), Senior Leaders Fellowship Program (SLFP) and Master Trainer (MT) training programs were often mentioned by evaluation respondents as having increased party members’ political knowledge and skills. However, Fellows and trainees also reported that they are not given much opportunity by party leadership to apply their new knowledge and skills to party building.

Fellowship programs, study circles, and advocacy programs all contributed to raising the voice of youth and women’s inclusion. Women Fellows became vocal for the implementation of a 33 percent women’s quota, and some women Fellows became aspirants for party nominations (reserved seats mainly).

Although women’s numbers in parliament and local government bodies have increased in quantitative terms, they are not adequately included in the decision-making bodies.

Respondents widely reported that the participation of youth is vital for changing the political landscape of Bangladesh. The SPL program encouraged youth to become more active and increased young party members’ organizing and communication skills. However, they are not always promoted to party positions based on merit.

Overall, SPL has made a good effort with internal party democracy, but participatory changes to decision-making and nomination procedures are mainly limited to the local level. Party central leaders make the

decisions and force the grassroots committees to implement them. Local-level leaders have little say in this regard. District committees of the Awami League (AL), Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and Jatiya Party (JP) are strictly controlled by their central committees due to the patron-client relationship—where district leaders’ political careers are dependent on doing the bidding of their central committee patrons.

The MT training program has contributed to improving party members’ training skills. According to some knowledgeable respondents, due to SPL and MT advocacy, the BNP reactivated its training cell and JP created a new position of Campaign Affairs Secretary. The AL has its own training and research cell.

MTs trained party members on electoral management, communication, and campaigning. Specifically, they trained the polling agents before the municipality and Union Parishad (UP) elections.

Fellowship programs and the Multiparty Advocacy Forum (MAF) initiative contributed to creating good relationships among the fellows. Post-fellowship events continue to strengthen these relationships. Cross-party interaction and relations also were developed through YLFP, SLFP, and MAF. Overall, MAF has created the opportunity and political environment for cross-party interaction.

MAF increased interparty cooperation. Members from opposing political parties have become used to working on community priorities under a united umbrella, but this was not the case prior to MAF. This interaction and cooperation also contributed directly to reducing political conflict at the local level. However, solving issues of political confrontation is still largely dependent on the parties’ top leaders.

The Peace Facilitator Group (PFG) initiative deals with political, religious, and ethnic conflicts at the upazila level. The significant success of PFG is to bring cross-party members under one umbrella. By doing so, PFGs have facilitated multiparty engagement and encouraged party leaders to practice democratic norms and procedures across the parties at the sub-district level. There remains a lack of coordination between MAFs and PFGs.

**EQ2:** *How can Activities like SPL engage women and youth more effectively in the future?*

The objective of women’s inclusion in politics and the mainstreaming of women in politics is itself a step toward the larger objective of social change and the strengthening of the democratic political landscape. And given Bangladesh’s demographic, it is essential that parties engage with youth. The SPL activity has opened gateways for women and youth to advance as politicians, and it has given them the skills and knowledge to contribute to positive changes in their parties and across parties.

Barriers to advancement and effectiveness are the party structures and decision-making process (which is highly centralized), familocracy, and access to financing. Beneficiaries calling for scale seem to recognize that the momentum for positive inclusion is there, but it will require many more capacitated members to realize the goal. Numbers only tell part of the story of change, however; and changes in attitudes and practices are important, integrally related measures of progress.

**EQ3:** *How efficient is SPL Activity implementation with planning, organization, resource mobilization, and adaptive management?*

Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) takes time. SPL has some strong CLA practices and tools in place; staff and stakeholder ideas inform Activity design and implementation. E-learning was a key innovation that allows low-cost and broad access to training. Virtual training is not a substitute for in-person training in all cases, however; election campaigning and women’s study circles are at least two examples that demand in-person training.

The implementing partner (IP), DI, is widely respected and trusted. However, the current staffing structure may not be adequate to meet demands for programming that is more tailored to the local context and more district-based events. Having small regional teams limits the possibility for Quality Assurance (QA) of local activities and the efficiency of coordination with local party units. Resource mobilization will be an important consideration for the next phase of programming; it is unclear how quickly staffing could be

scaled up while maintaining quality standards and the trusted relationships that have been central to SPL's success.

DI does not seem to be using the full suite of CLA tools or meeting the CLA vision laid out in recent Activity documents. Regular applied political economy analyses (to examine the power dynamics and economic and social forces that affect development) and social and behavioral science insights are needed to inform ongoing learning and adaptation and better assess SPL contributions to outcome-level changes. Donors can be invited to participate in key learning events and should require reporting on key learning questions. They can incentivize CLA by sending the clear message that identifying challenges, piloting new ideas, and adjusting programming when needed are desired. They should require reporting on key learning questions and approve Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plans in a reasonable timeframe.

**EQ4:** *To what extent are the Activity's objectives still relevant to the current development circumstances in Bangladesh?*

SPL is filling a critical gap in capacity building within political parties and creating safe spaces for interparty dialogue. It remains highly relevant in the current context. Whether every strategy it has adopted is equally relevant and impactful is an open question. To understand what works and, indeed, to validate the Theory of Change (TOC), a more robust activity-based Political Economy Analysis (PEA) and MEL system that captures organizational change and establishes clear attribution links is needed.

SPL has generated greater demand and interest in training and associated capacity building of political parties. The need is significantly greater than what SPL is now delivering, and the time horizon for effecting genuine systems change will require multiple activity cycles. Despite activity efforts to garner party commitment to support and underwrite training, advocacy, and other capacity building efforts, it is not clear whether parties or any other agency would carry these efforts forward in the absence of a development program like SPL.

Considering what is at stake, the political capital that the Activity and IP have built, and the absence of other agencies—domestic or international—working in this space, the Activity remains relevant and, arguably, essential in its focus.

**EQ5:** *How can activities like SPL support political parties to be more effective and peaceful leaders in accordance with USAID's Political Party Assistance Policy?*

There is strong stakeholder demand to extend political party assistance to more locations and more people. There are also arguments for narrowing assistance to focus on select issues or populations that show promise for lasting change—or shifting resources away from political party support to other types of programming.

Reviewing SPL compliance with the Political Party Assistance Policy (PPAP) will be an important step for planning future programming. The Mission can engage outside experts if needed to support this effort. Beyond compliance with the Policy, USAID needs to carefully consider the fundamental vision for future political party assistance. This should reflect the political economy, achievements to date, where there is potential for the greatest traction, stakeholder buy-in, and a balance between demand and supply-driven support.

**EQ6:** *What measures should be taken to promote the sustainability of Activity achievements?*

SPL effects at the individual beneficiary level are easier to see than party-level effects. It may take more time to see these effects and changes in the political culture. SPL has built awareness about women's inclusion in the political parties; the extension of the deadline for achieving the Representation of the People's Order (RPO) mandate and the naming of women's inclusion as a priority in political party strategic plans are important references for enhancing inclusion efforts. Training and other capacity-building efforts are needed and highly appreciated by political parties. All major parties have indicated that institutionalizing training is a priority; but so far, they have invested very little of their own resources into making this a

reality. MAFs and PFGs are good initiatives for conflict mitigation, but the centralized nature of politics and funding considerations put their sustainability in question.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evaluation findings, the ET recommends the following.

### I. Effectiveness

- *DI should:* **Where possible, include more senior and central party leaders in SPL activities to enhance linkages between the grassroots and central levels.** Holding more activities at the regional and district levels could help to facilitate senior and central leaders' involvement; some leaders may be more available/willing to attend local events than those in Dhaka.
- *USAID and DI should:* **Continue to prioritize strategic engagement with central leaders.** In the short term, the emphasis may be on ensuring that top leaders remain open to SPL support and that SPL can make progress at the local level where party units have relative autonomy. Longer term, it could involve an incentive-based approach,<sup>1</sup> depending on the challenges that different parties face—and provide more customized support services for party units. Coordinate with diplomatic channels on messaging as appropriate.
- *DI should:* **Deepen coordination and build synergies with other donor programming—including new election-related efforts ahead of the 2024 elections.** This may relate to electoral integrity, mitigating electoral violence, and engaging youth (male and female) in positive politics.
- *DI should:* **Review nomination and selection criteria and processes for fellowship programs to ensure that they align with Activity goals.** This could include prioritizing female and active party members and putting checks in place to reduce the chance that candidates are nominated due to favoritism.
- *DI should:* **Prioritize women's inclusion.** Actively integrate the legal mandate for women's inclusion into Activity messaging and show parties how proactive compliance with the mandate benefits them. Consider offering more training seats for women than men.

### 2. Monitoring and Learning

- *USAID should:* **Commission an independent assessment of the SPL training program to understand how it is contributing to desired outcome-level changes at the individual and party levels.** Building on SPL's own assessments, an independent assessment could look at trainee selection, participants' retention and use of knowledge and skills, how political parties are benefiting from the training, how MTs are being used, the relative values of e-learning versus in-person training, the extent to which political parties are investing in training (e.g., vis-à-vis their Strategic Plans), how SPL can continue to support parties' in-house training capacity, etc. The assessment should consider longitudinal, cumulative change and, as possible, include a comparison group of non-beneficiaries.
- *USAID should:* **Require implementer to conduct regular applied political economy analyses.** These insights can be used to inform ongoing adaptation and better assess SPL contributions to outcome-level changes. Clearly communicate to the implementer that piloting new ideas and adjusting programming, when needed, are desired actions.
- *DI should:* **Continue CLA efforts outlined in the Year 6 work plan,** including regular political

---

<sup>1</sup> Incentives differ by party. For instance, AL, which isn't involved in the central debate, may be focused on managing internal party conflict.

economy analyses, opportunity and risk analyses, and use of a political space monitoring tool. Document the results of these efforts in regular reporting to USAID. Invite USAID to participate in key CLA events.

- *USAID should:* **Clarify the reporting requirements for SPL’s Learning Agenda.** This can include the frequency and format of reporting for different learning questions (short-term, long-term, Performance Management Plan [PMP], Coronavirus Disease 2019 [COVID-19], and self-reliance questions).
- *USAID should:* **Require stepped-up PEA and MEL expertise in Next Generation (nextgen) programming** to ensure programmatic relevance, evidence-based adaptation, and learning in the context of the anticipated, continued, dynamic political environment.
- *DI should:* **Work with CLA and political economy and inclusion experts to develop future MEL plans.** Ensure that MEL plans reflect learning to date, data quality assessments, and sustainability planning as SPL comes to an end. Consider adding qualitative indicators to better assess SPL contributions to outcome-level changes and context indicators to track conditions beyond SPL control that may affect the achievement of results.

### 3. Sustainability and Coordination

- *DI should:* **Continue support for institutionalizing political party training.** This may include working with political parties to develop their Action Plans, supporting parties to establish or strengthen their training cells, training additional MTs due to attrition, providing refresher training to existing MTs, tracking use of the “Politics Matters” e-learning website, and developing new in-person and virtual training modules in response to user feedback.
- *DI should:* **Continue the university YLFP effort to encourage democratic practices within parties’ student wings.**
- *USAID should:* **Explore opportunities for enhanced collaboration with other programming to build synergies** (e.g., related to elections, youth, women, and civil society) for future programming.
- *DI should:* **Explore options for more district- and divisional-level activities to increase attendance and save costs.** Given the small number of DI staff in the regional offices, this may require more travel for Dhaka-based staff to support QA for some activities.
- *DI should:* **Consider enhanced training for political parties on fundraising and fund management, internal party communications, research skills, and strategic/action planning.**
- *USAID should:* **Explore options for establishing a political party training institute** to provide short and long courses for political actors. The institute could be based at a public university to provide legitimacy and benefit from academic resources. Satellite training cells could also be established to extend reach and accessibility. Political parties and donors could co-invest in this.

### 4. Compliance and Design

- *USAID should:* **Review SPL compliance with USAID’s PPAP and conduct regular reviews to determine if there have been any changes in parties that are deemed democratic or significant per the PPAP.**<sup>2</sup> As needed, engage third-party experts with local knowledge to

---

<sup>2</sup> From the PPAP: “It is a best practice for Missions to build in an annual review to determine if there has been any change in the parties that are deemed democratic or significant. Missions are encouraged to consult with implementing partners and the Embassy to inform their decisions on party selection.”

support this effort. Based on the review of findings, expand or contract assistance. As needed, request a waiver to work with a particular political party or multi-party coalition.

- *USAID should:* **Conduct a needs assessment to inform possible future political party assistance.** Carefully consider the vision for assistance. The vision should reflect the political economy, achievements to date, where there is potential for the greatest traction, the needs of individual political parties, stakeholder buy-in, and a balance between demand and supply-driven support. Be willing to pause political party assistance or shift resources to other types of programming to strengthen the political landscape. USAID should consider the ideal timing for an assessment—recognizing that no matter who wins the 2024 elections, many of the needs and opportunities are already well known.
- *USAID should:* **Consider options and opportunities for scale in response to high demand.** Based on existing and anticipated evidence and resource availability, consider the tradeoffs between expanding political party assistance into more districts versus working more intensively in selected districts and expanding to upazilas. Clearly define the criteria for scaling up/down; how a nextgen strategy would build on achievements to date; what future success would look like at the end of the five-year project cycle (TOC); and the desired role of central leaders.

# I. INTRODUCTION

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Bangladesh commissioned ME&A, Inc. (ME&A) to conduct a Midterm Performance Evaluation (MPE) of the Strengthening Political Landscape (SPL) Activity implemented by Democracy International (DI). The Activity is being implemented under USAID Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) Development Objective 1: *Improved Democratic Systems that Promote Transparency, Accountability, and Integrity*.

The objective of this performance evaluation is to examine SPL’s technical and programmatic validity and effectiveness in the context of the political situation in Bangladesh and assess its progress toward sustainability—particularly in the run-up to the 2024 elections and the dynamic political situation in the country. The MTE will develop recommendations to inform future USAID/Bangladesh programming to strengthen the political landscape in the country and identify opportunities for necessary course corrections and improvement in DI’s implementation of SPL in its last 18 months.

Bangladesh’s political parties are centralized, leader-driven institutions that have often failed to create space for lower-level leaders to participate. DI with SPL’s predecessor, the Democratic Participation and Reform (DPR) project, helped identify incentives and opportunities for parties to live up to the democratic ideals enshrined in their constitutions. The SPL Activity launched in 2017 to: 1) support improved transparency and inclusivity in the decision-making processes within Bangladeshi political parties and 2) advance youth and women’s political participation and leadership opportunities.

The outcomes of the Activity are designed to contribute to Intermediate Result (IR) 1.1: “*Political party activists and politically active citizens<sup>3</sup> have the skills and knowledge to be effective leaders and advocate for more inclusive policies and practices within the party*” and IR 1.2: “*Increased skills of political party activists and politically active citizens to engage constructively to mitigate conflict.*” (1.3: *Improved Political Processes to Prevent Further Backsliding into Authoritarianism* has been removed from the Activity.) The overall funding of the Activity is \$28,446,856.

The performance evaluation was conducted in February–May 2023 in Dhaka City and in eight divisions representing 21 districts (see Table 3) where the SPL Activity was implemented through 2022. (Note: additional districts were added in 2023.)

## I.1 POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Bangladesh has a long history of political violence. The last several years have witnessed a dramatic increase in both the frequency and severity of political violence: More than 100 people were killed and many more injured in the Union Parishad (UP) elections of 2021. Traditionally, violence in politics has been driven by a combination of long-standing factors (e.g., the electoral system, lack of confidence in electoral processes, and historical grievances), as well as the erosion of tolerance for pluralism and the limited avenues for opposition participation in politics following the Bangladesh Nationalist Party’s (BNP) boycott of the 2014 elections.

Intra-party conflict is another driver of violence, particularly in the Awami league. The absence of parliamentary opposition prevents a natural Westminster check-and-balance process, and the abolishment of the caretaker government system enables the ruling party to ignore calls for negotiation or dialogue with opponents and civil society activists who are seen to be critical of the government. This has entrenched an unequal power dynamic between the two primary parties. In this context, political parties have increasingly resorted to violence to express grievances and sway public opinion. The Bangladeshi

---

<sup>3</sup> “Politically active citizens” is generally synonymous with civil society and includes the media, academics, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). SPL engages the media. Civil society is not an SPL direct beneficiary, however.

public, however, overwhelmingly opposes political violence and sees grassroots approaches as having the most potential to promote peace.

In recent years, Bangladesh's political parties have made significant strides in becoming more responsive and inclusive, and there are opportunities for further progress. While two parties—the Awami League (AL) of Prime Minister Sheik Hasina and the BNP of Khaleda Zia—continue to dominate the political space, these parties as well as the Jatiyo Party (JP) have shown that they can make progress. Programs such as SPL and its predecessor, the DPR project, help identify incentives and opportunities for parties to live up to the democratic ideals enshrined in their constitutions. Historically, Bangladesh's political parties are centralized, leader-driven institutions that have often failed to create space for lower-level leaders to participate.

But with support from DI under DPR and SPL, all the main parties have significantly engaged more women and youth in leadership positions. New and inclusive consultative mechanisms provide an opportunity to increase grassroots voices in such important decisions as the contents of party manifestos.

## **1.2 THE STRENGTHENING POLITICAL LANDSCAPE ACTIVITY (2017–2024)**

The overall goal set in USAID's CDCS is *Bangladesh is committed to democratic principles and inclusive growth with an increasing capacity to economically diversify, address inequality, and become a resilient Indo-Pacific partner.* Out of the three Development Objectives (DOs) to support this Goal, DO 1 emphasizes the improvement of the political system of the country. SPL Activity's goal is strengthening political processes and broaden political participation by strengthening institutional capacity and practices of political parties by equipping political party activists and politically active citizens with skills to 1) be effective leaders and advocates for inclusive policies and practices within their parties (IR 1.1) and 2) engage in constructive conflict mitigation processes (IR 1.2). The Theory of Change (TOC) underpinning the design of SPL is:

- *If* political party activists and politically active citizens develop the skills and knowledge to be effective leaders and advocate for more inclusive policies and practices within their parties; and
- *If* the skills of political party activists and politically active citizens to engage constructively to mitigate conflict increase;
- *Then* institutional capacity and practices of political parties will be strengthened in Bangladesh; and politics in Bangladesh will be more inclusive, responsive, and peaceful.

With increasing instability and a narrowing of the political space, two of the initial assumptions underpinning the initial TOC are no longer relevant:

- 1) The political situation in Bangladesh remains generally stable or improves.
- 2) The space for civic participation in politics and good governance processes remains open.

SPL's political economy analysis (2021) revisited some assumptions upon which the original development hypothesis and results framework were based. Based on the emerging situation, the TOC assumptions were revised as follows:

- 1) Political parties remain cooperative with DI and continue to be open to USAID and other donors' assistance.
- 2) Bangladesh is not afflicted with a natural disaster of such magnitude that programming becomes unmanageable.
- 3) Terrorist activity is minimal.

The Activity MEL Plan put forward several potential risks to achieving Activity results:

- 1) Youth/women cannot freely participate in the Activity's intervention due to security concerns (medium risk).

- 2) Youth and women political activists are frustrated with the party leadership, as advancement in the party’s leadership positions is often determined by authoritarian and arbitrary decisions (low risk).
- 3) Perceptions of bias in program support from political parties (low risk).
- 4) Internal conflicts among party leaders (high risk).
- 5) Opposition party does not participate in elections due to actions by the ruling party, boycott, or other outside factors (medium risk).

The IR and Activity descriptions have also been refined over time, as the situation in the country has changed. SPL is currently working with two mutually reinforcing IRs that focus on leadership and skill development within the major political parties, boost capacity, and encourage interparty dialogue and problem solving.

**Table 1. SPL Intermediate Results and Activities**

<b>IR 1: Political Party Activists and Politically Active Citizens Have the Skills and Knowledge to Be Effective Leaders and Advocate for More Inclusive Policies and Practices within Their Parties</b>
Sub-IR 1.1 Increase party membership capacity to advocate for internal democratic practices and improvements to party structure.
Sub-IR 1.2 Improve political party capacity to collect and interpret constituent opinions.
Sub-IR 1.3 Increase party representation and leadership of women and youth.
<b>IR 2: Increase Skills of Political Party Activists and Politically Active Citizens to Engage Constructively to Mitigate Conflict</b>
Sub-IR 2.1 Increase opportunities and capacity for productive interaction between competitor parties.
Sub-IR 2.2 Political parties work in partnership with politically active citizen groups to advocate for mitigating conflict.
Sub-IR 2.3 Political parties and politically active citizens more effectively leverage conventional media and social media to promote a more open and inclusive political culture.
Sub-IR 2.4 People Against Violence Everywhere (PAVE)

Several recent adjustments to this results framework and the Activity are worth noting:

- 1) The original Results Framework (RF) had three IRs—including IR3, which read: *Improved Political Processes to Prevent Further Backsliding into Authoritarianism Have Been Removed from the Activity*. This was removed following the elections in 2018, as was the Implementing Partner (IP) (The Asia Foundation).
- 2) Political party “activists” referenced under IR1 are largely limited to media, as the Activity was requested to stop working with civil society in 2021.
- 3) The Hunger Project (THP) is exclusively focused on IR2.

Table 2 provides a snapshot of specific initiatives and participants reached under SPL from its inception to the date of the last updates reported in February 2023.

**Table 2. Participants reached by SPL initiatives (most recent updates)**

<b>Master Trainers (MTs)</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Active</b>	<b>All Modules</b>	<b>Campaign Management</b>	<b>Poll Watchers</b>	<b>Internal Democracy</b>	<b>Conflict Mitigation</b>	<b>e-Learning</b>	<b>Date of Update</b>
	428	195	17	238	238	279	65	63	10- Mar-22
<b>Young Leaders Fellowship Program (YLFP)</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Active</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>AL</b>	<b>BNP</b>	<b>JP</b>	<b>Jamat</b>	<b>Date of Update</b>
	207	94	105	102	76	72	33	26	6-Dec-21
<b>Senior Leaders Fellowship Program (SLFP)</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Active</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>AL</b>	<b>BNP</b>	<b>JP</b>		<b>Date of Update</b>
	156	99	57	86	70	72	14		14-Dec-22
<b>Women's Empowerment</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>AL</b>	<b>BNP</b>	<b>JP</b>					<b>Date of Update</b>
	1575	857	659	59					22-Feb-23
<b>Multi-Party Advocacy Forum (MAF)</b>	<b>No. of MAFs</b>	<b>No. of Members</b>	<b>No. of Projects Completed</b>	<b>No. of Ongoing Projects</b>					<b>Date of Update</b>
	21	680	91	41					22-Feb-23

The SPL has been implemented in eight divisions and at the national level. Within the eight divisions, 21 priority districts and eight cities were targeted where SPL's network, access, and ability to influence are the strongest. To maintain neutrality, SPL priority areas included districts where there are opportunities to aid and engage at least two major political parties, AL and BNP, and the potential to engage another important political party, JP.<sup>4</sup> Table 3 provides a list of the geographic locations where SPL worked.

**Table 3. SPL Target Locations**

<b>Locations</b>
<b>Barishal Division</b>
Districts and Cities: Barguna, Patuakhali, Jhalokathi, Barishal City
<b>Chattogram Division</b>
Districts and Cities: Chattogram South, Cox's Bazar, Chattogram City
<b>Cumilla Division</b>
Districts: Brahmanbaria, Chandpur, Cumilla South, Noakhali
<b>Khulna Division</b>

<sup>4</sup> SPL Year 6 Workplan, Annex B.

Locations
Districts and Cities: Khulna, Bagerhat, Khulna City
<b>Mymensingh Division</b>
Districts and Cities: Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Sherpur, Mymensingh City
<b>Rangpur Division</b>
Districts and Cities: Thakurgaon, Lalmonirhat, Rangpur City
<b>Rajshahi Division</b>
Districts and Cities: Rajshahi, Joypurhat, Naogaon, Rajshahi City
<b>Sylhet Division</b>
Districts and Cities: Sylhet, Sunamganj, Sylhet City
<b>Dhaka</b>
National/Central Committees of Parties, Dhaka South City

### I.3 EVALUATION PURPOSE

The objective of this MPE is to assess SPL’s technical and programmatic validity and effectiveness and assess its progress toward sustainability. The period of performance for this midterm evaluation will cover the timeframe from the Activity’s inception in March 2017 to December 2022. The findings are designed to be used to identify opportunities for course corrections and improvement in DI’s implementation of SPL. During discussions in the kickoff meeting with the ET, USAID advised that although this is a midterm evaluation, its focus should be forward looking. Particularly, USAID would like to understand stakeholders’ views about how the Activity design can be improved in the last 1.5 years of the Activity and for potential follow-on programming.

Six evaluation questions were agreed to:

- EQ1:** To what extent has SPL been successful in achieving Activity objectives (IR 1 and IR 2)?
- EQ2:** How can Activities like SPL engage women and youth more effectively in the future?
- EQ3:** How efficient is SPL Activity implementation with planning, organization, resource mobilization, and adaptive management?
- EQ4:** To what extent are the Activity’s objectives still relevant to the current development circumstances in Bangladesh?
- EQ5:** How can Activities like SPL support political parties to be more effective and peaceful leaders in accordance with USAID’s Political Party Assistance Policy?
- EQ6:** What measures should be taken to promote the sustainability of Activity achievements?

The evaluation was undertaken during February–May 2023. The primary audiences for this performance evaluation are USAID/Bangladesh and DI. Secondary audiences will include the U.S. Embassy in Bangladesh, Bangladeshi political parties, the USAID Asia Bureau, bilateral and multilateral donors, and other relevant development partners working for democratic governance.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was conducted by a four-person team: an international Team Lead (TL)/senior evaluation specialist with expertise in evaluating political programs in complex settings; two senior national specialists with in-depth knowledge of political development, political parties, electoral and political processes—and parliamentary democracy and political participation in Bangladesh; and the Bangladesh Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (BMEL) Deputy Chief of Party (DCOP)/Monitoring Lead, who led one of the four field data collection teams.

The evaluation used qualitative and quantitative methods to answer and contextualize the Evaluation Questions (EQs) in the complex, dynamic, socio-political context. A total of 43 key reports, studies, and relevant documents were reviewed and annotated. (See Annex 2.) KIIs, GIs, and FGDs were carried out during the period March 7–23, 2023, across eight divisional districts in Dhaka, Khulna, Cumilla, Chattogram, Barishal, Sylhet, Rajshahi, and Rangpur. These districts were selected purposively based on where SPL has an office with wide coverage. Two of the selected divisions (Rajshahi and Sylhet) also have a THP office.

Each member of the ET collected data in two districts. Central-level data was collected by all members of the ET. Each member of the ET was supported by a research associate. Following each KII, GI, or FGD, notes were written up and reviewed before being uploaded into a shared database. Analysis was supported by the BMEL statistician and carried out using NVivo.

### 2.1 S047 SPL MIDTERM PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

#### KII/GI and FGD

##### a) Sample Size

In total, 54 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Group Interviews (GIs) were conducted at the district (37) and national levels (17), and 12 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted at the district level. Their distribution is shown in Table 4.

*Table 4. Distribution of national and district level KIIs/GIs by stakeholder type*

KIIs and GIs	National	District
USAID	2 (1)	---
Democracy International (DI)	3 (1)	4 (4)
The Hunger Project (THP) and Peace Facilitator Groups (PFGs)	1 (1)	3 (3)
Political Parties	4	26 (3)
Local Government (LG)	---	4 (1)
Civil Society (media, academia)	4	---
Other knowledgeable experts (e.g., authors of 2019 MTE and 2021 Political Economy Analysis [PEA], and non-United States Government [USG] donors)	3	---
<b>Total (KIIs/GIs)</b>	<b>17(3)</b>	<b>37(11)</b>

FGDs	National	District
Central leaders of all parties	---	---
YLFP participants	---	4
SLFP participants	---	4
MAF members	---	4
<b>Total FGDs</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12</b>

*(Note: Number in parentheses indicates the number of GIs.)*

As shown in Table 4 above, samples were drawn from seven categories of SPL stakeholders. USAID is the main donor; DI and THP are the IPs; and political parties are the main beneficiaries. Civil society respondents included members of the media and academics who are knowledgeable about the political landscape of Bangladesh. Other knowledgeable experts are local and international experts familiar with SPL and the political landscape. LG refers to city corporations, municipalities, and upazilas/UP. The representatives of these organizations are mostly nominated by the political parties. They play a vital role in the local-level political activities of their parties. Many of them participated in the SPL’s YLFP, SLFP, and Master Trainer (MT) Training of Trainers (ToTs). At USAID’s request, one data collection event with a political party was substituted for an event by THP’s PFGs.

All FGDs were conducted with direct beneficiaries of SPL—including members of the political parties who participated in the YLFP, SLFP, and MAFs; and central party leaders who participated in SPL events in different capacities.

### **b) Sample Section**

For USAID, the Agreement Officer’s Representative (AOR), alternate AOR, and Project Management Specialist for Civil Society were selected. For SPL, all DI senior management staff, four DI regional teams, and two THP upazilla teams were selected for KIIs/GIs. Among civil society personnel, two media persons from TV channels involved in covering SPL events and one academic were selected. For political parties, DI provided its full database of direct beneficiaries and a list of recommended respondents for the evaluation (individuals who were most involved in SPL from April 2019 to December 2022). To reduce selection bias, the ET decided to recruit half the respondents from each list and randomly selected an additional two respondents in each of eight districts to account for respondent unavailability or non-response. ET handed over the list of the selected respondents to DI to set up the KIIs/GIs and FGDs.

Just prior to district-level data collection, DI informed the ET that some of the selected respondents were deceased or no longer active in SPL activities. Therefore, some of the randomly selected respondents from the full DI database had to be replaced with individuals from DI’s recommended respondents. This introduced a level of selection bias that could not be mitigated in the time available.

### **c) Location**

All national-level respondents were based in Dhaka City, while district-level respondents were drawn from the eight targeted divisions: Dhaka, Chattogram, Sylhet, Cumilla, Barishal, Khulna, Rajshahi, and Rangpur. The eight divisions were grouped into four clusters: Dhaka and Chattogram comprised Cluster 1, Sylhet and Cumilla were Cluster 2, Barishal and Khulna were Cluster 3, and Rajshahi and Rangpur were Cluster 4. The sample was proportionally distributed among the four clusters.

#### d) Data Collection Instruments

The ET developed five sets of KII/GI instruments—one for USAID, DI, THP, other donors and other knowledge experts; one for the political parties; one for the media and academia; one for LG respondents; and one for PFGs. The ET also developed two sets of FGD guidelines—one set for the YLFP/SLFP participants and one for MAF members. The ET developed these instruments from the perceptions gained from the desk research, discussions with USAID and DI, and interaction among the ET members. After development, all the instruments underwent several levels of review by USAID, BMEL, and ET members. They were then pretested in Dhaka and updated prior to district level data collection.

#### e) Data Collection

For district-level data collection, the ET split into four teams to cover the four clusters; each team included one ET member and a research associate. The teams used the final version of the data collection instruments to facilitate interviews and discussions. Wherever possible, the teams recorded the discussions as a backup to interview notes. In most cases, the ET facilitated the discussions, and the research associate took notes. The TL reviewed all interview notes prepared by the research associates and ET members. These notes were then uploaded to a Google Docs folder and coded with NVivo software.

## 2.2 ONLINE CLIENT SATISFACTION SURVEY

#### a) Sample Size

The ET also conducted a rapid phone survey with a sample of SPL’s direct beneficiaries. The survey was designed to capture stakeholder satisfaction with the project, perspectives on relevance, and thoughts about future programming. The survey had a sample size of 302 respondents (37 percent of SPL’s direct beneficiaries) drawn randomly from a list of 824 direct beneficiaries (see Table 5 below). The sample was supposed to be drawn proportionally from each party but was finally based on respondent availability on the day of interview.

As it turns out, the sample is close to the actual proportions of direct beneficiaries by party affiliation and includes 30 members of JP (10 percent sampled versus 15 percent actual), 128 members of BNP (42 percent sampled versus 46 percent actual), and 144 members of AL (48 percent sampled versus 40 percent actual). One-hundred and fifty-five (155) are young Fellows, 59 are senior Fellows, and 88 are MTs. This distribution is not proportional to the number of political party members nor the types of beneficiaries (i.e., YLFP, SLFP, and MT). The findings are presented in aggregate and are not broken down by political party or beneficiary type.

*Table 5. Distribution of the sample by political party affiliation and beneficiary type*

Type of beneficiary	Political Parties							
	AL		JP		BNP		ALL	
	Total	Sample	Total	Sample	Total	Sample	Total	Sample
Young Fellows	99	68	33	18	108	69	240	155
Senior Fellows	70	25	15	6	71	28	156	59
Master Trainers	161	51	67	6	200	31	428	88
<b>Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>824</b>	<b>302</b>

## **b) Sample Selection**

The ET initially planned to conduct an electronic stakeholder survey as specified in the work plan. DI subsequently cautioned that response rates for electronic surveys can be low because many of their stakeholders do not use email. USAID recommended using DI's enumerators.

The respondents were drawn from a list of young Fellows, senior Fellows, and MTs provided by DI. In case a selected respondent could not be located or refused to participate, the next person on the list was selected.

Gender disaggregation was considered at every step of respondent selection. As a result, 41 percent of the respondents were female, and 59 percent were male. The survey was carried out in the same divisions where KIIs/GIs and FGDs were conducted.

## **c) Data collection**

The ET developed a structured survey instrument based on information gained during desk research and interactions with USAID, DI, and ET members. The instrument was finalized through several rounds of review by USAID and BMEL and pretested with non-sample respondents. The final instrument was then uploaded to an online platform (*i.e.*, Survey 123) to facilitate data collection using phones. The whole system was pretested before the start of data collection.

Four enumerators were involved in data collection. All enumerators are experienced survey practitioners and had been trained by DI on how to conduct online data collection telephonically. After recruitment, the BMEL Data Analyst provided them with an orientation on the questionnaire and the online platform. BMEL trained and supervised the trainers who also signed a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) as part of their contracts. The enumerators collected data under the supervision of the BMEL Data Analyst. BMEL staff, including the BMEL Data Analyst, backchecked 10 percent of the respondents to verify interview quality and the accuracy of data collected by the enumerators. No deviations were identified.

## **2.3 DATA ANALYSIS**

### **a) Analysis of Qualitative Data (from KIIs/GIs and GFDs)**

The ET developed a qualitative coding framework. NVivo software was then used to code the data. Three research associates supported the ET with coding. The BMEL Data Analyst then generated coding reports which the ET, with BMEL support, analyzed to prepare this draft report.

### **b) Analysis of Quantitative Data (from Survey)**

BMEL developed a data analysis plan for the quantitative survey data. The BMEL data analyst analyzed the data according to the plan using Microsoft (MS) Excel and produced descriptive statistics and charts for key variables such as youth engagement, inclusion of women, participation in decision-making, interparty collaboration, etc. This data was then integrated with the evaluation's qualitative findings.

# **3. EVALUATION LIMITATIONS**

As with any evaluation design, biases and limitations are inevitable. To avoid selection bias and minimize the risk of speaking only to those who had positive experiences, the ET collected a full list of contacts from DI and randomly selected individuals from the list to participate in KIIs and FGDs. The ET also considered respondents suggested by outside experts familiar with SPL. Social desirability bias may have been an issue—especially in the FGDs, where respondents within the group may have been reticent to contribute in a way that differed too much from the views of others in the group and, more generally, what was perceived as acceptable to the group.

To mitigate this, assurances of confidentiality were provided. The limited timeframe for fieldwork meant that a handful of key individuals were not available due to other commitments. To address the limitations, the ET conducted an extensive, multi-round desk review and held separate out-briefs with USAID and DI to help address gaps and clarify remaining issues. The use of different data collection methods (KII, FGDs, survey, desk review, and out-brief feedback) and data triangulation mitigated these limitations.

Due to the TL's availability, BMEL shared some of the TL responsibilities, including drafting substantive sections of this report.

## 4. EVALUATION FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

### 4.1 EQ1: TO WHAT EXTENT HAS SPL BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN ACHIEVING ACTIVITY OBJECTIVES (IR 1 AND IR 2)?

#### Introduction

EQ1 explores how SPL activities have contributed to internal party democracy (IR 1) and constructive conflict mitigation processes across parties (IR 2) since 2019. All respondent groups shared their views. The analysis is based on stakeholder views and self-reporting by SPL.

DI works with the three major political parties—AL, BNP, and JP—at the district and central levels to achieve IR 1 and IR 2; and THP (DI's partner) works at the upazila level to support the goals of IR 2.

**IR 1: Political party activists and politically active citizens have the skills and knowledge to be effective leaders and advocate for more inclusive policies and practices within the party** (*internal party democracy*).

IR 1 has three sub-IRs:

- 1) IR 1.1: Strengthened inclusive and transparent decision-making practices within political parties
- 2) IR 1.2: Strengthened evidence-based policy building on views from all levels of party membership
- 3) IR 1.3: Improved capacity and leadership development skill of party members at all levels of party membership

The evaluation focused on the IR level rather than the sub-IR level; therefore, the findings are presented by broad theme rather than by sub-IR.

#### General Skills Development and Application

SPL has implemented fellowship and other training programs to increase party members' general skills and capacity in various subject areas. Respondents consistently highlighted the YLFP, SLFP, and MT programs as increasing party members' political knowledge and skills. Despite the challenges and constraints, SPL beneficiaries acknowledged the overall success of the program. The evaluation survey data reveals that 65 percent of survey respondents are "very satisfied" and 32 percent are "satisfied" with SPL support (for a combined total of 97 percent).

#### Fellowship Programs

SPL offers YLFP and SLFP to strengthen party members' leadership and political skills. The fellowship programs are divided into three areas: 1) political knowledge, 2) leadership skills, and 3) party building. Trainings on political knowledge are designed to increase party members' critical political and leadership knowledge—including understanding the basic concepts of state, government, political party, democracy, civic participation, internal party democracy, and elections. Trainings on political skills address political

communications, political career planning, advocacy, political conflict mitigation, tolerance building, peace building, ethical leadership, and public speaking. Trainings on party building focus on party member recruitment, party finance, campaign management, party outreach with supporters and the general population, and party constitutional development (SPL Work Plan, Year 3, 2019, p. 9).

The YLFP is viewed as being very successful at building the skills of young leaders. Both individual party members and political parties benefited from YLFP. Respondents often mentioned how their political knowledge and skills improved. Their personal confidence also improved due to their increased knowledge and skillset (KII, AL Rajshahi). The ET heard from several interviewees that Fellows are given priority when parties select polling agents for election day (FGD, YLFP Cumilla). Most YLFP Fellows reported that their tolerance for opposing party members had increased due to the fellowship program (FGD, SPLF Barishal). We often heard that cross-party relations had improved and continued when they joined MAFs. (See IR 2 below.) Fellows see this improvement as a good sign for future politics (FGD, YLFP Rajshahi).

In Year 3, SPL launched a condensed fellowship module for senior-level central and grassroots party leaders (i.e., the president, general secretary, vice president, and joint general secretaries of a district/city committee). Senior Fellows learned about leadership qualities, regulations related to political parties in Bangladesh, gender equality in political parties, party finance, and conflict mitigation (SPL, Work Plan, Year 4, p. 21). As of December 2022, a total of 156 (F-57, M-86) senior Fellows had graduated, of whom 99 (63.5 percent) were still active in SPL in December 2022.

In the fellowship programs, Fellows learned leadership skills. They also learned about gender in politics, regulations related to political parties in Bangladesh, the importance of financial transparency in politics, political conflict and violence, and peaceful conflict mitigation strategies (Year 4 Annual Report, May 15, 2021, p. 6). During interviews and focus groups, Fellows often mentioned how SLFP had modified their mindset and behavior (Box–SLFP Impact).

*“SLFP training provided us [with] the opportunity to interact with different party leaders. Training and post-training activities help us to change our mindset, improve our tolerance, and calm down our temper[s].”*  
(FGD SLFP)

SLFP and YLFP trainings were held simultaneously at the same venue, although in separate rooms, to build positive relationships with senior and young Fellows from the same area. Cumulative SPL Activity data (March 2017–March 2022) shows that 444 young Fellows (male: 239, female: 205) had graduated from the YLFP (237 in SPL and 207 in DPR, SPL’s predecessor Activity run by DI from 2011 to 2017). Among them 97 Fellows (male: 51, female: 46) (AL: 39, BNP: 49, JP: 9) had been promoted to higher positions within their parties.

### **Master Trainer (MT) Program**

In Year 3, SPL started a ToT workshop based on a party training needs assessment highlighting the need for a sustainable training to strengthen internal party democracy and develop leadership and party-building capacity at the party level. Following the ToT workshops, MTs apply their skills leading follow-on training workshops for party leaders and members. They also use the e-learning platform to conduct virtual local-level political party trainings. Promising leaders from each party, including some SLFP Fellows (both men and women) were asked to select a group of candidates to be trained as MTs. Each class of MTs received intensive training on three specific modules: 1) developing and maintaining democratic internal structures, 2) promoting and enforcing transparency and accountability, and 3) conducting outreach to new sectors

(SPL Year 4 Annual Report, p. 8).

According to the Key SPL Data Master File, DI has trained 428 MTs (AL: 161, BNP: 200, JP: 67) (see Figure 1), of which approximately 46 percent (199) were still “active” as of March 2022. Nineteen (19) active MTs had been promoted to main party committees.

Since Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), SPL has conducted much of its training program virtually using platforms such as Zoom and Facebook Live. Initially, SPL beneficiaries were not familiar with online meetings but became used to participating in online training through their SPL experience. A couple of respondents from AL noted that they greatly appreciated online training because their party promotes digitalization in the country and uses more digital tools than the other parties (FGD, MAF Rajshahi; GI DI Cumilla).

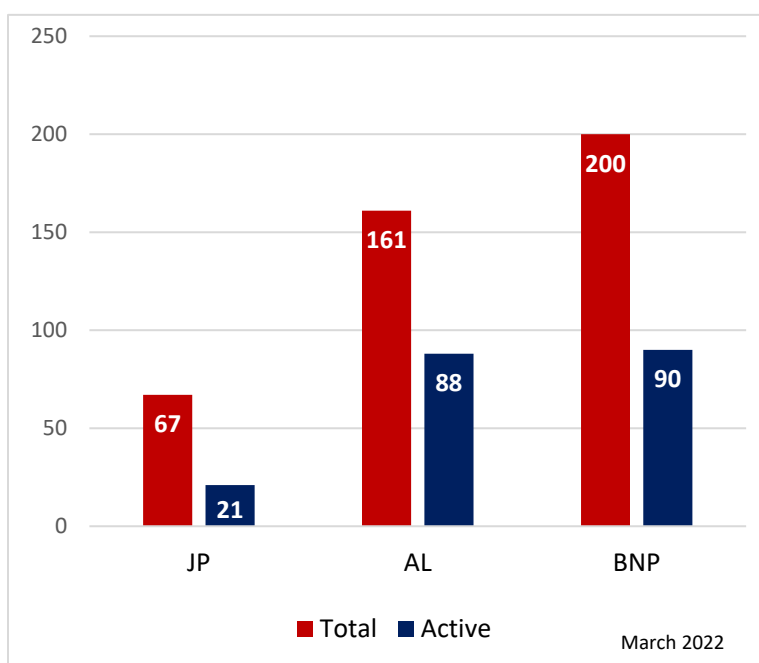


Figure 1. Number of trained and active MTs by party

Many MTs were initially disappointed by the introduction of online training as they believed their work would be replaced. Over time, however, some MTs have come to appreciate how online training can be used to supplement in-person training and offers the possibility of training members who find it difficult to attend in-person training events. Others still feel replaced. This may be one of the reasons why some MTs are not motivated to deliver training, and it is likely contributing to the issue of MT attrition. Notwithstanding the utility of this tool, MTs report that participants still prefer in-person training rather than online training (GI, DI Chattogram).

As highlighted in the 2019 MTE, the ToT program has created a large group of trainers that now train scores of others—enabling SPL to further use and expand the skills of youth and women leaders, many of whom have now been selected as MTs. Since that time, in response to COVID-19 and as a sustainability measure, training is now largely virtual. MTs are now viewed as an important party resource for delivering training and advocating for the institutionalization of training at the party level (SPL Year 6 Work Plan, p. 6). Still, some MTs, e.g., in the Rajshahi and Rangpur districts, said they do not have many opportunities to apply their skills.

Nonetheless, due to MTs pushing and advocacy by SPL, BNP’s central leaders have been persuaded to activate party training cells, and JP has created the post of Training Secretary. Both BNP and JP appear to be moving toward more institutionalized training, while AL members noted during interviews and focus groups that their party already has existing research and training cells.

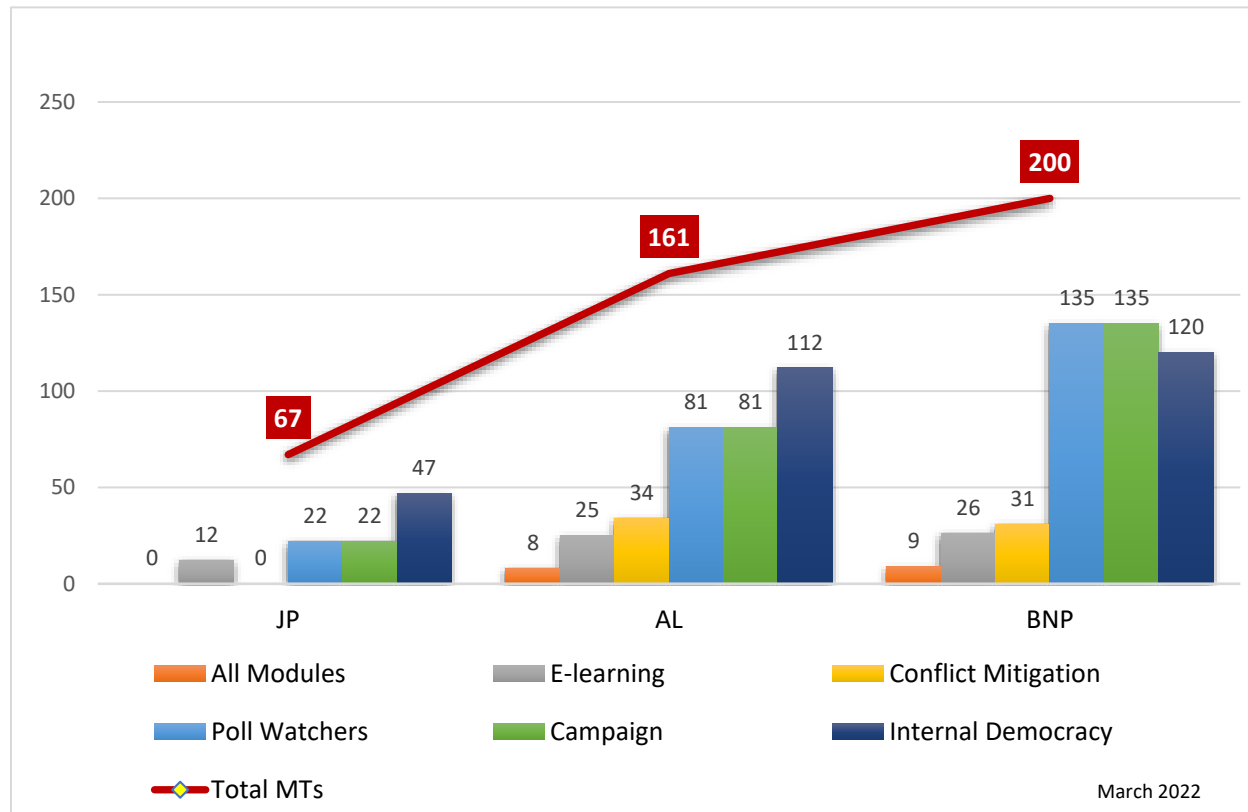
### E-Learning Platform (“Politics Matters”)

In Year 4, SPL developed the e-learning platform “Politics Matters,” allowing low-cost and broad access to training. This platform is being used for ToT follow-on training, refresher training, and party leader training. Figure 2 shows that most users of the online platform have participated in trainings on internal democracy, campaign management and poll watching.

As of March 2022, a total of 3,817 party members had registered on the “Politics Matters” e-learning

platform—of which 215 had completed all eight training modules. (AL-25, BNP-26, JP-12, YLF-52, MAF-100, Key SPL Master Data File). Interviewed MT, YLFP, and MAF members mentioned the e-learning platform and its benefits, and DI field staff believe that the e-learning platform is very useful for party building and improving political knowledge.

### Strategic Planning Workshop/Meetings



**Figure 2. Master Trainers (MTs) and course attendees by party**

As part of party-building activities, SPL is actively conducting Single Party Planning Meetings (SPPMs) with the leaders of district- and city-level party committees. SPL network members (YLFs, SLFs, MTs, and women’s network members) also participate. In Year 5, SPL conducted 55 SPPMs with a total of 597 participants (male: 468, female: 129) across the parties (SPL Year 5 Annual Report, p. 11).

As part of party-building activities, SPL is actively conducting SPPMs with the leaders of district- and city-level party committees. SPL network members (YLFs, SLFs, MTs, and women’s network members) also participate. In Year 5, SPL conducted 55 SPPMs with a total of 597 participants (male: 468, female: 129) across the parties (SPL Year 5 Annual Report, p. 11).

The concept of political party strategic planning is new in Bangladesh. SPL is drafting strategic plans with each of the parties, and JP and BNP have made commitments to provide strategic support in their drafting and implementation (GI with DI, MTE 2023). In Year 5, SPL organized 19 district-level strategic planning workshops (AL: 8, BNP: 9, JP: 2) in 11 districts. Before that, SPL conducted 35 pre-workshop meetings (AL: 14, BNP: 17, JP: 4) with party central leaders where they agreed to organize the district-level, single-party, strategic planning workshops (SPL Year 5 Annual Report, p. 11). The workshops provided key grassroots leaders the opportunity to work in groups to formulate a comprehensive strategic plan and a two-year action plan for strengthening internal democratic practices by district committees.

After the strategic planning workshops, SPL arranged seven (AL: 1, BNP: 5, JP:1) follow-up meetings with a total of 39 (male: 30, female: 9) key grassroots leaders (SPL Year 5 Annual Report, p. 11). The strategic planning workshops contributed to a) developing a comprehensive strategic plan and a two-year action plan, b) developing the skills and knowledge of party members to be effective leaders, c) highlighting the necessity of women's inclusion, d) institutionalizing party training, e) increasing democratic practices, and f) implementing conflict mitigation at the district level (SPL Year 5 Annual Report, p. 11).

### **Increase Party Membership Capacity**

SPL fellowship and training programs improved party members' skills and developed the capacity of all three political parties. Beneficiaries received training on election and campaign management, political communication, party finance, etc. Due to SPL, the perception of training has begun to change among senior leaders, and party training requirements have been discussed at all levels (GI, MTs Khulna). Another notable achievement of the fellowship program is the recognition of Fellows by their party leaders. At the district level, party leaders increasingly consult with SPL Fellows before making decisions (KII, BNP Khulna).

#### **a. Election and Campaign Management**

SPL has increased party members' capacity for election and campaign management. Most KII respondents (BNP, AL, and JP) highlighted election campaign training as useful. In the sessions they learned how to conduct election campaigns in an organized manner, how to communicate with voters, how to send them messages, and how to focus on a candidate's qualities.

*"The biggest success of SPL is teaching us the election campaigning scientifically and preparing the election mass message to attract voters. Now we know how to target the voters [and] how to connect with voters through our message." (KII BNP)*

For example, a YLFP Fellow in Khulna mentioned how they had learned to plan, implement, and manage election campaigns more efficiently to target voters (FGD, YFLP Khulna). One respondent mentioned that the knowledge and skills of election and campaign management that he gained from SPL equipped him to prepare an effective campaign strategy that won him election with a huge margin of votes (KII, LG).

Respondents both from AL and BNP identified polling agent training as a great initiative of SPL (KII, AL Dhaka; KII, BNP Rangpur). Others noted how parties had requested that Fellows train their polling agents before LG elections (KII, AL Dhaka). Some respondents also appreciated the sessions on party constitution, internal democracy, conflict mitigation, and e-learning. As a result of this training and skills development, some Fellows and MTs are now able to demonstrate their qualifications to senior leaders and are being recognized by party leaders as potential campaign managers and organizers. For instance, a female YLFP FGD respondent in Khulna noted how she had risen to frontline leadership for delivering good speeches in public (FGD, YLFP Khulna).

#### **b. Meeting and Organizing**

Party members' meeting and organizing skills have improved due to SPL's training. Participants learned how to write resolutions of party meetings and record decisions and investments, which helped them to monitor party members' activities (KII, JP). Party members are better able to create versatile agendas and implement programs that motivate and engage party workers in party activities (KII, JP Barishal). Women leaders are now better able to organize and conduct party meetings without the help of male leaders (KII, AL Rangpur). SPL trainings also motivated participants to conduct meetings and make decisions in line with democratic norms and procedures. Respondents mentioned that they follow democratic norms and procedures, so every member has scope to participate in the discussion and decision-making process (GI, PFG Rajshahi).

### c. Advocacy

Fellows and MTs have become skilled in advocacy (i.e., promoting internal party democracy, women’s inclusion, and cross-party conflict mitigation). Most survey respondents (63 percent) reported that SPL has increased the capacity of party members to advocate for more inclusive policies and practices within their parties. Fellows have gone on to conduct various types of social campaigns. For instance, during COVID-19, Fellows disseminated important public service messages and distributed sanitizers and masks in Rangpur (KII, JP Rangpur). Young Fellows organized a youth camp on the university and college campus and motivated talented students to get into politics in Khulna (FGD, YLFP Khulna).

### d. Research

In Year 5, SPL launched its Research Apprenticeship Program (RAP) with BNP and JP. The program is designed to increase both parties’ capacity to conduct research, analyze and interpret data, and use data in party decision-making. (Year 5 Annual Report; May 15, 2022, p. 2). Both BNP and JP senior leaders mentioned the benefits of RAP for political parties and expressed their gratitude to SPL.

For instance, JP leaders noted how the JP RAP trainees conducted a random public opinion poll in February 2022 that covered all eight divisions of Bangladesh (SPL Year 5 Annual Report, pp. 16–17) and submitted the results to the party presidium (executive committee) that persuaded them to scale up research. BNP conducted a similar poll in January 2022.

*“A senior Fellow mentioned that once she planned to meet one of the senior leaders of her party, she had done appropriate research on the topic for discussion; and as a consequence of her research, she was greatly appreciated by the senior leader. She learn[ed] this from the fellowship, which helped her to build a reliable relationship with her senior leader network.” (FGD SLFP)*

A BNP official noted that with SPL support, BNP conducted a pilot public perception study of party leaders that led to more effective decision-making by the party (KII with BNP senior official). AL did not participate in RAP and has its own research unit named the Centre for Research and Information (CRI), which conducts research and public discussions.

### e. Internal Democracy and Intraparty Conflict Mitigation

As noted in the strategic planning section above, improving party democratic practices and conflict mitigation capabilities are current areas of focus for SPL—which trains young and senior Fellows in conflict mitigation and is starting to see results at local levels. One respondent stated that he is more cognizant of what democracy means and noted how democratic practice is increasing among the middle tier of AL; however, he also noted that this is not reflected at the central level (KII, AL).

*“Earlier, during the formation of committees, conflicts used to occur within the party, but later a committee was formed by coordination to resolve these conflicts.” (FGD YFLP)*

A PFG member in Rajshahi noted that there have been a lot of changes made to decision-making processes in the last five years, that everyone’s opinion is given equal value in his party, and leaders are now elected in upazilas and unions through council elections (KII, LG Rajshahi). Another KII respondent in Chattogram stated that there are now democratic practices for creating leadership in his party (BNP) and DI had made this happen (KII, BNP Chattogram). However, despite these changes at the local level, many noted that democratic practices had not yet filtered up to the district and central levels. One focus group participant noted that while upazila and UP committees had been democratically formed, at the district and central levels party structure was an impediment to internal democracy. Without modification to party structure, nothing could be done at these more senior levels until the lower tier of leaders move into senior positions (FGD, YLFP).

The lack of internal democracy leads to conflict within parties on a variety of issues from policy disagreements to contested positions, resulting in the need for conflict mitigation to avoid political violence (GI, MTs). Several respondents mentioned that their mindset about conflict has changed due to SPL training. From the training, they learned that conflict does not always mean negativity; conflict can lead to positive outcomes (FGD, YLFP Rajshahi; KII, JP Rangpur; KII, AL Rangpur). One respondent noted that SPL training and initiatives have contributed to mitigating internal party conflicts at the local level but to be more effective will require the engagement of central leaders (KII JP Dhaka).

#### **f. Interparty Conflict Mitigation and Peace Building**

Due to the fellowship programs, interpersonal relationships developed across party lines and interparty coordination to mitigate political violence improved at the local level in several districts (GI DI Rajshahi; KII, BNP Barishal; KII, BNP Chattogram; KII, AL Rangpur).

*“SPL project funding helps us strengthen peacebuilding activities at the upazila level. PFG members deal with political conflict, misunderstandings, and communal harmony building.” (GI THP)*

After the fellowship programs, SPL facilitated the maintenance of these relationships and improved coordination through social media (SPL Year Annual Report, pp. 29–30). Across the country, Fellows are connected through a Facebook messenger group where party programs and personal activities are shared and solutions to social problems can be collaborated on (FGD, SLFP Rangpur). SPL training contributed to increasing tolerance among the participants (GI, MTs Khulna; KII, AL Khulna).

A female respondent mentioned that prior to her training, she was not interested in listening to opposite party members, but now she realizes that she would be better off if she listened to the opposition regularly (KII, BNP Barishal). She further noted that the senior leadership of each party is giving space to SPL Fellows to work jointly with opponent party Fellows, “which was very difficult earlier” (KII, BNP Barishal). As a result, respondents provided numerous instances where local political violence had been mitigated or avoided altogether due to Fellows’ conflict mitigation and peace building efforts (KII, BNP Khulna; KII, AL Rajshahi; KII, AL Barishal). As a young fellow from Khulna put it, “We are not leaving the ideology of our party, but we are acting peacefully, and this is what I have gained from the learning in the fellowship program” (FGD, YLFP Khulna).

#### **g. Party Financing**

Political party finance (fundraising and expenditure) is one of the most talked-about political issues in Bangladesh. Political parties have a treasurer position in the central and local-level committees, where they also maintain their bank accounts. Parties’ annual budgets are not available to the public. Both young and senior Fellows attended a session on transparency and management of party finances during their fellowship programs. In these sessions, Fellows learned how to raise party funds, how to manage them, and how to ensure transparency. Respondents often mentioned the usefulness of this training session.

One group interview noted how, due to SPL advocacy, all three major parties (AL, BNP, and JP) in the Chandpur district had opened their own bank accounts (GI, DI Cumilla). However, despite these instances of success, political parties are still collecting money from rich party members to carry out their party programs and election campaigns. Respondents noted that this process lacks transparency—and it is an open secret that aspiring candidates buy nominations (FGD, YLFP).

## **IR 2: Increased Skills of Political Party Activists and Politically Active Citizens to Engage Constructively to Mitigate Conflict**

### **Multiparty Advocacy Forums (MAFs)**

SPL MAFs are a platform for SPL network members from all major political parties to come together to address community priorities such as safety, health, sanitation, women’s political empowerment, youth

engagement, and the elimination of child marriage. According to SPL data, as of February 2023, MAFs had been formed in all 21 districts with 680 members and had completed 91 projects (Key SPL Master Data File, February 2023).

One respondent mentioned that many Fellows' relationships with senior leaders have improved due to MAFs—and many senior leaders recognize and respect MAFs for their work (FGD, YLFP Cumilla). SPL's 2021 Political Network Members' Perception Survey shows that most of the respondents (90.7 percent) believe that their skills for engaging constructively with political leaders of all political parties have increased due to SPL. More than three-fourths of 2021 respondents (78.9 percent) believe that relations across party lines have improved due to SPLs. Of these, 55.7 percent believe these improved relations have reduced conflict across party lines. (This is notably lower than the 71.4 percent of 2020 respondents who reported this.) (Political Network Members' Perception Survey, SPL, October 21, Slides 29 and 32; Political Network Members' Perception Survey, SPL, July 2020, Slide 19). Survey respondents for this MTE were optimistic that more open dialogue among parties will be a lasting benefit of SPL. (See EQ6, IR 1.)

The MAFs promote tolerance among members of different parties and create a space for cross-party engagement where members from the three major parties can discuss and resolve political and social issues (GI with MTs, Khulna). Participants in one Barishal FGD stated that, "In the MAF, we are not blinded by party politics. Our relationship with all the members has gone beyond politics. We can confidently seek personal support from any member of this forum" (FGD, MAF Barishal).

*"The political environment is not healthy, but I will say that as a result of DI's training, political tolerance has increased among us. Now we can sit together and discuss politics without any reaction."* (FGD MAF)

It seems that MAF members maintain a cordial relationship beyond party lines. In some districts (e.g., Borguna), MAFs have adopted their own constitutions and opened bank accounts, and members have paid lump-sum fees to maintain the MAF's activities (FGD MAF, Barishal). Respondents often mentioned that MAFs are useful platforms for resolving social problems and contributed to mitigating local interparty conflicts. However, some noted that MAFs could not do much to mitigate wider interparty conflict, which requires the engagement of senior party leaders (Kil, BNP leader Rangpur; Kil, JP leader Dhaka). Despite this, a political leader and MT from Khulna noted that while the MAF is not directly involved in resolving political conflict, it has created a platform where leaders of multiple parties can coexist to mitigate social and political issues through mutually agreed decisions (GI with MTs, Khulna).

### **Peace Facilitator Group (PFG)**

SPL provided support for upazila-level conflict and violence mitigation activities through a sub-award to THP. In each upazila, a PFG is formed with 30 members (Peace Ambassadors) from the different political parties and civil society groups, seven to 10 of whom are women. Peace Ambassador District Networks (PADNs) are district-level networks of Peace Ambassadors that meet regularly to exchange best practices and lessons learned from activities conducted by the PFGs, identify challenges and how to overcome them, and coordinate the PFGs' activities (SPL Year 5 Annual Report, SPL Year 6 Work Plan). As of March 2022, THP had administered PAVE to 27 PFGs to strengthen their capacity for creating a space for positive engagement in the socio-political culture at the upazila level through developing interpersonal relationships, support, and coordination.

More recently, PAVE Refresher Trainings have focused on providing an understanding of the PFG constitution, developed in Year 5; and democratic practices, election processes, and conflict resolution strategies to empower local leaders on peaceful coexistence and improve the capacity of PFGs to develop future action plans and resolve political conflict at the upazila level (SPL Year 6 Work Plan, p. 26).

Respondents mentioned that PFG is successful at bringing cross-party members under one umbrella (GI, THP Rajshahi). To achieve this, a THP field organizer sits separately with the different party leaders and persuades them to work together for peace building in their community.

THP conducts work to reduce corruption and improve the accountability of political leaders and government officers and motivates local leaders to sign a code of conduct committing them to peaceful elections and resolving conflict through mitigation (GI, PFG in Rajshahi), e.g., THP trained leaders to resolve political and social problems in the common interests of their community. According to THP's work plan, every year each PFG organizes six follow-up meetings and six peace events in each PFG upazila. All PFG members participate in these events.

Also, members follow democratic norms and procedures where every Peace Ambassador can participate in the discussions and decision-making processes. According to the THP field manager, training, motivation, and follow-up activities are the key factors in PFG's success (GI with PFG Peace Ambassadors).

*"PFG motivated political parties (Upzilla committee of BNP, AL, JP, and Workers Party of BD) to sign a code of conduct in 2018 in 12 Upzillas. The President and secretary from each party were present in the MOU [Memorandum of Understanding] signing ceremony. Again, in December 2022, a code of conduct was signed by the new leaders of AL, BNP, JP, and the Workers Party. Signatory parties maintained their commitment. The PFG inspired all the party members to work with the local government on political as well as social issues. This happened because of the PFG platform."* (GI with THP)

## Conclusions

The fellowship (YLFP and SLFP) and MT training programs (including ToT) were often mentioned by respondents as having increased party members' political knowledge and skills; however, Fellows and trainees also reported that they are not given much opportunity to apply their new knowledge and skills to party building.

Fellowship programs, study circles, and advocacy programs all contributed to raising the voice of youth and women's inclusion. Women Fellows became vocal for the implementation of a 33 percent women's quota, and some of them became aspirants for party nominations (primarily reserved seats). Although women's numbers in parliament and LG bodies have increased in quantitative terms, they are not adequately included in the decision-making bodies.

Respondents widely reported that the participation of youth is vital for changing the political landscape of Bangladesh. The SPL program encouraged youth to become more active and increased young party members' organizing and communication skills; however, they are not always promoted to party positions based on merit.

Overall, SPL has made a good effort on IR I (internal party democracy), but participatory changes to decision-making and nomination procedures are mainly limited to the local level. Party central leaders make the decisions and force the grassroots committees to implement them. Local-level leaders have little say in this regard. District committees of the AL, BNP, and JP parties are strictly controlled by their central committees due to the patron-client relationship—where district leaders' political careers are dependent on doing the bidding of their central committee patrons.

The MT training program has contributed to improving party members' training skills. Due to SPL and MT advocacy, the BNP was persuaded to reactivate their training cell, and JP created a new position of Campaign Affairs Secretary. The AL has their own training and research cell. MTs trained party members on electoral management, communication, and campaigning. Specifically, they trained the polling agents before the municipality and UP elections.

Fellowship programs and MAF contributed to creating good relationships among the Fellows. Post-fellowship events continue to strengthen these relationships. Cross-party interaction and relations also developed through YLFP, SLFP, and MAF. Overall, MAF has created the opportunity and political environment for cross-party interaction and cooperation. Members from opposing political parties have become used to working on social issues under a united umbrella. This was not the case prior to MAF. This interaction and cooperation also contributed directly to reducing political conflict at the local level. However, solving issues of political confrontation is still largely dependent on the parties' top leaders.

The PFG deals with political, religious, and ethnic conflicts at the upazila level. The big success of PFG is to bring cross-party members under one umbrella. By doing so, PFGs have facilitated multiparty engagement and encouraged party leaders to practice democratic norms and procedures across the parties at the sub-district level. Each PFG has 30 members. Most are local political leaders and public representatives, five to seven are women, and several are members of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). MAF and PFG both do interparty conflict mitigation work at the district and upazila levels, respectively; however, there is a lack of coordination on this work between MAF and PFG. Compared to the MAF members, PFG members are given less support by SPL. The THP staff opined that they are given less priority than MAF by the SPL program.

## **4.2 EQ2: HOW CAN ACTIVITIES LIKE SPL ENGAGE WOMEN AND YOUTH MORE EFFECTIVELY IN THE FUTURE?**

### **Introduction**

EQ2 focuses on SPL's major achievements with women and youth and how to build on these efforts in the future. The ET interviewed all respondent groups about this topic.

The history of youth participation in politics in Bangladesh can be traced back to the country's independence struggle. Young people played a significant role in the liberation movement of Bangladesh. The data released by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and reviewed by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies indicate that the current population of Bangladesh stands at 169.8 million, with 27.96 percent of them aged from 15 to 29 years.<sup>5</sup>

The digital literacy rate of youth in Bangladesh remains low, with only 15 percent of the youth population considered digitally literate.<sup>6</sup> Despite this, young people in Bangladesh are increasingly using digital platforms to participate in politics and advocate for social change. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the youth unemployment rate in Bangladesh in 2022 was 10.6 percent, which is more than twice the overall national unemployment rate of 4.2 percent.<sup>7</sup>

Today, opportunities for young people to get involved in the mainstream political process is challenged by sociocultural and institutional issues. The student wings of the parties are no longer the hub of change that they once were; the wings are marred by inter- and intra-party violence.

The Constitution of Bangladesh calls for equality of women in all spheres of life and ensures women's participation in national and local politics.<sup>8</sup> In the national parliament, 50 seats are reserved for women.<sup>9</sup> The latter are elected by the members of parliament based on proportional representation of the political

---

<sup>5</sup> Staff Reporter, "Youths account for 28pc of population" 10 April 2023. *The Daily Star* Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/youths-account-28pc-population-3293161> (accessed 14 April 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Md Farooque Hossain, "Digital literacy: whither is Bangladesh?" 27 September 2022. *Bdnews24.com* Cited in <https://bdnews24.com/opinion/comment/kuexj6ahg5> (accessed 14 April 2023).

<sup>7</sup> UNB, "ILO: Youth unemployment rate in Bangladesh stands at 10.6%," 11 August 2022. *Dhaka Tribune*. Cited in <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2022/08/11/iilo-youth-unemployment-rate-in-bangladesh-stands-at-106> (accessed 14 April 2023).

<sup>8</sup> Articles 9, 10, 27, 28 (1), 28 (2), 28 (3), 28 (4) and 65 (3) in the Constitution.

<sup>9</sup> For details see, Ahmed, N., & Hasan, S. (2018). Alangkar or Ahangkar? Reserved-seat women members in the Bangladesh parliament. *Women in Governing Institutions in South Asia: Parliament, Civil Service and Local Government*, 17–39.

parties in the parliament. Women can, however, directly contest the remaining 300 seats. Initiatives like quotas for women in LG,<sup>10</sup> the introduction of reserved seats for women in the national parliament, and the Representation of the People's Order (RPO) requiring 33 percent female representation on all political party committees have helped to set the stage for increased women's representation in politics.

Still, women remain underrepresented at every level: only 22 of the 300 elected seats in parliament are held by women, the ruling party only has 25 percent female representation on its central committee, and representation by women in grassroots committees across all parties is lower than 5 percent (SPL Year 4 Workplan, p. 29).

Consistent with USAID's CDCS, SPL has a strong focus on inclusion as reflected in the project's sub-IR I.1, *Strengthened inclusive and transparent decision-making practices within political parties*. SPL's cornerstone strategy—the Fellows' program—is designed to build the capacity of female and youth party members. Several additional programmatic strategies seek to provide opportunities for Fellows and other women and youth politicians to raise their voices and boost access to party networks, leadership positions, and voters. The project also seeks to raise awareness about equity issues among party leadership and the rank and file.

But women and youth in Bangladesh continue to face myriad social, economic, and institutional obstacles in the quest for political representation. Women confront patriarchal attitudes and behaviors from party leaders, family, and male peers. Quotas have increased representation; but because the reserved seats in parliament do not represent any constituencies, they are often perceived as ornamental. Party efforts to productively engage young people in shaping party platforms or by mentoring the next generation of leaders is uneven. Some observers suggest young people and youth platforms are being instrumentalized and converted to unproductive ways of problem solving, as the respondent quotes below illustrate:

*"Upper-level leaders often do not want to include women in district- or central-level meetings. They do not want to hear from the women members, and sometimes they are forced to stop talking. Many leaders (male) ignore women leaders." (FGD, MAF)*

*"As a woman, it is ... challenging to do politics at [the] grassroots level with no self-financing ... politics at the grassroots level is more violent and powered by money. Sometimes women are not treated fairly, and a qualified woman does not get equal value in the nomination procedure." (FGD, YLFP)*

*"There is no student politics today, no elections are held in the student councils. So, no student leadership is emerging. There is a crisis of new leadership, so hybrid leaders are emerging." (FGD, SLFP)*

Educated youth are skeptical of entering politics, and they find a shrinking space in civil society to promote issues like climate change, human rights, and social justice—about which they feel strongly. Others are just apathetic. Family members also have significant reservations. In SPL's 2020 opinion poll, most respondents (54 percent) believed that parents would not approve of their children's involvement in politics (SPL Year 4 Workplan, p. 33). Further, both women and youth have disproportionately unequal access to the financial resources and skills necessary to enter and pursue a political career.

## Findings

**Inclusion.** SPL's design addressed the contextual and the individual factors holding women back from full participation in the political process. Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of evaluation survey respondents say

---

<sup>10</sup> For details see, Asian Development Bank (ADB) (2004). *Legal and Institutional Reforms Essential for Inclusive Development*, news release, 4 May, Manila: Asian Development Bank.

that SPL has greatly increased the capacity of party members to advocate for more inclusive policies and practices within their parties. Male and female key informants referred to the RPO's 33 percent mandate repeatedly in their discussions of SPL inclusion initiatives. Planning workshops, training, and advocacy events mobilized women to push for meeting the quotas (SPL Year 6 Work Plan, p.17, 2023). Roadmaps for achieving the quota and party-specific task forces (which included central party leaders) were organized to monitor implementation of the roadmaps.

These efforts contributed to creating awareness about women's inclusion more broadly and instigated some momentum toward achieving the quota (*op.cit*, SPL Workplan Year 6, 2023). Female Fellows, who led advocacy efforts, built on the skills they were learning—which reportedly helped them be effective advocates, organizers, and speakers about the quota and other issues. Women joined together across party lines to petition the election commission for the inclusion of 33 percent women in the RPOs of political parties. Several BNP stakeholders noted that because of this advocacy, the party had instituted a mandate for an additional 10 to 15 percent female committee representation at all levels.<sup>11</sup> Representatives of other parties also noted increased attention to women's representation and the barriers women face.

*"Along with other women fellows, I have been advocating for their rights to the senior leaders in the district ... the situation has been changing gradually. The senior leaders are showing interest in women's leadership." (BNP)*

*"Compared to other parties, AL included more women in the committee. There are reserved seats for women in the union, upazila, and district councils. Women are competing for these seats. AL gave a very few women nominations for general seats because it requires money and supporters, which is not available with most of the women candidates." (AL)*

**Skills Development for Women and Youth.** This was widely appreciated by beneficiaries who said it contributed to their confidence, analytical ability, and capacity in the face of systems that still tend to marginalize them. Female and youth Fellows and female MTs talked about their enhanced ability to speak with party leadership, the media, and voters. Youth and female MTs particularly focused on campaigning skills—including communicating messages to voters, particularly swing voters. Several mentioned the benefits of the e-learning platforms. These skills have contributed to women's access to political participation and leadership effectiveness.

*"Women's involvement in the political parties is gradually increasing. Sixteen women members have undertaken capacity development training through [the] SPL study circle. Out of them, 6 women members have been working in the party actively. Others are facing challenges of social and family barriers as well as insecurity. Earlier, these problems were so aggravated that there was hardly a women leader [at] the grassroot[s] level. Continuous awareness building and capacity development initiatives [are] changing this situation. (Male AL member)*

**Knowledge.** Women appreciated what they learned about the party constitution and the constitution of the country through these programs—highlighting especially that they learned the art of being a "politician" through the SPL program. Study circles were created to enable female leaders to build their political knowledge and understanding of the current political environment and share their own political analysis with their fellow female leaders (SPL Year 4 Workplan, pp. 31–32). Women also mentioned learning to use smartphones to access information.

---

<sup>11</sup> The ET heard both 10 percent and 15 percent.

*“Before the SPL program, they (the women party members) did not know much about their rights and scope. The Fellowship has improved their speaking skills and political knowledge.” (YLFP)*

**Advocacy.** The MAF, study circles and women’s inclusion workshops offered women platforms for advocating on multiple social issues, which honed their speaking and analytical skills and contributed to their visibility (After-Action Review Report 2023, p. 1; After-Action Review Report 2021, p. 1). Many women talked of their aspiration to bring about qualitative change in the lives of people through politics and their desire to gain top leadership positions within their parties to carry on social welfare (*shomaj sheba*) activities more effectively. Female politicians may gain credibility with peers and voters as they communicate these culturally cherished social values, including values related to nonviolence that are currently under threat. These values appear to have informed and may have enabled the success of the MAFs. However, while providing a culturally acceptable framework for women in the political landscape, it may be that, in the longer term, this framing could also pigeonhole the issues women can tackle.

**Recognition by Central Party Leaders.** This is important for the rank-and-file and party leadership at the district level. According to many respondents, SPL training and certification is valued by party leaders (reportedly more so by BNP and JP leaders, and more so for male youth than women)—offering a level of recognition. Of the 489 Fellows who graduated during SPL, 105 (47 female and 58 male) were promoted to main party committees.<sup>12</sup>

*“Women’s participation has increased. SPL helped them build better relationships with seniors and improve their communication skills. Due to their involvement with the SPL program, they were able to establish a network of their own at the district and central levels. (Observer)*

But many women at the district level continue to feel sidelined by their parties. Female respondents spoke about the lack of confidence they feel senior leadership has in their capabilities and skills. Though they have learned to speak with senior and central-level leaders, and SPL has provided opportunities for them to do so, so they feel they cannot fully contribute or be heard.

The evaluation suggests that recognition and opportunities for upward movement in political parties may be different for women and youth (particularly male youth).

*There’s been a change in the political landscape. [Sixty-five] (65) % of the population is below age 30, and they have more information than people at the top. They’re listening [to] everything like debate podcasts, and this is a change in Bangladesh. I like this group because they are friends with information, and that is why bottom-up communication is needed for decision-making at the central level. The need [for improved bottom-up information flow] is clear; it’s DI’s job to figure out how to do it. DI can develop the tools, workplan and mechanism.” (BNP)*

**Networks.** The MAF, study circles, and joint advocacy events offered women opportunities for constructive networking across parties. During COVID, SPL facilitated online discussions with women leaders about the impacts of the pandemic on women and promoted advocacy for women’s inclusion in decision-making around responses to the pandemic at the district and national levels (SPL Year 4 Workplan, pp. 31–32).

Although female Fellows valued the networks that SPL enabled for them within their parties and with members of other parties, they lamented the lack of contact they had with central-level women from their own party. Female district politicians recognize that many women at the central party levels are selected,

---

<sup>12</sup> Source: DI, Key SPL Data Master File, undated. Although this is impressive, representing 22 percent of all Fellows who graduated, without comparison data it is difficult to assess to what extent these promotions can be attributed to SPL.

not elected; and that selection can be based on family connections, nepotism, returns for favors, and so on. The evaluation did not explore this issue with women at the central level; but given the consensus that party decision-making is highly centralized and patriarchal, it is possible that such networking would be discouraged by senior party leadership. What is clear from the data is that the glass ceiling for women is still thick, irrespective of party or place and women's efforts; and struggles on behalf of the party are not perceived as reciprocal.

*"As a woman leader, I will fight for reserved seats in the upcoming parliament. I will go to our party chief and try to convince her. If I get it, then I'll run for the general seat next time. Actually, it is very hard to get nominations for the general seats. Because men are more actively engaged in politics than we are, they have money, too." (AL)*

*"They do advocacy at their own local level for their party, but nobody advocates for them. They never go to central programs because no one enquires about them, and they are not given much respect. As women, they have to prove their worth at every step." (Observer)*

**Profile and voice with voters.** Youth and women who participated in SPL programs particularly appreciated the campaigning skills they acquired from SPL training programs. In addition to organizing and public speaking, women mentioned their advantage of being able to access private spaces and reaching out to the female voters more easily than their male peers or competitors.

*"For me, the most useful part was the learnings on election campaign management, the methods of organizing election, doing research before any activity plan, e.g., lessons from the politics of other countries, internal conflict management, importance of and ideas on fundraising." (FGD, YLFP)*

SPL also involved journalists covering women's issues, and it continues to promote its success stories via its Facebook pages and YouTube channels to raise awareness of the importance of women's political empowerment (SPL Work plan Year 5, 2021, pp. 22–23). The women appreciated learning how to hold a microphone when speaking to crowds or the media. Skill with the media, and particularly TV, offered women and youth a national profile—many for the first time.

*"Women leaders participated in the 'Kotha Hoke' talk show [and] raised their voice[s] for nomination in the general seats in the last general elections ... one got nomination for the parliamentary election.... A women student leader from the DUCSU (Dhaka University Central Students' Union) increased her voters due to her participation in the RTV talk show. Young BNP women leaders ... got visibility through the RTV program; they were also young fellows. They are now raising their voices." (Media representative)*

SPL has also developed multiple web-based platforms for engaging youth in politics in relatable ways (After-Action Review Report 2023, p. 19). The Activity has supported the student wings of partner political parties to train new members using digital training platforms (SPL Year 4 Workplan, p. 34).

## Conclusions

The objective of women's inclusion in politics and the mainstreaming of women in politics is itself a step toward the larger objective of social change and the strengthening of the democratic political landscape. And given Bangladesh's demographics, it is essential that parties engage with youth. Not only are they the future leaders, but they bring 21st-century skills and perspectives that are essential for the country's ambitions in the global community. Policy requirements for gender equity are in place. The SPL Activity has opened gateways of opportunities for women and youth to advance as politicians, and it has given

them the skills and knowledge to contribute to positive change in their parties and across parties. Legal requirements for women's inclusion are in place.

Barriers to advancement and effectiveness are the party structures and decision-making process (which is highly centralized), familiocracy, and access to financing. Beneficiaries calling for scale seem to recognize that the momentum for positive inclusion is there, but it will require many more capacitated members to realize the goal. Numbers only tell part of the story of change, however; and changes in attitudes and practices are important, integrally related measures of progress.

### **4.3 EQ3: HOW EFFICIENT IS THE SPL ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION WITH PLANNING, ORGANIZATION, RESOURCE MOBILIZATION, AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT?**

EQ3 explores 1) how SPL has planned and managed resources to meet the Activity objectives and 2) lessons about effective planning and adaptation. DI; THP; USAID; the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO); and other knowledgeable experts were key respondents for this question. Political parties were not directly asked this EQ but offered insights on SPL training locations and staff.

#### **Findings**

**Planning and Adaptive Management.** SPL conducts periodic Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) exercises such as After-Action Reviews (AARs), district-wise coordination meetings, and pause-and-reflect sessions to assess learning and inform programming adjustments. For example, in response to participant feedback, DI adjusted the format of women's Study Circles from being online to in-person with more emphasis on public speaking and advocacy skills. This resulted in increased participation and more opportunity for cross-party interaction and collaboration.<sup>13</sup>

DI staff appreciated that they have regular opportunities to share their programming ideas with the management team. Some regional staff said they would like more opportunities to design programming regionally to reflect the local context. The needs, opportunities, and political landscape differ by location.

CLA efforts are evident in some project documents. The Year 4 Annual Report contains CLA information, while the Year 5 Report does not. The Year 6 Work Plan again emphasizes CLA, including plans to conduct (applied) political economy analyses and opportunity-and-risk analyses, develop a political space monitoring tool, and leverage social and behavioral science insights to optimize women's inclusion. At least one internal PEA was completed in Year 6; however, the extent to which DI has internal analytical capacity or has embedded PEA methodology in its approach (as recommended in the 2020 PEA, 2022 PEA, and by knowledgeable experts during this evaluation) is not clear.

It is also unclear whether DI has in-house expertise to measure behavioral changes among party members or attribute improvements in political landscape to DI. For example, women's inclusion is increasing, but it is less evident whether *attitudes* about women's inclusion or how women leaders are *treated* have changed. These outcome-level changes are to be expected after more than a decade of USAID and FCDO investment in Bangladesh. At the time of this writing, the Year 6 Annual Report and Year 7 Work Plan were not available.

SPL donors expressed a strong interest in being more involved in key SPL learning events and more SPL documentation of learning. The Year 6 Work Plan spells out DI's plans for CLA coordination meetings with USAID and FCDO. In addition, SPL has a Learning Agenda (LA) that includes short- and long-term, Performance Management Plan (PMP), COVID-19 and self-reliance questions. The LA is part of the May 2022 Activity MEL Plan. Reporting requirements for the LA are not evident from the available documentation. It does not seem that DI systematically or comprehensively reports on the LA.

---

<sup>13</sup> SPL AAR Report, January 2023, p. 3.

**Examples of Adaptations.** Two significant adaptations that DI staff talked about were (1) the formation of MAFs to formalize the assignments that Fellows undertake in their communities and (2) SPL support to party units to develop two-year strategic plans. Both are also important sustainability measures. THP staff talked about involving youth and senior party leaders in PFGs and forming a PFG policy and PADN as important adaptations. (The policy is expected to be implemented in Year 7.) COVID-19 also drove key Activity adaptations: DI developed a COVID-19 Digital Guide for Leaders and adapted most of its activities for online implementation. SPL and USAID’s Agreement Officer’s Representative, Lubain Masum were recognized for their efforts:

*Citation: “For Outstanding Contribution in Facilitating Democracy International’s Transition from In-Person Activity Meetings and Training Sessions to Digital Online Platforms during the COVID-19 Pandemic from April 1, 2020, to October 30, 2020.”*

**Training Locations.** Due to COVID-19—and as a sustainability measure, most SPL training activities have shifted online. Political parties desire more in-person training, however—especially for topics like election campaigning. Some also suggested holding trainings outside the office setting and making them more interactive and participatory. DI, MTs, and other knowledgeable experts agreed that in-person training is more interactive, focused, and motivational; and yields better results than online training. (Some MTs also noted that lunch, snacks, and conveyance incentivize party members to participate in training sessions.)

DI staff, political parties, and other knowledgeable experts also recommended conducting training and fellowship activities at the district and regional levels rather than Dhaka to reduce costs, extend training duration, and increase attendance. Some respondents added that participants are more comfortable in their local environment and that local senior leaders are more likely to attend the local events than central-level events. One suggestion for online training was a workshop with young political leaders around the world to discuss what motivates them.

**Activity Staffing and Partner Coordination.** Political parties, USAID, and other knowledgeable experts were highly complementary of DI. DI access, contacts, and trust from political parties has been a major factor for SPL’s success. (See elaboration under EQ4.) Some respondents also credited USAID’s involvement with key political leaders and diplomatic backing as factors for success. DI’s regional staff reported good internal communications, organization, and information flow with the Dhaka office. District-based party members requested more SPL presence in the districts and more timely communications with SPL. Likewise, some DI regional offices felt that DI should do more to engage district and divisional party leaders in planning—and lamented that they do not have enough staff to effectively cover the region and that this can affect QA. As noted above, DI may need to build up in-house PEA and change management capacity to inform ongoing learning and adaptation and better assess SPL’s contributions to outcome-level changes.

To maximize resources, several respondents called for deepening coordination between SPL and other donor programming with common stakeholders and goals, including the civil society support project Promoting Advocacy and Rights (PAR), which aims to strengthen the enabling environment for 1) sustained CSOs advancing democratic governance and citizen participation, and 2) the new election support project (e.g., related to electoral integrity, mitigating electoral violence, and engaging youth in positive politics), as well as other youth-related efforts. USAID and THP also called for stronger coordination and sharing of successes between DI and THP. DI recognized this in its Year 6 Report and its 2023 AAR report, e.g., calling for PADNs and MAFs to work together in the short term to develop a shared vision and understanding of how democracy should function in their respective communities and set the stage for collective action.<sup>14</sup>

DI-THP coordination efforts vary by district. For example, respondents in Rajshahi said the two partners hold quarterly meetings. The dynamics seem to be complicated by the fact that THP’s and many PFGs’

---

<sup>14</sup> SPL AAR Report, January 2023, p. 23.

governance and peace-building activities predate SPL. THP noted a desire for PFGs to operate as an independent organization. The enhanced coordination efforts may be reflected in future SPL reporting on cross-party consensus-building forums and training on conflict mediation and consensus-building processes,<sup>15</sup> both of which waned during COVID-19.

## Conclusions

CLA takes time. SPL has some strong CLA practices and tools in place; staff and stakeholder ideas inform Activity design and implementation. E-learning was a key innovation that allows low-cost and broad access to training. However, virtual training is not a substitute for in-person training in all cases; election campaigning and women’s study circles are at least two examples that demand in-person training.

DI is widely respected and trusted. However, the current staffing structure may not be adequate to meet demands for programming that is more tailored to the local context and more district-based events. Having small regional teams limits the possibility for QA of local activities and the efficiency of coordination with local party units. Resource mobilization will be an important consideration for the next phase of programming; it is unclear how quickly staffing could be scaled up while maintaining quality standards and the trusted relationships that have been central to SPL’s success.

DI does not seem to be using the full suite of CLA tools or meeting the CLA vision laid out in recent project documents. Regular applied political economy analyses are needed to examine the power dynamics and economic and social forces that affect development; and social and behavioral science insights to inform ongoing learning and adaptation and better assess SPL contributions to outcome-level changes. Donors can be invited to participate in key learning events and should require reporting on key learning questions. Donors can incentivize CLA by sending the clear message that identifying challenges, piloting new ideas, and adjusting programming when needed are desired. They should require reporting on key learning questions and approve MEL Plans in a reasonable timeframe.

There are opportunities for SPL to deepen coordination and build synergies with other donor programming. Likewise, DI and THP are striving for better coordination. There are signals that this could improve in Year 7—based on the learning and adaptations that have taken place; however, coordination is still likely to vary by district.

## 4.4 EQ4: TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE ACTIVITY’S OBJECTIVES STILL RELEVANT TO THE CURRENT DEVELOPMENT CIRCUMSTANCES IN BANGLADESH?

### Introduction

EQ4 explored stakeholder views of the relevance of SPL in the current political landscape—particularly in the lead-up to the 2024 elections and windows of opportunity to build on these efforts in the future. All respondent groups shared their views on this topic.

The evaluation finds that the focus of SPL remains highly relevant in Bangladesh. Most (77 percent) of survey respondents say that SPL remains relevant in the current political context, with no discernable difference among the parties. Women were somewhat more likely to find SPL “very relevant” than men (82 percent vs. 73 percent)—likely because of the opportunities it opens for them. MTs were most enthusiastic (84 percent). Multiple observers note that no other organization is filling the vital niche that this activity fills in building political party capacity and productive interparty relationships—both essential for a stable, vibrant democracy. Indeed, 57 percent of direct beneficiaries surveyed say SPL has contributed *a lot* to the political climate (36 percent say somewhat). (Women are more positive [62 percent] than men [54 percent]).

---

<sup>15</sup> These two performance indicators include THP activities: (1) 2.1.1: Number of consensus-building forums (multi-party, civil/security sector and civil/political) held with USG assistance [F indicator DR 3.1-3] and (2) 2.2.2: Number of groups trained in conflict mediation/resolution skills or consensus-building techniques with USG assistance [F indicator DR 3.1-2].

The goals of SPL require a long-time horizon, and current events suggest that Bangladesh is at a tipping point—which raises the stakes and relevance of this type of programming. DI’s efforts over a 12-year period with its work on DPR and SPL (SPL MEL Plan—updated September 2022, p. 4) have established the organization as a trusted interlocutor. It is thus difficult to separate the Activity from the implementer.

This section considers the relevance of the project in terms of its TOC and then examines the ongoing relevance of the two projects’ intermediate results. It concludes with a look at the role of the implementing agency. Insights are based on Activity reports, feedback from direct beneficiaries of the project, and several observers with knowledge of the Activity. What other stakeholders—particularly senior party leadership at the central and district levels who have not interacted with the project—think about impact and potential future relevance is not known.

**Theory of Change (TOC).** Putting aside the reference to “politically active citizens,”<sup>16</sup> which appears to have taken a less important role at USAID’s request over the course of the project, the causal linkage assumptions in SPL’s TOC remains relevant, even imperative, in today’s Bangladesh.

The project Results Framework (RF) (see Annex 3) includes several critical assumptions that appear to be as relevant today as they were when the RF was last updated (2021). These include assumptions about continued party cooperation with DI and USAID and the absence of a natural disaster or terrorist incident that would disrupt programming. Two critical assumptions were removed in 2021 to reflect the unstable political situation following the 2018 elections and the narrowing space for civic participation.

SPL’s Theory of Change
<i>IF</i> political party activists and politically active citizens develop the skills and knowledge to be effective leaders and advocate for more inclusive policies and practices within their parties; and
<i>IF</i> the skills of political party activists and politically active citizens to engage constructively to mitigate conflict are increased;
<i>THEN</i> institutional capacity and practices of political parties will be strengthened in Bangladesh; and politics in Bangladesh will be more inclusive, responsive, and peaceful.

Testimonials from direct beneficiaries suggest that at the district level, where the Activity has focused, individual capacity-building and stakeholder engagement have strengthened democratic principles: more inclusive policies and practices, more constructive dialogue about issues that affect people’s lives, and peaceful approaches to conflict resolution. And, as noted elsewhere, there is evidence that institutional capacity is being built incrementally in SPL districts.

*“There are changes in party decision-making ... it is now done formally [at the district level]. They are issuing notices before decision-making meetings.” (BNP)*

Here are a few examples where change has trickled up to the national level, e.g., BNP instituting a mandate for adding greater female representation on party committees; the establishment of a training unit (BNP); and an emerging commitment to strategic planning at many levels within JP (SPL Year 3 Annual Report, p. 4). Respondents (both BNP and JP) strongly felt that the above measures would result in the strengthening of democratic practices within the parties. The training unit will help the party workers to be more effective; it was felt that while there were institutes for people with different professions there was no such institution in the country which teaches one to be a politician or how to engage in politics. The Strategic Plan was viewed positively by the JP respondents as it was seen to provide them with a vision for the future (FGD, SLFP Dhaka, 9.3.2023; and KII, JP Dhaka, 7.3.2023).

<sup>16</sup> The ET felt that the term “politically active citizens” is a problematic one in the Bangladesh context. There are civil society members who comment on political issues in the media but do not necessarily see themselves as politically active; the DI, however, is of the view that politically active citizens and civil society are synonymous.

Ultimately, realization of the TOC rests on an assumption that investment in a small number of individuals will pay broader party-wide dividends in the longer term as these individuals take on leadership roles in their parties and the impacts of the program ripple out. There is a chorus of direct beneficiaries encouraging the project to continue and scale.

*“SPL is not that popular and widespread yet. We know about it because we were involved directly. But SPL can work for positive change.... No change comes overnight. Change comes slowly. SPL also has a long-term plan to build a strengthened political landscape. (AL)*

*‘Every activity of SPL is very important and effective; the only shortcoming is that ... few politicians ... participate in these activities. It requires a large number of skilled politicians to bring a positive change in politics.’ (AL)*

On the other hand, perspectives from outside experts familiar with SPL suggest that the Activity may have demonstrated its relevance and validated the TOC—and that scaling it to more districts is not necessarily the next step.

*“The idea of SPL was to see if structural change is possible, not expansion to all districts. Working at [the] grassroots [level] is easy compared to bringing changes at the central level. If there is no linkage with central-level decision makers, nothing will change. So, DI can set some criteria and exercise strategic choice [in choosing] districts.” (Expert observer)*

The latter part of this perspective is consistent with other stakeholder views, as noted below.

*SPL’s role in the political landscape. In a development landscape that is characterized by short-cycle support, SPL is recognized for filling a critical niche. Meaningful reform is a long-term endeavor.*

*“In our country, there is no formal institution for political education. We learn politics from the senior leaders. Due to SPL, youth, and women ... learn about politics and develop their political skills. Political parties themselves should adopt a similar political education program for their members.” (AL)*

*“SPL has given the platform to build a strong and qualified leader for future from the district level.” (AL)*

*“Politics is itself a very big area. But SPL can do the base of the institutional building. SPL can work to bring a culture of democracy.” (AL)*

In addition to strengthening the capacity of individual political parties, respondents particularly appreciated the safe spaces that SPL has created for representatives from deeply polarized parties to build tolerance, collaboration, and trust. The unique, neutral convening role that the project plays—even if just at the district level to address community priorities—cannot be overrated. These inspire a modicum of hope about what might be possible more broadly.

The programmatic continuity over a decade and a half appears to have paid off in the traction that multiple cycles of programming have built for demand, credibility, and local-level impact, even though some stormy national times.

*"I did not find another alternative [to] SPL, which is contributing significantly in managing the current volatile political environment." (AL)*

*"DI can keep continuing working with more senior leaders, especially the government leaders. If DI takes initiative with the government to negotiate with the BNP, we will appreciate their initiatives. We are also hoping for something like that. We have confidence in DI." (BNP)*

But there also are skeptics who believe that an externally supported development project has little chance of impact in the current contentious environment. Specifically, some district-level respondents and expert observers view the options for SPL to impact central leadership in a highly centralized system as limited. Global geopolitical considerations are also on respondents' minds. The United States (U.S.) is one of the largest markets for the Bangladesh garments industry, and it is feared that sanctions by the U.S. have the potential of harming the Bangladeshi economy.

*"Senior leaders don't take into account what the SPL says or preaches, so it does not have any impact. Besides, there is [a] lack of trust as it is a foreign organization." (AL)*

*Working at [the] grassroots [level] is easy compared to bringing [about] changes at the central level. If there is no linkage with central level decision makers, nothing will change." (Observer)*

*"We hope that the work of DI [will] continue to solve the current political crisis in Bangladesh. But I doubt that. The problem is that the present government is not pleased with the foreigners who are trying to establish democracy here and make the election neutral and fair." (JP)*

**Democracy International (DI).** After 12 years of working in the democracy space, DI is a trusted, neutral interlocutor. Evaluation respondents referred to DI as "responsible," "respected," "fair," "polite," and "sincere." Keeping in mind that the respondents were largely direct beneficiaries of the project, these comments are nonetheless a significant testimony to DI's standing in the political landscape. DI has managed to retain a principled posture—maintaining the trust of a diversity of stakeholders, even in a politically polarized environment.

*"DI is the only organization that is neutral and brought BNP and AL together around one table. No other organization in Bangladesh can do that. It's a very big responsibility ... Everyone respects only DI.... It's not possible for any other program [to do what DI is doing]." (BNP)*

This has not always come easy, however, and comments suggest that the parties have watched closely.

*"There was a time when DI gave a negative impression.... But later, DI changed the situation by giving AL a platform to join DI's activities and discard Jamat e Islami. These are positive things about DI.... We want to look forward and [we] want the U.S. beside us with positive things." (AL)*

**IR 1, continued relevance.** SPL's IR 1: "Political party activists and politically active citizens have the skills and knowledge to be effective leaders and advocate for more inclusive policies and practices within the party" continues to have currency with observers and stakeholders. The building blocks reflected in the sub-IRs also remain relevant as reflected in priorities expressed by party stakeholders: 1) inclusive and transparent decision-making practices; 2) evidence-based policy, reflecting views of all levels of party membership; and 3) capacity and leadership of party members at all levels.

Beneficiary testimonials suggest that SPL generated a *demand* for support that party stakeholders value now, and realize they may not have recognized they needed, before.

*In our country, there is no formal institution for political education. We learn politics from the senior leaders. Due to SPL, youth and women ... learn about politics and develop their political skills. Political parties themselves should adopt a similar political education program for their members.” (AL)*

*“SPL has created a demand for training in the political parties.” (AL)*

Democratic principles are being adopted in internal party approaches because of SPL interventions. These are seen to be changing the political culture, at least in some of the intervention districts. These gains have been incremental and local.

Some are more skeptical.

*“DI activities have a limited impact on reducing internal party conflict. We learned about conflict mitigation but have little scope to apply those.” (JP)*

And, echoing many others, one Fellow suggested that the project needs a stronger national dimension.

**IR2, continued relevance.** SPL’s IR 2: “Increased skills of political party activists and politically active citizens to engage constructively to mitigate conflict” remains at the heart of the political landscape in Bangladesh. As noted elsewhere, SPL has established several neutral platforms that have successfully promoted productive dialogue among parties. The YLFP, SLFP, MT, MAF, PFG, and other activities of SPL have contributed to tolerance and respect among participants. Some respondents pointed out that, earlier, they used to think only about their own parties—but through the trainings, they learned to see the limitations of their own parties as well; to be tolerant of others’ views—and, most importantly, to be listeners.

*“Political leaders need training to learn good political culture.... Training is important for changing the mindset about conflict as well; they come to understand that opposition is not the enemy.... I have developed an attitude toward evaluating the leaders of other parties ... [E]arlier, power (the capacity to create and control violence) was given more importance than leadership ability. Although ‘muscle power’ is still important, political knowledge and the ability to influence the public are also considered for positions on the party committee.” (BNP)*

*“The platform of YLFP and SLFP allowed me to be connected with other party members.” (AL)*

*“SPL brought multi[ple] parties to the table. This is historic in Bangladesh.” (FGD, YLFP)*

*“Earlier I was not interested to listen to the opposite party member, but now I realize that I will benefit if I listen to the opposition regularly.” (BNP)*

Some ripple effects to broader party dynamics were also reported.

*“If we want to change the political climate positive[ly], young and senior fellows must be connected with centrally influential leaders so that they can convey their message directly to them.” (AL)*

As reported under EQ1 and EQ2, an important takeaway that was repeated by many stakeholders was the revelation that conflict is inevitable and even useful in politics if it is dealt with constructively.

*“I observed some changes at the local level. The senior local leaders like to discuss with the SPL fellows and the trained members of their parties before [ma]king any decision. Also, the SPL trained party members are showing more tolerance during [the] decision-making stage.” (BNP)*

*“DI taught us to see conflict as a positive matter. Now we know from DI that conflict doesn’t always mean negativity; conflict can be positive.” (FGD, YLFP)*

There was a strong recommendation by a number of respondents to scale up cross-party political initiatives and engage central leaders in this effort. Respondents came back to that point repeatedly.

## Conclusions

*“SPL programs supported [us] a lot in building relationship[s] between grassroots-level workers and upazila/district-level leaders, but they did not work much in building relationship[s] with the central leaders. Due to this gap, they cannot utilize their full skills learned from the SPL programs.” (BNP)*

*“If we want to change the political climate positively, young and senior fellows must be connected with centrally influential leaders so that they can convey their message directly to them.” (AL)*

*“There were always intra- and inter-party conflicts in the political parties ...The senior leadership of each party is giving space to the SPL fellows for working jointly with the oppo[sing] party fellows, which was very difficult earlier.... However... they could not do much in inter-party conflict mitigation due to [a] lack of support from senior leadership in the party.” (BNP)*

SPL is filling a critical gap in capacity building within political parties and creating safe spaces for interparty dialogue. It remains highly relevant in the current context. Whether every strategy it has adopted is equally relevant and impactful is an open question. To understand what works and, indeed, to validate the TOC, a more robust project-based PEA and MEL system that captures organizational change and establishes clear attribution links is needed.

SPL has generated greater demand and interest in training and associated capacity building of political parties. The need is significantly greater than what SPL is now delivering, and the time horizon for effecting genuine systems change will require multiple project cycles. Despite project efforts to garner party commitment to support and underwrite training, advocacy, and other capacity building efforts, it is not clear whether parties or any other agency would carry these efforts forward in the absence of a development program like SPL.

Considering what is at stake, the political capital that the project and IP have built, and the absence of other agencies—domestic or international—working in this space, the Activity remains relevant and, arguably essential in its focus.

### **4.5 EQ5: HOW CAN ACTIVITIES LIKE SPL SUPPORT POLITICAL PARTIES TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE AND PEACEFUL LEADERS IN ACCORDANCE WITH USAID’S POLITICAL PARTY ASSISTANCE POLICY?**

EQ5 focuses on USAID/Bangladesh support to political parties per USAID’s Political Party Assistance Policy (PPAP). Key respondents for this question were donors, implementers, and political party analysts. The analysis includes a review of key literature.

## Findings

**PPAP Overview.** The goal of USAID’s political party assistance is to develop and consolidate representative democracies with multi-party systems.<sup>17</sup> The PPAP is governed by the principles that USAID programs: (1) support representative, multiparty systems and (2) do not seek to determine election outcomes. USAID/Bangladesh was involved in the update to the Policy in 2021. The Policy contains guidelines and implementation guidance, including how to determine if a political party is “democratic” and “significant,” and standards that must be met if requesting a waiver to the Policy. The PPAP prohibits assistance to non-democratic parties, such as those who use violence as a tool to obtain or hold power, but communication and engagement with these parties is permitted.

As a best practice, the Policy recommends Missions to build in an annual review to determine if there has been any change in parties that are deemed democratic or significant and encourages missions to consult with implementing partners and the Embassy to inform their decisions on party selection. Jamaat e Islami, which was de-registered in 2013, is not eligible for USAID assistance. USAID/Bangladesh has not reviewed political party compliance with PPAP or requested a waiver to work with a political party or coalition under SPL.

**Existing Analysis.** The 2016 solicitation for SPL describes significant backsliding in the progress toward a competitive democratic political system. It highlights undemocratic practices (such as limited space for grassroots leaders to participate in policy discussions, sidelining of women, under-utilization of youth party members, and highly centralized and dynastic political party mechanisms) and the use of violence by all political parties to achieve political ends. It points out that, “Any meaningful reform will need to be a long-term investment that gradually and progressively develops skilled democratic leaders and introduces practices to make political parties more inclusive and able to mitigate political violence—changing the status quo on how politics is currently practiced in Bangladesh.”<sup>18</sup> DI’s 2020 PEA again describes political parties as undemocratic (for example, dynastic leadership as the norm and promotions within the parties not necessarily based on merit or internal democratic support) and the use of violence at the intra- and interparty levels as an ongoing problem. The 2022 PEA did not find evidence to contrast these earlier findings.

**Respondent Views.** As described earlier in this report, the needs and stakeholder demand for political party assistance are vast. Many respondents emphasized that withdrawing assistance would leave a vacuum and remove pressure on political parties to become more internally democratic and undercut the momentum for interparty cohesion and tolerance that has been built. There is a strong instinct by many stakeholders to expand support to meet the needs—such as working in more districts, intensifying work at the upazilla and central levels, and broadening target participants to include smaller parties, coalitions, and community influencers, such as religious groups. At the same time, there are important questions about what types of changes are realistic and in what timeframe, and what the best donor investments are considering the political economy, buy-in from decision makers, achievements to date, and the PPAP.

Only a few evaluation respondents were familiar with the PPAP. Some analysts who described major political parties as undemocratic recommended that donors provide more targeted support (e.g., to enhance the political leadership capacity of youth and women) rather than a broad portfolio of political party assistance—or shift resources to other types of programming such as civil society support, broad youth empowerment, or freedom of speech if those efforts seem likely to create lasting change. Some also cautioned that western democracies do not enjoy the moral authority or leverage they once did to exert pressure on political parties; while SPL is a positive brand, there is an appreciation that there are factors beyond an implementer’s control or influence.

---

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.usaid.gov/policy/political-party-assistance>.

<sup>18</sup> RFA-388-16-000008 Strengthening Political Landscape (SPL) in Bangladesh, p. 6.

## Conclusions

There is strong stakeholder demand to extend political party assistance to more locations and more people. There are also arguments for narrowing assistance to focus on select issues or populations that show promise for lasting change—or shifting resources away from political party support to other types of programming.

Reviewing SPL compliance with the PPAP will be an important step for planning future programming. The Mission can engage outside experts if needed to support this effort. Beyond compliance with the Policy, USAID needs to carefully consider the fundamental vision for future political party assistance. This should reflect the political economy, achievements to date, where there is potential for the greatest traction, stakeholder buy-in, and a balance between demand and supply-driven support. Donors need to be willing to pause assistance if it is not yielding the desired outcomes.

### 4.6 EQ6: SUSTAINABILITY: WHAT MEASURES SHOULD BE TAKEN TO PROMOTE THE SUSTAINABILITY OF ACTIVITY ACHIEVEMENTS?

EQ6 explores stakeholder views of the sustainability of SPL achievements, what type of resources political parties are investing in to sustain positive effects and provides recommendations as to what SPL can do to promote sustainability.

#### Findings

**Planning for Sustainability.** SPL is taking several steps to promote sustainability, including supporting the development of two-year strategic plans for political party units; gradually handing over responsibility for organizing and delivering training to MTs; promoting the e-learning “Politics Matters” website; encouraging MAFs and PFGs to continue low-cost efforts for peace building; and signing Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with political parties to support sustainability initiatives, such as establishing their own training cells. All these steps are critical for sustaining SPL’s achievements and furthering USAID’s plans to slowly shift from technical assistance to policy assistance to build country management capacity (CDCS 2020–2025, p. 1).

DI is actively supporting the three political parties’ (AL, BNP, JP) district-level Strategic Planning Workshops (SPWs). These are conducted in the presence of senior party leaders, some of whom have chair the workshops or participate in them as special guests. The SPWs focus on four core areas: (1) institutionalizing training, (2) women’s inclusion, (3) conflict mitigation, and (4) effective constituent outreach. In these workshops, the parties develop a comprehensive strategic plan and a two-year action plan. As of December 2022, SPL had conducted 35 SPWs with district committees and prepared six- to 12-page booklets in Bangla for grassroots party units containing the Two-Year Strategic and Action Plans derived from the groupwork findings (SPL Annual Report, Year 5).

As reported in EQ1, as of March 2022, DI had developed 428 MTs in the three political parties, 195 (46 percent) of whom are active (SPL Data Master File). This high rate of attrition is of concern for the sustainability of MTs and is likely caused by several factors—including the difficulty that some MTs are having raising funds for training events. Female MTs reportedly struggle more to mobilize funds than male MTs. While the ET does not have data to substantiate this funding issue as a root cause of MT attrition, it is important to note that to encourage sustainability, DI has been phasing out its financial support for training over the last two years and is only providing logistics support to the MTs conducting political party training.

*“The number of MT[s] is also very poor. At least 10 MTs in each district could be developed to bring sustainable change in the political parties.”*  
(GI participant)

Compounding the funding issue, parties do not appear to have dedicated training budgets and appear to raise funds for each training Activity separately (GI, DI Dhaka). One MT interviewee stated that the party does not have any budget to carry out SPL trainings and is struggling to arrange funding to carry out

training programs for party members and women’s study circles (GI, MT Khulna). The same respondent mentioned that the e-learning platform “Politics Matters”—a self-paced, self-driven, training curriculum—may also be contributing to MT attrition.

As reported under EQ1, a MT in Khulna asserted that senior party leaders’ perception of training has changed, and the training requirement has been raised at all levels (GI, MT Khulna). A BNP MT from Dhaka said that he had persuaded their central leaders to activate the training cell of the party. They also decided that MTs who received training from DI would operate the training cell (GI, MT Dhaka).

*“Knowledge of our constitution, conflict resolution, campaign management, etc., that we have learned through SPL trainings will remain with us, and we will utilize them in our personal and in our parties’ activities.” (GI participant)*

This bodes well for the sustainability of training within the parties. A respondent in Khulna said that the learning from SPL and the relationship developed with all the party leaders through SPL will be sustainable (KII, AL Khulna). However, several respondents mentioned the need to engage central leaders more in the SPL program to ensure that its benefits are recognized and sustained beyond the life of the program (GI, USAID; KII, BNP Dhaka).

DI’s After-Action Review Report 2023 (p. 10) and this evaluation indicate that MAF is an effective and sustainable platform to continue SPL activities after the SPL project ends. DI is gradually phasing out support to MAFs. In alignment with SPL’s decision, a Baguna MAF participant mentioned that they are working on preparing future activities without SPL support. They are collecting subscription fees from the members to meet operational costs; and they have their own office, constitution, and bank account. The Chattogram MAF has been using the DI office for meetings but said they plan to conduct some meetings outside the DI office.

*“We want to make MAF stronger and more active. For sustainability, every member deposits 50 taka monthly to the common fund. Though it is not enough, it create[s] a sense of ownership.” (Participant in MAF FGD)*

Yet despite these local efforts to separate from SPL support, the political parties are requesting that SPL support remain in place to extend MAF activities to the upazila level (FGD, MAF Rajshahi). The General Secretary of the Barguna MAF said, “We have created this forum. We do not want it to break down due to a funding crisis, so we have started making small personal investments. These small investments will bring ownership of this forum among its members on the one hand and create capital for investment on the other. Thus, all members of the forum can visualize the prospect of MAF” (FGD, MAF Barishal).

The THP’s GI respondents identified PFGs as viable platforms beyond SPL. PFG volunteers have resolved issues of conflict in their localities and persuaded party leaders to sign a code of conduct in 2018 and 2022 for sustaining peace in local politics. According to a Rajshahi PFG member, the UP chairman often called PFG members to join local dispute resolution meetings and asked for their opinion in forming committees (GI, PFG Rajshahi). As reported under EQ3, there was a recent decision to establish a PFG policy. Every year they organize follow-up PFG meetings and peace events. Through peace events and meetings, PFG encourages party leaders to practice democratic norms in the party, i.e., form party committees.

During COVID-19, SPL introduced an e-learning platform for virtual learning. The e-learning platform is hosted on two websites, “Politics Matters” and “Karon Bangladesh Amar.” The platform has social media extensions for engaging a broad base of political leaders, politically active citizens, academia, and journalists. “Politics Matters” provides high-quality, low-cost, easy-access political training content. SPL conducted specialized training with high-performing MTs from each major party on the features of the “Politics Matters” website and then collected recommendations for improving and using the website.

Several MTs mentioned that they have conducted follow-on training on the e-learning platform with party activists and are encouraging members to take online courses (GI, MTs Dhaka). BNP in Borguna, AL in Jhalokathi, and JP in Patuakhali all have used it to conduct training events (GI, DI Barishal). This bodes well

for sustainability; however, the extent to which the e-platform is used remains to be seen. DI expressed an interest in expanding e-learning to the entire country (DI Annual Report, Year 5).

**Examples of Sustainability.** SPL has conducted various interventions such as YLFP, SLFP, ToT, Study Circle, and e-learning for capacity building of the political party members. However, tracking data on the *application* of knowledge and skills from these interventions is scant. The ET heard anecdotal evidence of how key beneficiaries are applying knowledge and skills from these interventions, but they did not come across robust tracking data.

*“Some Master Trainers (MTs) were disappointed with the e-learning website because they thought their work will end. Later they understood that the website will help them to train the party members.” (GI DI)*

*“As e-learning facilitators, MTs are getting noticed by party leaders and gaining recognition and promotions.” (GI MT)*

A YLFP FGD participant from Cumilla said that he learned election campaigning mechanisms from SPL training, which he later used to win the election. Another participant from Chattogram mentioned that the fellowship benefited him in many ways, e.g., now the District Secretary asks for his opinion and his relationship with him has improved. Another participant from Chattogram mentioned that he was given the task of providing training to the upazilla-level party members—and that this task helped him to create a district-wide network, the opportunity to meet with party leaders, and gain increased acceptance within the organization.

A YLFP participant from Khulna mentioned that he arranged five upazila-level councils where different committee positions were announced; he noted that senior leaders valued his decision-making and organizing ability and that they took his advice for forming the committees. A YLFP FGD participant from Rajshahi said that training had improved his skills and changed his mindset. He added, *“Our tolerance has increased; now we think positively.”* He also added that democratic party practices and interpersonal relations among different YLFP participants have improved; they learned how to resolve conflict and how to do career planning.

One young leader said that before the fellowship, parties did not invite each other to events. Since the fellowship, they are more likely to invite members of other parties to social and political events (FGD, YLFP Chattogram). Another young leader noted that training and the fellowship network have contributed to reducing the gap among Fellows and improved multiparty relations at the district level (FGD, YLFP Rajshahi).

*“We are not leaving the ideology of our party, but we are acting peacefully, and this is what I have gained from the learning in fellowship program.” (FGD, YLFP)*

Increasingly, YLFP participants from different parties are coming together for post-fellowship events that are playing a significant role in building this relationship.

The young leader further stated, *“Our friendly relationship provokes us to think about our community beyond the party line; now we focus on community development with mutual respect”* (FGD, YLFP Rajshahi). MAF members often said their perception of conflict had changed: they now see conflict more positively and as an opportunity, rather than as fighting” (KII, AL Rajshahi; FGD, YLFP Rajshahi; KII LG Khulna).

A female SLFP member shared that *“in terms of personal change, my listening ability has increased, and [I also assess] the argument or perspective of the other person before speaking out—in order not to create any conflict situation”* (FGD, SLFP Dhaka). A MAF member from Chattogram pointed out that MAF activities facilitated young women activists’ mobility and strengthened their network, which is usually weak in a patriarchal society (FGD, MAF Chattogram).

SPL programs have contributed to changes in mindset regarding women in politics. As reported in earlier sections of this report, all major parties say that they are committed to increasing women's inclusion in mainstream committees. Women are also more vocal about their rights and more organized in groups that are sometimes interparty in composition (FGD, SLFP, Dhaka). One such women's group issued a press release to provide 33 percent of positions on committees to women leaders (GI, USAID).

*"The number of study circles has reduced. As a result, only a few women members of the party can receive training. Ideally, more women should be trained to achieve the target for 33 percent of seats in the party's committees." (AL Leader)*

DI regional staff said they shared a list of the trained women leaders with the district leaders and advocated for their inclusion in the committees (GI DI Barishal). When DRP started in 2011, there was only a 2 to 3 percent inclusion of women in the committees of the political parties; now it is more than 15 percent (GI, USAID).

AL claims that it has been actively pursuing women's inclusion for a long time and that 20 percent of seats in its mainstream committees have been filled by women (GI, DI Barishal). BNP respondents mentioned that BNP has declared 20 percent women's inclusion in the committees (GI, DI Barishal). Respondents from BNP cited examples of different municipalities, unions, and ward-level committees where women contested in a direct election (KII, BNP Rajshahi; KII, LG Khulna). Though efforts are being made to empower women, the major parties have so far failed to meet the target (KII, Academic). The deadline was recently extended until 2030. One respondent asserted that that AL has more woman members in its committees than other parties *"because women are safe in the ruling party, while in the opposition parties woman face a lot of challenges and an adverse political environment"* (FGD, SLFP Barishal).

SPL training and advocacy for the internal use of democratic practices by parties has been taking root at the local level and, with time, promises to pay dividends at more senior levels. This is a sustainable achievement of SPL. A district-level senior leader mentioned that internal democratic practices are gaining strength, with political parties regularly using them to elect their party councils (FGD, SLFP Sylhet). In BNP's council, *"1818 members were elected by direct votes in 27 committees. President and secretary were also elected by direct votes"* (FGD, SLFP Sylhet). A BNP leader from Barishal mentioned that they have formed union-level to district-level committees—following the democratic process (FGD, SLFP Barishal). An AL leader said that they have organized councils regularly to form committees from the union to central levels (FGD, SLFP Barishal). In addition, political party members are advocating for inclusive policies in forming committees and nominating candidates for parliamentary and LG elections (GI, DI Barishal; KII, BNP Barishal; KII, Media).

Various sources, including SPL's 2020 and 2021 Political Network Member Perception Surveys, indicate that the party members have increased knowledge/skills and confidence to advocate for more inclusive policies and practices within their parties (GI, MTs Sylhet). Survey findings for this evaluation also show that 63 percent of respondents say that SPL has significantly increased the capacity of party members to advocate for more inclusive policies and practices within their parties.

However, while this evaluation found that leadership capability has improved among the SPL-trained party members, and decision-making is now done in a more democratic and participatory way at the UP level, (KII LG Khulna) this does not appear to have filtered up to the district and central levels. An interviewee from Rangpur noted that while decisions are being made more democratically at the local level, he did not see any major change in the decision-making process at more senior levels, *"until now, the party central committee has held all [the] power.... Decisions for all types of activities are made at the central level. There is no involvement at the local level."* (KII JP Rangpu

**Political Party Investments in Sustainability.** The ET did not hear of any financial investments from political parties to build on SPL. Although political parties gave high importance to SPL training and some parties (i.e., BNP and JP) have created new positions for a training secretary in the committee, there is no direct budget for it; party leaders and MTs are expected to invest personally in capacity-building programs. Party leaders are also investing their time in selecting Fellows and attending different events as guests.

Party financing is opaque; as reported under EQ1, district party units fundraise as needed rather than having established party funds. A MT from Dhaka noted that in the financial audit report to the Election Commission, all parties show external donations supporting their events, (GI, MTs Dhaka). While there are exceptions, parties generally do not collect subscription fees from members. An MT from Dhaka suggested that parties could introduce digital payment systems for subscription collection (GI, MTs Dhaka). Some respondents recommended that party financing be discussed in a single-party format rather than a multiparty one (GI, DI Chattogram).

## Conclusions

SPL effects at the individual beneficiary level are easier to see than party-level effects. It may take more time to see these effects and changes in the political culture. SPL has built awareness about women's inclusion in the political parties; the extension of the deadline for achieving the RPO mandate and the naming of women's inclusion as a priority in political party strategic plans are important references for enhancing inclusion efforts. Training and other capacity-building efforts are needed and highly appreciated by political parties. All major parties have indicated that institutionalizing training is a priority; but so far they have invested very little of their own resources into making this a reality. MAF and PFG are good initiatives for conflict mitigation, but the centralized nature of politics and funding considerations puts their sustainability in question.

## Cross-cutting Consideration: Performance Management

The cross-cutting section of this evaluation highlights SPL's performance management opportunities with a particular focus on the RF and performance tracking.

- **Performance Tracking and Reporting:** The May 2022 MEL Plan is currently pending USAID approval. The 14 performance indicators are quantitative; there are no qualitative indicators that may offer a richer picture of project contributions. In addition, baselines and performance targets are set annually; cumulative data is not available. USAID conducted a Data Quality Assessment (DQA) of SPL performance indicators in July 2022, but the ET did not have access to this data. The ET also did not have access to comparison data for SPL districts and non-SPL districts, which would be helpful for understanding SPL's contribution to the political landscape.

Further, as reported in EQ3, there is a lack of behavioral science insights to inform ongoing learning and adaptation and better assess SPL's contributions to outcome-level changes. This would be helpful, for example, for optimizing women's inclusion. Several respondents recommended developing more creative metrics for women's inclusion. A DI regional team said the project needs to find ways to report less visible changes, such as how women are influencing grassroots decisions.

# 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evaluation findings, the ET recommends the following.

## I. Effectiveness

- *DI should:* **Where possible, include more senior and central party leaders in SPL activities to enhance linkages between the grassroots and central levels.** Holding more activities at the regional and district levels could help to facilitate senior and central leaders'

involvement; some leaders may be more available/willing to attend local events than those in Dhaka.

- *USAID and DI should:* **Continue to prioritize strategic engagement with central leaders.** In the short term, the emphasis may be on ensuring that top leaders remain open to SPL support and that SPL can progress at the local level where party units have relative autonomy. Longer term, it could involve an incentives-based approach depending on the challenges different parties face and providing more customized support services for party units. Coordinate with diplomatic channels on messaging as appropriate.
- *DI should:* **Deepen coordination and build synergies with other donor programming, including new election-related efforts ahead of 2024 elections.** This may relate to electoral integrity, mitigating electoral violence, and engaging youth (male and female) in positive politics.
- *DI should:* **Review nomination and selection criteria and processes for fellowship programs to ensure that they align with project goals.** This could include ensuring the prioritization of female and active party members and putting checks in place to reduce the chance that candidates are nominated due to favoritism.
- *DI should:* **Prioritize women's inclusion.** Actively integrate the legal mandate for women's inclusion into project messaging and show parties how proactive compliance with the mandate benefits them. Consider offering more training seats for women than men.

## 2. Monitoring and Learning

- *USAID should:* **Commission an independent assessment of the SPL training program to understand how it is contributing to desired outcome-level changes at the individual and party levels.** Building on SPL's own assessments, an independent assessment could look at trainee selection, participants' retention and use of knowledge and skills, how political parties are benefiting from the training, how MTs are being used, the relative values of e-learning versus in-person training, the extent to which political parties are investing in training (e.g., *vis-à-vis* their Strategic Plans), how SPL can continue to support parties' in-house training capacity, etc. The assessment should consider longitudinal, cumulative change—and, as possible, include a comparison group of non-beneficiaries.
- *USAID should:* **Require implementer to conduct regular applied political economy analyses.** These insights can be used to inform ongoing adaptation and better assess SPL contributions to outcome level changes. Clearly communicate to the implementer that piloting new ideas and adjusting programming when needed are desired.
- *DI should:* **Continue CLA efforts outlined in the Year 6 work plan,** including regular political economy analyses, opportunity and risk analyses, and use of a political space monitoring tool. Document the results of these efforts in regular reporting to USAID. Invite USAID to participate in key CLA events.
- *USAID should:* **Clarify the reporting requirements for SPL's Learning Agenda.** This can include the frequency and format of reporting for different learning questions (short term, long term, PMP, COVID-19, and self-reliance questions).
- *USAID should:* **Require stepped up PEA and MEL expertise in nextgen programming** to ensure programmatic relevance, evidence-based adaptation, and learning in the context of the anticipated continued dynamic, political environment.
- *DI should:* **Work with CLA, political economy, and inclusion experts to develop future MEL plans.** Ensure that MEL plans reflect learning to date, data quality assessments, and

sustainability planning as SPL comes to an end. Consider adding qualitative indicators to better assess SPL contributions to outcome level changes and context indicators to track conditions beyond SPL control that may affect the achievement of results.

### 3. Sustainability and Coordination

- *DI should:* **Continue support for institutionalizing political party training.** This may include working with political parties to develop their Action Plans, supporting parties to establish or strengthen their training cells, training additional MTs due to attrition, providing refresher training to existing MTs, tracking use of the Politics Matters website, and developing new in-person and virtual training modules in response to user feedback.
- *DI should:* **Continue the university YLFP effort to encourage democratic practices within parties' student wings.**
- *USAID should:* **Explore opportunities for enhanced collaboration with other programming to build synergies** (e.g., related to elections, youth, women, and civil society) for future programming.
- *DI should:* **Explore options for more district and divisional level activities to increase attendance and save costs.** Given the small number of DI staff in the regional offices, this may require more travel for Dhaka-based staff to support quality assurance for some activities.
- *DI should:* **Consider enhanced training for political parties on fundraising and fund management, internal party communications, research skills and strategic/action planning.**
- *USAID should:* **Explore options for establishing a political party training institute** to provide short and long courses for political actors. The institute could be based with a public university to provide legitimacy and benefit from academic resources. Satellite training cells could also be established to extend reach and accessibility. Political parties and donors could co-invest in this.

### 4. Compliance and Design

- *USAID should:* **Review SPL compliance with USAID's PPAP and conduct regular reviews to determine if there has been any change in parties that are deemed democratic or significant per the PPAP.**<sup>19</sup> As needed, engage third-party experts with local knowledge to support this effort. Based on the review of findings, expand or contract assistance. As needed, request a waiver to work with a particular political party or multi-party coalition.
- *USAID should:* **Conduct a needs assessment to inform possible future political party assistance.** Carefully consider the vision for assistance. The vision should reflect the political economy, achievements to date, where there is potential for the greatest traction, the needs of individual political parties, stakeholder buy-in, and a balance between demand and supply-driven support. Be willing to pause political party assistance or shift resources to other types of programming to strengthen the political landscape. USAID should consider the ideal timing for an assessment—recognizing that no matter who wins the 2024 elections, many of the needs and opportunities are already well known.

---

<sup>19</sup> From the PPAP: "It is a best practice for Missions to build an annual review to determine if there has been any change in the parties that are deemed democratic or significant. Missions are encouraged to consult with implementing partners and the Embassy to inform their decisions on Party Selection."

- *USAID should:* **Consider options and opportunities for scale in response to high demand.** Based on existing and anticipated evidence and resource availability, consider the tradeoffs between expanding political party assistance into more districts versus working more intensively in selected districts, and expanding to upazilas. Clearly define the criteria for scaling up/down; how a nextgen strategy would build on achievements to date; what future success would look like at the end of five-year project cycle (TOC); and the desired role of central leaders.

# ANNEXES

## **ANNEX I: SCOPE OF WORK (SOW)**

### **Intake Form**

#### **USAID/Bangladesh**

#### **Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DRG)**

**Date of Request: December 22, 2022**

**Tasking Request: S047**

#### **Type of Task: Midterm Performance Evaluation of Strengthening Political Landscape (SPL) in Bangladesh**

#### **Description of Activity:**

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) awarded the No. AID-388-A-17-00003 to Democracy International (DI) for implementation of Strengthening Political Landscape (SPL) in Bangladesh. The overarching objective of this \$28,446,856 project with an implementation period of 2017-2024 is to strengthen political processes and broaden political participation in Bangladesh. More specifically, program aims to strengthen institutional capacity and practices of political parties in Bangladesh by equipping political party activists and politically active citizens with skills (1) to be effective leaders and advocates for inclusive policies and practices within their parties and (2) engage in constructive conflict mitigation processes. This goal will contribute to the achievement of Intermediate Result (IR) 1.3: “Improved Political Processes to Prevent Further Backsliding into Authoritarianism” under USAID/Bangladesh’s Development Objective 1: “Improved Democratic Systems that Promote Transparency, Accountability, and Integrity.” To achieve the program goal, DI will conduct activities under two major program objectives.

Objective 1: Political party activists and politically active citizens have the skills and knowledge to be effective leaders and advocate for more inclusive policies and practices within their parties.

Objective 2: Increased skills of political party activists and politically active citizens to engage constructively to mitigate conflict.

#### **Background and Understanding of Issues**

The political landscape in Bangladesh is complex, with two primary yet countervailing narratives currently playing out. As a result of work by DI under Democratic Participation and Reform (DPR) and, all the key political parties significantly improved the way they involve, communicate, and listen to their grassroots leaders and supporters, including importantly women and youth. Parties are more internally democratic and responsive than they were 10 years ago. However, there is more work to be done, and parties are increasingly plagued by intra-party tension and violent competition. Following the 2014 elections, intra-party contest and conflict moved away from the institutional sphere to the street, where party activists and supporters have stepped up their willingness to resort to significant and deadly political violence. The 2018 elections were also marred by brutal attacks on opposition candidates and violent clashes between Awami League and BNP. At the inter party level, the ways individuals interact and compete continue to remain contentious and oftentimes violent. As a result of long-term political traditions and historical grievances, inter party politics in Bangladesh has always been viewed as zero-sum.

#### **Opportunity to Further Gains Toward Responsive, Inclusive Parties**

Bangladesh’s political parties have made significant strides in becoming more responsive and inclusive, and there are opportunities for further progress. While two parties—the Awami League (AL) of Prime Minister Sheik Hasina and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) of Khaleda Zia—continue to dominate the political space, these and the Jatiyo Party (JP) have shown that they can make progress. Programs such as and its predecessor, DPR, help identify incentives and opportunities for parties to live up to the

democratic ideals enshrined in their constitutions. Historically, Bangladesh's political parties are centralized, leader-driven institutions that have often failed to create space for lower-level leaders to participate. But with support from DI under DPR and SPL, all the main parties have significantly engaged more women and youth in leadership positions. New and inclusive consultative mechanisms provide an opportunity to increase grassroots voices in such important decisions as the contents of party manifestos.

### **New Challenges of Political Violence**

Although Bangladesh has a long history of political violence, the last several years have witnessed a dramatic increase in both its frequency and severity; more than 100 people were killed and many more injured in the UP elections of 2021. Traditionally violence in politics was driven by a combination of long-standing factors (e.g., the electoral system, lack of confidence in electoral processes, historical grievances), as well as the erosion of tolerance for pluralism and the limited avenues for opposition participation in politics following the BNP's boycott of the 2014 elections. Intra-party conflict is another driver of violence, particularly in Awami league. The absence of parliamentary opposition prevents a natural Westminster check-and-balance process, coupled with abolishment of the caretaker government system enables the ruling party to ignore calls for negotiation or dialogue with opponents and civil society activists who are seen to be critical of the government. This has further entrenched an unequal power dynamic between the two primary parties. In this context, political parties have increasingly resorted to violence to express grievances and sway public opinion. The Bangladeshi public, however, overwhelmingly opposes political violence and sees grassroots approaches as having the most potential to promote peace.

### **Logical framework**

USAID's logical framework for leads to the following development hypothesis:

- *If* political party activists and politically active citizens develop the skills and knowledge to be effective leaders and advocate for more inclusive policies and practices within their parties; and
- *If* the skills of political party activists and politically active citizens to engage constructively to mitigate conflict are increased;
- *Then* institutional capacity and practices of political parties will be strengthened in Bangladesh; and politics in Bangladesh will be more inclusive, responsive, and peaceful.

Following this rationale, DI has established Intermediate Results 1, and 2, and has derived three sub-intermediate results for IR1 and two intermediate results for IR2 to structure its work.

IR.1: Political party activists and politically active citizens have the skills and knowledge to be effective leaders and advocate for more inclusive policies and practices within the party.

Sub-IR 1.1 Strengthened inclusive and transparent decision-making processes within political parties.

Sub-IR 1.2 Strengthened evidence-based policy building on views from all levels of party membership.

Sub-IR 1.3 Improved capacity and leadership skills at all levels of party membership.

IR.2: Increased skills of political party activists and politically active citizens to engage constructively to mitigate conflict.

Sub-IR 2.1 Broader, more tolerant and constructive interparty interactions enhanced.

Sub-IR 2.2 Mitigate the short- and long-term impacts of political violence.

### **Objectives of the Evaluation**

The objective of this midterm performance evaluation is to assess SPL's technical and programmatic validity and effectiveness and assess SPL's progress towards sustainability.

The primary audiences for this performance evaluation are USAID/Bangladesh and Democracy International. Secondary audiences will include US Embassy State Department in Bangladesh, political parties of Bangladesh, the USAID Asia Bureau and, other bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors and other relevant development partners working for democratic governance.

The findings of the report will be used for course correction of the implementation of the SPL Activity. USAID expects the implementers of the Activity to shape their Activity and strategy considering the findings of this evaluation report. The findings of this report will also be used to inform future programming.

### **Research Question:**

This Scope of Work is for a Midterm performance evaluation of the SPL Activity implementation from March 2017 to December 2022. The evaluation should review, analyze, and evaluate the SPL program using the following prioritized questions. The evaluation should make inferences based on the findings, identify opportunities and make recommendations for improvement. In answering these questions, the ET should assess both the performance of USAID and that of the implementing partner(s).

### **Effectiveness:**

- To what extent has SPL been successful in achieving Activity objectives? To what extent the program is on course to meet set objectives?
- How effectively were women and youth engaged by SPL's interventions in the targeted areas?

### **Management:**

- How effective is SPL's performance management system?

### **Relevance:**

- To what extent are the Activity's objectives still relevant to the current development circumstances in Bangladesh?

### **Sustainability:**

- How much progress is SPL making in ensuring sustainability of activities beyond USAID support?
- What measures should be taken to ensure and/or enhance sustainability? (Based on the findings above)

**Client Satisfaction:** To what degree do political parties and relevant civil society perceive SPL has been successful in achieving its objectives?

- To what extent do political parties and relevant civil society actors think that SPL has been successful in achieving its objectives?
- To what extent has the Activity engaged multiple stakeholder groups (donors, think tanks, donors, CSOs, U.S. State Department etc.) to achieve its intended outcomes?

**Geographic Coverage:** *(Guidance – If this is third-party monitoring, please provide locations of sites to be visited)*

The evaluation should cover implementation sites in Dhaka, Chattogram, Khulna, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Sylhet, Barishal and Cumilla districts.

**Dates of performance and timeline:** *(Guidance – Please provide an anticipated start date and or completion date. Please note that, depending on the complexity of the requested services, the period of performance, from initiation to completion, can be significant)*

The ET should start the process by the end of December 2022. The final reports should be submitted by March 2022. This evaluation is time sensitive.

### **Team Composition/Qualifications of Consultants:**

**TL:** An international Senior Evaluation Specialist with experience in evaluating right to information/transparency activities in developing countries. The TL will provide leadership for the team, finalize the evaluation design, coordinate activities, arrange meetings, consolidate individual input from team members, and coordinate the process of assembling the final findings and recommendations. S/he will also lead the preparation and presentation of the key evaluation findings and recommendations to USAID/Bangladesh. At least ten (10) years of experience in evaluation management is required. Experience in conducting evaluation and assessments on democratic participation, political processes and political party strengthening programs in developing countries is required, and preference will be given to a specialist with experience working knowledge of authoritarian countries. Ability to produce highly quality evaluation report in English is essential. The TL must be physically present in Bangladesh during the evaluation entire period.

**Team Member (International)- One:** A mid-level evaluation specialist with an advanced degree in a relevant discipline and at least eight (8) years of experience. Experience in design, management monitoring and evaluation of democratic participation programs in developing countries is required. Prior experience and ability to conduct evaluations, in particular on democratic participation, political processes and political party strengthening programs, and to write well in English is required. S/he will work with the national team member to manage focus group discussions (FGD) and other data collection methods, analyze findings and draft the evaluation report. The International Team Member must be physically present in Bangladesh during the evaluation entire period.

**Team Members (National)- Two:** Team members' experience should include post-graduate level social science, law, economics, and/or political science experience. In-depth knowledge of issues relating to Bangladesh political development, political parties, electoral and political processes, parliamentary democracy, and process of democratic participation and role of civil society in developing and/or transitional democracies is required. Experience in conducting evaluations or assessments is essential. Ability to conduct interviews and discussions and write well in Bangla and English is essential. National Team Members must be physically present in Bangladesh during the evaluation entire period.

### **Proposed Evaluation Methodology**

The ET is encouraged to use a mixed method approach that would include the use of different tools to tease out qualitative and quantitative information and suggest alternative approaches during the planning stage. For example, given the sensitive nature of political issues, the ET could suggest alternative or additional approaches that can maximize data collection and analysis.

The evaluation methodology will include following tools, however the ET is encouraged to propose new methods of data collection and analysis in the work plan.

- 1. Desktop Review of Key Documents and Initial Analysis:** The ET shall review relevant USAID and sector specific documents, as well as key documents from USAID's implementing partners and outside sources.

The ET will use this literature to develop an initial response to the questions listed above, and to set forth hypothesized cause-effect relationships that can be tested through field research and interviews. The ET will also use the information from the desk review to design tools for conducting key informant interviews and focus group discussions.

- 2. Conduct Interviews in the field:** The ET will conduct interviews with USAID/Bangladesh, relevant USAID/ Washington staff, program participants, implementing partners, sub-contractors and sub-grantees, relevant GOB representatives, civil society representatives, the media, donors,

stakeholders, and other relevant beneficiaries. The Team should create sampling frame to conduct interviews of stakeholders and field visits, including representation of sub-grantees. The interviews should be designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The ET's work plan should include an interview list and proposed field visits.

- 3. Conduct Focus Group Discussions:** The evaluation should include focus group discussions with the target beneficiaries and other stakeholders involved in the implementing of the SPL Activity.

The Team will build on the proposed methodology and provide more specific details on the evaluation methodology in the Evaluation Work Plan. The evaluation will be participatory in its design and implementation and the evaluation methodology will be finalized through further review and discussion between USAID/Bangladesh and the ET. The methodology narrative should discuss the merits and limitations of the final evaluation methodology. In the final evaluation report, the evaluator should also detail limitations and how these limitations were addressed or how limitations were taken to account in proposing recommendations. The ET will design appropriate tools for collecting data from various units of analysis. The tools will be shared with USAID during the evaluation and as part of the evaluation report.

The information collected will be analyzed by the ET to establish credible answers to the questions and provide major trends and issues.

**Deliverables:** *(Guidance – In a bullet format, please provide a list of anticipated deliverables (e.g. Design proposal; Draft questionnaires, protocols and other data collection instruments; Updated SOW, if applicable; Draft Report; Mission Presentation; Final Report in electronic version that incorporates comments, statements of difference (if applicable) and appendices; Data sets; etc.)).*

**All deliverables are internal to USAID** and the ET unless otherwise instructed by USAID. Evaluation deliverables include:

**Evaluation Team Planning Meeting (s)** – essential in organizing the team's efforts. During the meeting(s), the team will review and discuss the SOW in its entirety, clarify team members' roles and responsibilities, work plan, develop data collection methods and instruments, review and clarify any logistical and administrative procedures for the assignment and prepare for the in-brief with USAID/Bangladesh.

**Evaluation Design and Work Plan** – Complete a detailed work plan (including task timeline, methodology outlining approach to be used to answer each evaluation question, and describe in detail the team responsibilities, and the data analysis plan, list of key informants, number of Focus Group Discussion): the draft work plan will be submitted within 10 working days after commencement of the evaluation; the final work plan will be submitted within 3 days after the international team members' arrival in Bangladesh.

**Evaluation Design Matrix** – A table will be prepared that lists each evaluation question and the corresponding information sought, information sources, data collection sources, data analysis methods, and limitations. The matrix should be finalized and shared with USAID/Bangladesh before evaluation field work starts. It should also be included as an annex in the evaluation report.

**Data Collection Instruments** – Data collection instruments will be developed and submitted to USAID/Bangladesh during the evaluation design phase prior to the commencement of the evaluation field work. The completed evaluation report should also include the data collection tools, instruments and list of people interviewed as an annex in the evaluation report.

**In-brief Meeting** – An in-person/virtual (as determined by SPL AOR) in-brief meeting with USAID/Bangladesh will be held within 2 working days of international team members' arrival in Bangladesh.

**Midterm briefing and interim meetings** – The ETL (or their delegate) will brief the SPL AOR on progress with the evaluation on a weekly basis by email, and also by in-person or virtual meetings as

determined by SPL AOR. A meeting minute should also be drafted by the ET within three days of each meeting or as determined by SPL AOR as per necessity. Any delays or complications must be quickly communicated to USAID/Bangladesh as early as possible to allow quick resolution and to minimize any disruptions to the evaluation. Emerging opportunities for the evaluation should also be discussed with USAID/Bangladesh.

**Debriefing with USAID** – A PowerPoint presentation of initial findings, conclusions and preliminary recommendations will be made to USAID/Bangladesh before the international team members depart Bangladesh.

**Debriefing with Partners** – The team will present the major findings from the evaluation to USAID partners (as appropriate and as defined by USAID) through a PowerPoint presentation prior to the team's departure from the country. **The debriefing will include a discussion of achievements and activities only**, with no recommendations for possible modifications to project approaches, results, or activities. The team will consider partner comments and incorporate them appropriately in drafting the final evaluation report.

**Draft Evaluation Report** – The ET will analyze all data collected during the evaluation to prepare a draft Performance Evaluation Report and submit the report within 15 working days after the departure of international team members from Bangladesh. The draft report must be of a high quality with well-constructed sentences, and no grammatical errors or typos. The report should answer ALL the evaluation questions and the structure of the report should make it clear how the evaluation questions were answered. The draft report must meet the criteria set forth under the final report section below. USAID will provide comments on the draft report within 10 working days of submission. The ET will in turn revise the draft report into a final Performance Evaluation Report, fully reflecting USAID comments and suggestions.

**Final Report:** The ET will submit a final Performance Evaluation Report that incorporates Mission comments and suggestions no later than ten working days after USAID/Bangladesh provides written comments on the draft Performance Evaluation Report. The format of the final report is provided below.

The final report must meet the following criteria to ensure the quality of the report:

- The evaluation report must represent a thoughtful, well-researched and well-organized effort to objectively evaluate what worked in the project, what did not and why.
- Evaluation reports shall address all evaluation questions included in the scope of work.
- The evaluation report should include the scope of work as an annex. All modifications to the scope of work, whether in technical requirements, evaluation questions, ET composition, methodology or timeline need to be agreed upon in writing by the technical officer.
- Evaluation methodology shall be explained in detail and all tools used in conducting the evaluation such as questionnaires, checklists and discussion guides will be included in an Annex in the final report.
- Evaluation findings will assess outcomes and impact on males and females.
- Limitations to the evaluation shall be disclosed in the report, with particular attention to the limitations associated with the evaluation methodology (selection bias, recall bias, unobservable differences between comparator groups, etc.).
- Evaluation findings should be presented as analyzed facts, evidence and data and not based on anecdotes, hearsay, or the compilation of people's opinions. Findings should be specific, concise and supported by strong quantitative or qualitative evidence.
- Sources of information need to be properly identified and listed in an annex.

- Recommendations need to be supported by a specific set of findings.
- Recommendations should be action-oriented, practical, and specific, with defined responsibility for the action.

The format of the final performance evaluation report should strike a balance between depth and length. The report will include a cover sheet, table of contents, table of figures and tables (as appropriate), glossary of terms (acronyms), executive summary, introduction, purpose of the evaluation, scope and methodology, findings, conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations. Where appropriate, the evaluation should utilize tables and graphs to link with data and other relevant information. The report should include, in the annex, any “Statement of Differences” by any team member or by USAID on any of the findings or recommendations. The report **should not exceed 30 pages**, excluding annexes. The report will be submitted in English, electronically in both word and PDF forms. The report will be disseminated within USAID. Upon instruction from USAID, SPL AOR will submit (also electronically, in English) this report **excluding any potentially procurement-sensitive information** to Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) for dissemination among implementing partners, stakeholders, and the public. The DEC submission must be within three months of USAID’s approval of the final report.

All quantitative data, if gathered, must be (1) provided in an electronic file in easily readable format; (2) organized and fully documented for use by those not fully familiar with the project or the evaluation; (3) owned by USAID and made available to the public barring rare exceptions.

## **ANNEX 2: BIBLIOGRAPHY**

1. Beneficiary phone survey - Political Network Members' Survey. Dhaka, Democracy International, July 2020
2. Beneficiary phone survey- MEL Indicator 2.a Survey Report. Dhaka, Democracy International, October 2021
3. CLA Activity Report and Learning Plan - AAR Report Final. Dhaka, Democracy International, Aug 2021
4. CLA Activity Report and Learning Plan – Coordination Meeting Report. Dhaka, Democracy International, November 2021
5. CLA Activity Report and Learning Plan – Coordination Meeting Report. Dhaka, Democracy International, November 2022
6. CLA Activity Report and Learning Plan – AAR Report Final. Dhaka, Democracy International, January 2023
7. CLA Activity Report and Learning Plan – Coordination Meeting Report. Dhaka, Democracy International
8. Developmental Evaluation. Dhaka, Democracy International, 2020
9. DQA Checklist 1.3.1. Dhaka, Democracy International, 2019
10. DQA Checklist 1.1.a. Dhaka, Democracy International, 2019
11. DQA Checklist 2.1.1. Dhaka, Democracy International, 2019
12. DQA checklist 2.1.1 (PRO cleared) CLEAN. Dhaka, Democracy International, March 31, 2019
13. DQA checklist 1.1.a (PRO cleared) CLEAN. Dhaka, Democracy International, March 31, 2019
14. DQA checklist 1.3.1 (PRO cleared) CLEAN. Dhaka, Democracy International, March 31, 2019
15. DQA checklist (PRO). Dhaka, Democracy International
16. Objective 1 & 2 Monitoring Data for Annual Report Year 5 (April 2021-March 2022). Dhaka, Democracy International
17. Perceptions Prevent Progress – A Political Economy Analysis of Decision-Making by Bangladesh's Major Political Parties. Dhaka, DI/UK AID, 2022
18. Performance Data – Key SPL Data Master File. Dhaka, Democracy International
19. Political Economy Analysis. Dhaka, Democracy International, 2022
20. Quarterly Indicator Progress Report (Oct. 2021–Sep. 2022). Dhaka, Democracy International, 2022
21. Quarterly Indicator Progress. Dhaka, Democracy International, 2022
22. SEMB – MTR – Report. Dhaka, Democracy International
23. SPL MEL Plan. Dhaka, Democracy International, 2022
24. SPL Mid Term Evaluation. Dhaka, Democracy International, 2019
25. SPL MTE. Dhaka, Democracy International, 2019
26. SPL PEA final. Dhaka, Democracy International, January 2020
27. SPL QI Quarterly Report. Dhaka, Democracy International, 2022

28. SPL Q3 Quarterly Report. Dhaka, Democracy International, 2022
29. SPL Q4 Quarterly Progress Report. Dhaka, Democracy International, October 2022
30. SPL Q1 Quarterly Report – Final. Dhaka, Democracy International, 2023
31. SPL Training Assessment Final Report. Dhaka, Democracy International
32. SPL Year 1 Annual Report. Dhaka, Democracy International, June 9, 2018
33. SPL Year 2 Annual Report. Dhaka, Democracy International
34. SPL Year 3 Annual Report. Dhaka, Democracy International, May 14, 2020
35. SPL Year 4 Annual Report final. Dhaka, Democracy International, May 13, 2021
36. SPL Year 5 Annual Report. Dhaka, Democracy International
37. SPL Year 2 Workplan Approved. Dhaka, Democracy International, September 10, 2018
38. SPL Year 3 Workplan July 2 approved. Dhaka, Democracy International
39. SPL Year 4 Workplan approved. Dhaka, Democracy International, June 2022
40. SPL Year 5 Work Plan. Dhaka, Democracy International
41. SPL Year 6 Work Plan Approved. Dhaka, Democracy International, April 24, 2022
42. SPL Workplan Analysis. Dhaka, Democracy International
43. USAID Bangladesh Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) Dec 2020-Dec 2025. Dhaka, USAID, 2020

**ANNEX 3: SPL RESULTS FRAMEWORK**

**ACTIVITY GOAL**  
**Improved access to justice**

**CONTEXT INDICATOR**  
**16. % change in number of legal aid applications received in PPJ focus districts**

**IR.1**  
**1.% change in number of individuals who received government legal aid or victim's assistance with USG support**

**IR2**  
**6. Bangladesh is an associate member of the International Consortium for Court Excellence**

**IR 3**  
**12. % of people in target communities who understand their legal rights**

<p><b>1.1</b></p> <p><b>2.# of monthly progress reports submitted by Panel Lawyers to DLAO</b></p>	<p><b>1.2</b></p> <p><b>3.# of directives, policy, and regulation reform efforts initiated by NLASO.</b></p>	<p><b>1.3</b></p> <p><b>4.# of LAC visibility and awareness campaigns (disaggregated by # of campaigns targeting gender focused issues such as GBV and child marriage)</b></p>	<p><b>1.4</b></p> <p><b>5. # of reports on referral and awareness initiatives received by DLAO submitted by UZLAC and UPLAC</b></p>	<p><b>2.1</b></p> <p><b>7.# of judges trained with USG assistance (# of men &amp; women);</b></p> <p><b>8. % of female judges trained with increased capacity to implement international framework for court excellence</b></p>	<p><b>2.2</b></p> <p><b>9. # of USG - assisted courts with court improvement plan (CIP);</b></p> <p><b>10. # of directives initiated reflecting international best practices as defined by the IFCE or other international frameworks</b></p>	<p><b>2.3</b></p> <p><b>11. # of coordination meetings held</b></p>	<p><b>3.1</b></p> <p><b>13. # of TIP, VE and GBV applications received</b></p>	<p><b>3.2</b></p> <p><b>14. # of awareness sessions arranged on rights and responsibilities, citizen rights, human rights, and other legal frameworks with UP and upazila committees</b></p>	<p><b>3.3</b></p> <p><b>15. # of programs broadcast on print, electronic, and social media on legal rights and/or availability of justice services</b></p>
--	--	--	---	---	---	---	--	--	--

Note: Red font indicates that target was not met; black font indicates that indicator target was achieved.

## ANNEX 4: DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

### KII Instrument: USAID, DI THP, FCDO, Other knowledgeable experts

Date of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_ Time of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Respondent ID:

Respondent Name:

Respondent Sex: M/F/T

Respondent Organization:

Respondent Position in the Organization:

Interviewer Name:

Notetaker Name:

#### **Introduction:**

Good morning/afternoon/evening. I am [NAME]. I am part of an evaluation team conducting a performance evaluation of the Strengthening the Political Landscape Activity supported by USAID. Most of this interview is about your experience with SPL. I would appreciate your candid views on where the SPL project is today and what contribution it has made to meeting its objectives of promoting stronger intraparty and interparty inclusive leadership, constructive dialogue, and productive accountability relationships with civil society. I'd also like your views on its continued relevance in the context of current events and the upcoming election. Towards the end of this interview, I'll ask you to reflect on how SPL might be reimaged in big or small ways to promote its objectives going forward.

I want to assure you that everything you tell me will be kept confidential. You will not be quoted without your permission.

- a) Do you agreed to participate in this interview? \_\_Yes \_\_No
  
- b) May we record this interview? \_\_Yes \_\_No
  
- c) May we quote you in the report? \_\_Yes \_\_No

**Introduction:**

1. What is your role in or involvement with SPL?
2. How long have you been involved with SPL Activity?

**EQ1: To what extent has SPL been successful in achieving Activity objectives (IR 1 and IR 2)?**

*SPL has two Intermediate Results (IRs).*

*IR 1 Political party activists and politically active citizens have the skills and knowledge to be effective leaders and advocate for more inclusive policies and practices within the party. [internal party democracy]*

*IR 2 Increased Skills of Political Party Activists and Politically Active Citizens to Engage Constructively to Mitigate Conflict*

- 1.1 SPL has two Intermediate Results. Let's talk about what has been achieved under each one, and what the challenges have been. For each IR, which achievements stand out to you, particularly since 2019?

*Probes:*

- *What are key factors for these successes?*
- *Ask about each IR*

- 1.2 Are there Activity areas that have been less successful than you expected? If yes, how so?

- 1.3 Based on learning from SPL and similar efforts, what Activity areas would you recommend scaling up or down in the future if USAID continues support for strengthening the political landscape in Bangladesh?

**EQ2: How can activities like SPL engage women and youth more effectively in the future?**

- 2.1 In your view, what have been SPL's major achievements with respect to women and youth?
- 2.2 How should SPL or similar programming build on these efforts in the future?

**EQ3: What lessons can be derived from SPL Activity planning, organization, resource mobilization and adaptive management approaches?<sup>20</sup>**

- 3.1 Has SPL planned and managed its resources effectively to meet the Activity objectives?
- 3.2 Are there lessons future programs can learn from SPL about effective planning and adaptation?

---

<sup>20</sup> ET has asked USAID for more direction on what the Mission would like to learn from this question and which respondents can best answer the question (DI, THP, USAID? Others?)

**EQ4: To what extent are the Activity’s objectives still relevant to the current development circumstances in Bangladesh?**

4.1 How well does the SPL design align with current opportunities for strengthening the political landscape in Bangladesh?

*Probe:*

*What, if any, changes are needed in the short term to make SPL more relevant to current development circumstances?*

4.2 What learning questions or learning activities have informed SPL? (How so?)

*[Background: The 2020-25 Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) contains preliminary learning questions that were meant to be refined in the Mission PMP and articulated in the Self Reliance Learning Agenda- SRLA. The 2019 Midterm evaluation and 2021 political economy analysis might also be seen as learning activities.]*

4.3 What windows of opportunity do you foresee in the next few years to strengthen the political landscape in Bangladesh?

**EQ5: How can activities like SPL support political parties to be more effective and peaceful leaders in accordance with USAID’s Political Party Assistance Policy?**

5.1 USAID’s Political Party Assistance Policy requires that USAID programs support representative, multiparty systems. How can activities like SPL support political parties to be more effective and peaceful leaders in accordance with the Policy?

**EQ6: What measures should be taken to promote the sustainability of Activity achievements?**

6.1 SPL will end in September 2024. In your opinion, what will be the most lasting positive effects of SPL programming?

*Probes:*

- How likely are political parties and politically active citizens to advocate for inclusive policies and practices within in the party after SPL ends? [IR 1]*
- How likely are political party activists and politically active citizens to engage constructively to mitigate conflict [IR 2]*

6.2 What type and level of resources are political parties investing to sustain the positive effects of SPL?

6.3 What more could SPL or similar future programming do to enhance sustainability?

**Other:**

7 Do you have any other comments you would like to share?

## KII Instrument: Political Party Participants

Date of Interview \_\_\_\_\_ Time of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_ Respondent

Name:

Respondent Sex: M/F/T

Respondent Political Party: AL/BNP/JP

Respondent Position in the Party:

Years of Political Experience:

Interviewer Name:

Notetaker Name:

### Introduction

Good morning/afternoon/evening. I am [NAME]. I am part of an evaluation team conducting a performance evaluation of the Strengthening the Political Landscape Activity supported by USAID. This interview is about your experience with SPL. In this interview I'd appreciate your candid views on where the SPL project is today and what contribution it has made to meeting its objectives of promoting stronger intraparty and interparty inclusive leadership, constructive dialogue, and productive accountability relationships with civil society. I'd also like your views on its continued relevance in the context of current events and the upcoming election. Towards the end of this interview, I'll ask you to reflect on how SPL might be reimagined in big or small ways to promote its objectives going forward.

I want to assure you that everything you tell me will be kept confidential. You will not be quoted without your permission.

- a) Do you agreed to participate in this interview? \_\_Yes \_\_No
  
- b) May we record this interview? \_\_Yes \_\_No
  
- c) May we quote you in the report? \_\_Yes \_\_No

## Introduction

1. How familiar are you with SPL?
2. Could you describe how you have interacted with SPL and for how long?

## **EQ1: To what extent has SPL been successful in achieving Activity objectives (IR 1 and IR 2)?**

I.1 Which SPL achievements stand out to you, particularly since 2019?

I.2 Do you think SPL contributed to the capacity of political party members to advocate for more inclusive policies and practices within their parties? [IR1]

*If yes, how?*

I.3 Do you think has SPL contributed conflict mitigation across parties? [IR2]

*Probes:*

- *What are key factors for these successes?*

I.4 Are there Activity areas that have been less successful than you expected?

*Probes:*

- *How so?*
- *What was disappointing? How would you suggest improving it? (Or should it be stopped)?*

I.5 In the last two to three years, do you see any changes in how decisions are made in your party?

*Probes:*

- *If yes, how so? (Have they become more participatory, inclusive?)*
- *If yes, has SPL contributed to any of the improvements? (How so?)*

I.6 How would you describe relations between central and local level leaders in your party?

*Probes:*

- *How, if at all, have relations changed in the past few years?*
- *Has SPL contributed to these changes? (If yes, how so?)*

## **EQ2: How can activities like SPL engage women and youth more effectively in the future?**

- 2.1 In your view, how has SPL contributed to the skills of women and youth in your party?
- 2.2 What more can SPL or other programs do in this regard?

**EQ4: To what extent are the Activity's objectives still relevant to the current development circumstances in Bangladesh?**

4.1 In your view, how relevant are SPL activities in the current political climate in Bangladesh?

*Probes:*

- *What, if any, changes are needed to make SPL more relevant?*

4.2 What changes do you expect in the political climate in Bangladesh in the next few years?

**EQ6: What measures should be taken to promote the sustainability of Activity achievements?**

6.1 SPL will end in September 2024. In your opinion, what will be the most lasting positive effects of SPL programming?

*Probes:*

- *How likely are political parties to advocate for inclusive policies and practices within in the party in the future? [IR 1]*
- *How likely are political parties to initiate interparty conflict mitigation efforts? [IR 2]*

6.2 How is your party building on SPL activities?

6.3 What more can SPL do build on its activities?

**Other:**

7. Do you have any other comments you would like to share?

## KII Instrument: Civil Society (media persons, academics)

Date of Interview \_\_\_\_\_ Time of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_ Respondent

Name:

Respondent Sex: M/F/T

Respondent Political Party: AL/BNP/JP

Respondent Position in the Party:

Years of Political Experience:

Interviewer Name:

Notetaker Name:

### Introduction

Good morning/afternoon/evening. I am [NAME]. I am part of an evaluation team conducting a performance evaluation of the Strengthening the Political Landscape Activity supported by USAID. This interview is about your experience with SPL. In this interview I'd appreciate your candid views on where the SPL project is today and what contribution it has made to meeting its objectives of promoting stronger intraparty and interparty inclusive leadership, constructive dialogue, and productive accountability relationships with civil society. I'd also like your views on its continued relevance in the context of current events and the upcoming election. Towards the end of this interview, I'll ask you to reflect on how SPL might be reimagined in big or small ways to promote its objectives going forward.

I want to assure you that everything you tell me will be kept confidential. You will not be quoted without your permission.

- a) Do you agreed to participate in this interview? \_\_Yes \_\_No
- b) May we record this interview? \_\_Yes \_\_No
- c) May we quote you in the report? \_\_Yes \_\_No

**Introduction:**

1. How familiar are you with SPL?
2. Could you describe how you have interacted with SPL and for how long?

**EQ1: To what extent has SPL been successful in achieving Activity objectives (IR 1 and IR 2)?**

*Internal Reference: SPL has two Intermediate Results (IRs):*

*IR 1 Political party activists and politically active citizens have the skills and knowledge to be effective leaders and advocate for more inclusive policies and practices within the party. [internal party democracy]*

*IR 2 Increased Skills of Political Party Activists and Politically Active Citizens to engage constructively to mitigate conflict [conflict mitigation]*

I.1 Which SPL achievements stand out to you, particularly since 2019?

I.2 Do you think SPL contributed to the capacity of political party activists and civil society to advocate for more inclusive policies and practices within the party? [IR1]

*Probes:*

- *If yes, how?*

I.3 Do you think has SPL contributed to conflict mitigation across parties? [IR2]

*Probes:*

- *If so, how?*

I.4 What Activity areas would you recommend scaling up or down in the future if USAID continues support for programs like SPL in the future?

*Probe: Why?*

**EQ2: How can activities like SPL engage women and youth more effectively in the future?**

2.1 Has SPL helped to elevate the voices of women?

*Probe:*

- What examples stand out?

Has SPL helped to elevate the voices of youth?

*Probe:*

- What examples stand out?

2.2 How should SPL or similar programming build on these efforts in the future?

**EQ4: To what extent are the Activity's objectives still relevant to the current development circumstances in Bangladesh?**

4.1 In your view, how relevant are SPL activities in the current political climate in Bangladesh?

*Probes:*

- What, if any, changes are needed to make SPL more relevant?

4.2 What changes do you expect in the political climate in Bangladesh in the in the next few years?

**EQ5: How can activities like SPL support political parties to be more effective and peaceful leaders in accordance with USAID's Political Party Assistance Policy?**

5.1 How can activities like SPL support political parties to be more effective and peaceful leaders?

Probe:

- How can SPL support civil society to realize this aim?

**EQ6: What measures should be taken to promote the sustainability of Activity achievements?**

6.1 SPL will end in September 2024. In your opinion, what will be the most lasting positive effects of SPL programming?

Probes:

- *How likely are political parties and civil society to advocate for inclusive policies and practices within in the party after SPL ends? [IR 1]*
- *How likely are political parties to initiate interparty conflict mitigation efforts? [IR 2]*

6.2 What more could SPL do to build on its activities?

**Other**

7. Do you have any other comments you would like to share?

## KII Instrument: GOB Officials

Date of Interview \_\_\_\_\_ Time of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_ Respondent

Name:

Respondent Sex: M/F/T

Respondent Organization:

Respondent Position in the Organization:

Interviewer Name:

Notetaker Name:

### Introduction

Good morning/afternoon/evening. I am [NAME]. I am part of an evaluation team conducting a performance evaluation of the Strengthening the Political Landscape Activity supported by USAID. This interview is about your experience with SPL. In this interview I'd appreciate your candid views on where the SPL project is today and what contribution it has made to meeting its objectives of promoting stronger intraparty and interparty inclusive leadership, constructive dialogue, and productive accountability relationships with civil society. I'd also like your views on its continued relevance in the context of current events and the upcoming election. Towards the end of this interview, I'll ask you to reflect on how SPL might be reimagined in big or small ways to promote its objectives going forward.

I want to assure you that everything you tell me will be kept confidential. You will not be quoted without your permission.

- a) Do you agreed to participate in this interview? \_\_Yes \_\_No
- b) May we record this interview? \_\_Yes \_\_No
- c) May we quote you in the report? \_\_Yes \_\_No

**Introduction**

1. How have you interacted with SPL?
2. What SPL activities are you familiar with?

**EQ1: To what extent has SPL been successful in achieving Activity objectives (IR 1 and IR 2)?**

- 1.1 Based on your knowledge of SPL, what Activity areas would you recommend scaling up or down in the future if USAID continues support for strengthening the political landscape in Bangladesh?

**EQ2: How can activities like SPL engage women and youth more effectively in the future?**

- 2.1 In your view, what have been SPL's major achievements with respect to women and youth?
- 2.2 How should SPL or similar programming build on these efforts in the future?

**EQ4: To what extent are the Activity's objectives still relevant to the current development circumstances in Bangladesh?**

- 4.1 In your view, how well does SPL address current opportunities for strengthening the political landscape in Bangladesh?
- 4.2 What windows of opportunity do you foresee in the next few years for an Activity like SPL to contribute to strengthening the political landscape in Bangladesh?

**EQ5: How can activities like SPL support political parties to be more effective and peaceful leaders in accordance with USAID's Political Party Assistance Policy?**

- 5.1 How can activities like SPL support political parties to be more effective and peaceful leaders?

**EQ6: What measures should be taken to promote the sustainability of Activity achievements?**

- 6.1 SPL will end in September 2024. In your opinion, what will be the most lasting positive effects of SPL programming?
- 6.2 What more could SPL or similar programming do to enhance sustainability?

**Other:**

7. Do you have any other comments you would like to share?

## GUIDELINES FOR FGDs

### YLFP/SLFP

<b>Identifier Code:</b>	<b>The Topic for the FGD</b>
<b>Moderator Name:</b>	(_____)
<b>Note Taker:</b>	

Activity	Party	Females (F)			Males (M)			Total
		#	Calendar year(s) of participation [list all that apply]	Districts [list all that apply]	#	Calendar year(s) of participation [list all that apply]	Districts [list all that apply]	
YLFP	BNP							
	AL							
	JP							
SLFP	BNP							
	AL							
	JP							
<b>Total #</b>								

### Illustrative FGD/SGD Guide Questions

<p><b>Facilitator Guide:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Make sure all participants have signed their names and understand and agree the discussion will be recorded and transcribed.</li> <li>2. The discussion is confidential, no one outside the ET will have access to the information and individual names of participants are not identified in the transcript.</li> <li>3. <b>Explain the objective of this FGD:</b> The discussion is part of a larger study commissioned by USAID in Bangladesh to learn the results of SPL activities. The ET is visiting several districts and talking to different people who have interacted with this project. We want to hear about your experiences, opinions, and recommendations. The overall purpose of this study is to understand what has worked the best and what have been the main challenges, and recommendations for improving programs like SPL in the future.</li> <li>4. <b>Some rules of engagement:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyone has the same right to participate; all your opinions are valuable.</li> <li>• We want all of you to participate, please allow everyone to express their point of view.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
--

- We do not have the answers and we do not expect you to answer in any specific way, please be as honest as possible in your responses.
- There are no wrong or right answers; all answers are good answers.
- You do not need to agree with others; everyone can express their own opinions.
- Only one person talks each time; we need to be able to hear the others.

## QUESTIONS

1. Please take a minute and complete this sentence on a piece of paper: “The most rewarding or useful thing about the Fellowship Program has been.....”

*Probe:*

- a. Benefits to personal career
  - b. Benefits to party
  - c. Which sessions/ topics were most useful & how
2. How would you describe relationships among Fellows?

*Probe:*

- a. Whether/ how the Fellowship Program has contributed to cross-party relationships
3. Has the Fellowship Program affected the relationship between Fellows and more senior party members? (If yes how?)
  4. Could you share examples of multiparty assignments that Young Fellows have conducted between sessions?

*Probe:*

- a. Whether / what type of activities Senior Fellows have conducted.
5. How can SPL best support political party members to advocate for internal democratic practices and improvements in the party structure? [IR 1]

*Probe:*

- a. How this can help address urgent issues
  - b. What SPL should NOT do and why
6. In the next 3 to 5 years, how can USAID contribute to a positive political climate in Bangladesh?

*Probe:*

- a. What specific interventions would look like
7. Do you have any final comments to share about the Fellowship Program or SPL in general?

## MAFs

<b>Identifier Code:</b>	<b>The Topic for the FGD</b>
<b>Moderator Name:</b>	(_____)
<b>Note Taker:</b>	

Activity	Party	Females (F)			Males (M)			Total
		#	Calendar year(s) of participation [list all that apply]	Districts [list all that apply]	#	Calendar year(s) of participation [list all that apply]	Districts [list all that apply]	
MAF	BNP							
	AL							
	JP							
<b>Total #</b>								

### Illustrative FGD/SGD Guide Questions

#### Facilitator Guide:

1. Make sure all participants have signed their names and understand and agree the discussion will be recorded and transcribed.
2. The discussion is confidential, no one outside the ET will have access to the information and individual names of participants are not identified in the transcript.
3. **Explain the objective of this FGD:** The discussion is part of a larger study commissioned by USAID in Bangladesh to learn the results of SPL activities. The ET is visiting several districts and talking to different people who have interacted with this project. We want to hear about your experiences, opinions, and recommendations. The overall purpose of this study is to understand what has worked the best and what have been the main challenges, and recommendations for improving programs like SPL in the future.
4. **Some rules of engagement:**
  - Everyone has the same right to participate; all your opinions are valuable.
  - We want all of you to participate, please allow everyone to express their point of view.
  - We do not have the answers and we do not expect you to answer in any specific way, please be as honest as possible in your responses.
  - There are no wrong or right answers; all answers are good answers.
  - You do not need to agree with others; everyone can express their own opinions.
  - Only one person talks each time; we need to be able to hear the others.

## QUESTIONS

1. Please take a minute and complete this sentence on a piece of paper: “The most rewarding or useful thing about participating in MAF has been.....”

*Probe:*

- a. Personal benefits
  - b. Community benefits
  - c. Party benefits
  - d. Challenges
2. How would you describe your relationships with other MAF participants from your area?

*Probe:*

- a. Whether/ how the MAFs have contributed to cross-party relationships
3. What is your vision for the future for MAFs?
- Probe:*
- a. What strategies are needed to realize this vision
  - b. Whether MAFs will take up political topics or mainly social topics
  - c. Whether MAFs are conducting their own action planning meetings without direct SPL support

4. What role are the MAFs playing in the lead up to the 2024 elections?

5. How can SPL better support interparty engagement, tolerance and cooperation [IR2]

*Probe:*

- a. What SPL should NOT do and why
6. In the next 3 to 5 years, how can USAID contribute to a positive political climate in Bangladesh?

*Probe:*

- a. What specific interventions would look like
7. Do you have any final comments to share about the MAFs or SPL in general?

## **Mini-Survey Questionnaire**

### **Online Survey: for political party direct beneficiaries as defined by SPL**

**Note:** ET has requested a contact list from SPL. The survey will be updated as needed to tailor it to direct beneficiaries.

**Introduction:** You are receiving this questionnaire because you participated in an activity sponsored by the Strengthening Political Landscape (SPL) Activity of Democracy International. This asks about your satisfaction with your experience with SPL. Your responses are confidential and anonymous and will contribute to an independent forward looking evaluation of SPL being conducted by the Bangladesh Monitoring and Evaluation and Learning Activity (BMEL) managed by ME&A.

The survey will take no more than 15 minutes to complete. Thank you for your time.

Question	Response Options	Notes	EQ
<p>1. Party affiliation: a. AL b. BNP c. JP</p> <p>2. Sex a. M b. F c. T</p> <p>3. Age</p> <p>4. Location</p>	<p>Drop-down options</p> <p>For location, include 21 SPL target districts</p>		
<p>5. Which of the following best describes your interaction with SPL?</p>	<p>Dropdown options</p> <p>Rank in the party:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Senior political party member</li> <li>● Junior political party member</li> </ul> <p>Participation in SPL<sup>21</sup>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Senior Leader Fellow</li> <li>● Youth Leader Fellow</li> <li>● Master Trainer</li> <li>● Multiparty Action Forum (MAF) participant</li> <li>● Narir Joye Shobar Joy (NJS) participant</li> <li>● Women Inclusion</li> <li>● Strategic Planning Workshop (SPW) participant</li> </ul> <p>Other [please describe]</p>	<p>Mark all that apply</p>	

<sup>21</sup> These are the categories included in the initial stakeholder contact list provided by SP. The ET has requested some clarifications from SPL and will updated the categories accordingly based on their response.

Question	Response Options	Notes	EQ
6. When did you first interact with SPL?	Drop-down options <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Before 2017</li> <li>● 2018</li> <li>● 2019</li> <li>● 2020</li> <li>● 2021</li> <li>● 2022</li> <li>● 2023</li> <li>● Not sure</li> </ul>		
7. In your view, how relevant are SPL activities in the current political climate in Bangladesh?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Very relevant</li> <li>● Somewhat relevant</li> <li>● Not relevant</li> <li>● Not sure</li> </ul>		EQ4
8. In your view, to what extent does SPL contribute positively to the political climate in Bangladesh?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A lot</li> <li>● Somewhat</li> <li>● Little</li> <li>● Not sure</li> </ul>		EQ1 EQ4
9. To what extent do you believe USAID/SPL has increased the capacity of <u>political party members</u> to advocate for more inclusive policies and practices within their parties?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A lot</li> <li>● Somewhat</li> <li>● Little</li> <li>● Not sure</li> </ul>	IR 1	EQ1
10. To what extent do you believe USAID/SPL has increased constructive interaction between parties?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A lot</li> <li>● Somewhat</li> <li>● Little</li> <li>● Not sure</li> </ul>	IR2	EQ1
11. Overall, how satisfied are you with the support you have received from SPL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Very satisfied</li> <li>● Satisfied</li> <li>● Neutral</li> <li>● Somewhat dissatisfied</li> <li>● Very dissatisfied</li> </ul>		EQ1

Question	Response Options	Notes	EQ
<p>12. [Enumerator prompt: Next, I will ask you about the benefits you or your party have gained from SPL that you think will be most lasting after SPL ends in 2024. I will ask you to select two options that you think are the best examples of benefits that will last. I'll read the options now and will repeat them if you'd like.]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● More women in decision-making roles [or as candidates/campaign managers]</li> <li>● More youth in decision-making roles [or as candidates/campaign managers]</li> <li>● Greater gender awareness amongst senior party leadership</li> <li>● Greater transparency in decision-making within my party</li> <li>● More open dialogue with another party</li> <li>● More open dialogue/contact with civil society</li> <li>● Policy recommendations or action plans put forward by my party [ask for detail in an open-ended, drill-down option for those who select this one]</li> <li>● None of the above</li> <li>● Not sure</li> <li>● Other [open ended; please specify]</li> </ul>		EQ6
<p>13. Do you have any suggestions for how programs like SPL can contribute positively to the political climate in Bangladesh in the future?</p>	<p>Open ended, optional</p>		<p>EQ1 EQ2 EQ3 EQ4 EQ5 EQ6</p>

## INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT

[Evaluators should review this form with all informants before the interview and be sure that they understand it clearly before obtaining their signature. If the informant is illiterate or expresses discomfort signing the form but verbally consents to proceed with the interview, the evaluator may sign the form to indicate that they received verbal consent.]

### Purpose

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. My name is [NAME]. I work for ME&A, as part of the USAID Bangladesh Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Activity (BMEL). Our team is conducting a midterm evaluation of the Strengthening Political Landscape (SPL) Activity led by Democracy International (DI). The SPL Activity provides training to national and local level political party members and awareness building among politically active citizens in Bangladesh. I am an independent consultant who has no connection to DI or any of its partner organizations that may have provided you with assistance. You and/or your organization have been recommended to us as key people who can provide expert insights on SPL. We encourage you to be as honest as possible.

### Confidentiality

Before we begin, I want to let you know that any information or examples we gather during this interview will not be attributed to you personally. Your privacy will be protected; we will not include your name or any information that would make it possible to identify you in the report. We also ask that what we discuss today remains here with us.

### Voluntary Participation and Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

Participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You do not have to agree to be in this study. You are free to end the interview at any time or to decline to answer any question which you do not wish to answer. If you decline to participate in the interview, no one will be informed of this. It will in no way affect the support you receive from the Activity or its partners. Do you have any questions? If you have any questions about this assessment in the future, you may contact the BMEL Deputy Chief of Party, Nazrul Islam, at: [NIslam@engl.com](mailto:NIslam@engl.com).

### Consent

To make sure we accurately record your answers, we would like to use a recorder during the discussion. The recording will not be shared with anyone outside of our team members. If you do not want to be recorded you can decline the recorder but still participate in the discussion, without penalty. Do you agree to participate in this interview today? With your consent, may I start the recorder?

[IF THE RESPONDENT SAYS “YES,” BEGIN THE INTERVIEW. TURN RECORDER ON IF CONSENT TO RECORD IS GRANTED]

I agree to participate in the interview: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	I agree to have the interview recorded: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Name:    Date:	
Signature:	