

# CVA IN AN URBAN SETTING

WORLD VISION BANGLADESH

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## Objective

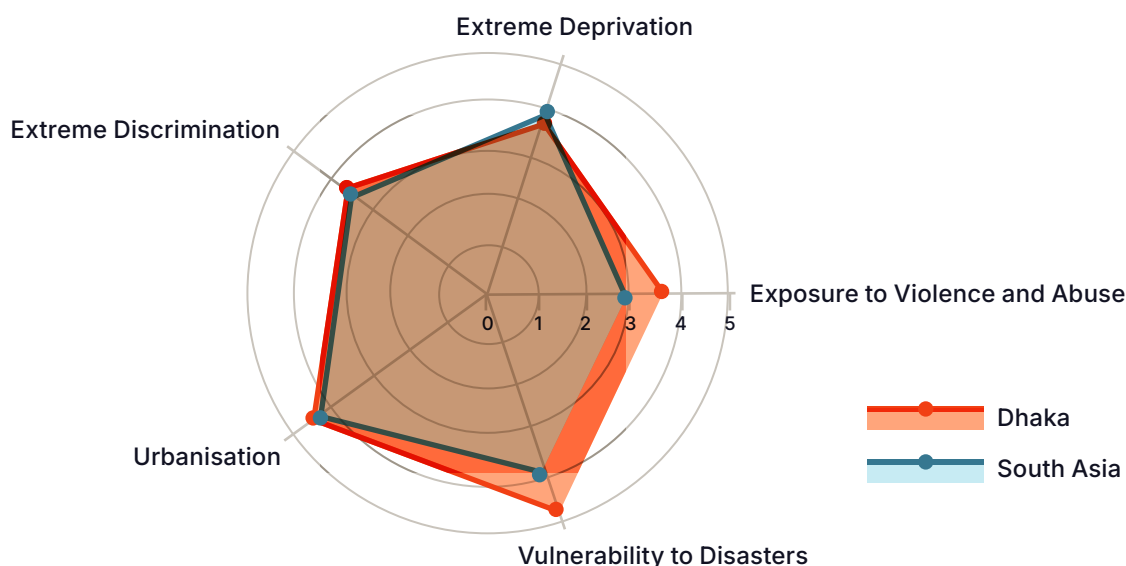
The objective of this case study is to document the successful application of guidance materials in urban Citizen Voice and Action (CVA) initiatives within two distinct urban contexts: a mega-city like Dhaka, Bangladesh, and an African city like Bamako, Mali. Rather than presenting novel approaches, this study seeks to demonstrate how established theoretical frameworks are effectively implemented in these unique settings, offering practical insights for future urban CVA initiatives.

Citizen Voice and Action is a local-level advocacy approach developed by World Vision to enhance [social accountability](#) and improve the relationship between communities and their local authorities. Urban environments present unique challenges for social accountability due to high population density, diverse demographics, complex governance structures, and dynamic socioeconomic conditions. The [Citizen Voice and Action approach](#) together with World Vision's [Urban Programme Approach](#) are used as a structured method to engage citizens in holding their local and city governments accountable for service delivery in an urban context. By fostering a participatory approach, CVA ensures that services are more responsive to the needs of urban communities, contributing to more equitable and sustainable development outcomes.

## Introduction

Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, is one of the most densely populated cities in the world. According to the World Population Review, the Greater Dhaka Area had a population of over 18 million as of 2016, while the city itself was estimated to have 8.5 million residents. By 2024, Dhaka's population is projected to reach around 24 million, with an annual growth rate of approximately 4.2%. This growth is driven by a vibrant economy and the influx of migrants attracted by both local businesses and international corporations. However, rapid urbanisation has brought significant challenges, including pollution, congestion, and increasing poverty. Figure 1 illustrates a five-dimensional child vulnerability mapping for Dhaka, which, compared to the South Asia region, ranks worse on four out of the five indicators.

## Multidimensional Child Vulnerability Score Sub-indicators - Dhaka (Bangladesh)



Source: <https://worldvision.economicsandpeace.org/>

**Figure 1. Multidimensional child vulnerability score sub-indicators – Dhaka (Bangladesh)**

While economic density in Dhaka is much higher than in the rest of the country, living standards and poverty rates do not reflect this advantage. Many poor urban households live in slums, enduring inadequate housing, insecurity, and overcrowding to remain close to employment opportunities (World Bank, 2019). Rural-to-urban migration continues to increase the number of people living in precarious conditions within cities. Approximately 68% of rural migrants settle in Dhaka, which has become one of the fastest-growing megacities globally (Islam et al., 2014; Pramanik and Stathakis, 2016). A 2015 Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics survey identified over 3,000 informal settlements in Dhaka, accommodating more than 1 million households.

World Vision Bangladesh has found that children in Dhaka face numerous challenges, especially regarding protection and access to services. A critical issue is the lack of awareness and enforcement of the National Children Act 2013, which outlines essential child protection measures. The Act mandates that every police station in Bangladesh must have a dedicated child help desk, separate rooms and toilet facilities for children, a distinct register for child cases, and child-friendly environments and furnishings. Additionally, the Act requires the provision of a social welfare officer and access to quality food and medical care for children.

However, both law enforcement agencies and local communities are largely unaware of these legal provisions. As a result, children's rights are often neglected at police stations, leaving them vulnerable and lacking essential protections.

World Vision's Citizen Voice and Action model is a transformative approach designed to improve dialogue between communities and governments, enhancing the delivery of essential services. By equipping citizens with information, tools, and opportunities for feedback, CVA fosters constructive dialogue and collective action, enabling communities to hold the government accountable for its responsibilities and commitments. World Vision Bangladesh has implemented the CVA model as part of its broader local advocacy efforts to promote [social accountability](#), proving instrumental in engaging citizens and influencing local governance to ensure the needs of vulnerable populations, particularly children, are addressed.

World Vision's Dhaka Urban Programme is guided by a focused city goal to promote safer and healthier cities, aligning with the [Urban Programme Approach](#) for sustained, impactful programming at all levels. Under the [Safer City domain of change](#), the programme has effectively influenced governance structures at the ward level and beyond, contributing to safer environments for children and communities.

This case study provides an in-depth look at the implementation of the CVA model in the Mirpur area of Dhaka, highlighting the unique adaptations made to address the urban context, the challenges encountered, and the outcomes achieved.







## Brief introduction to the urban context

Mirpur, located in Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC), is one of the most densely populated urban areas in Dhaka and contains a large number of informal settlements. According to the 2014 Slum Census, DNCC has 1,639 slums, with Mirpur hosting between 20 and 21 of these, both large and small. Figure 2 below displays key characteristics of DNCC, as extracted from the citywide assessment report.











Population		Number of Slums	
	Total: 6,032,923 Male: 81,963 Female: 70,794		72.83%
Major Land Use		Percentage of Slum Dwellers	
	Residential Area: 63.20% Commercial: 6.65% Industrial Area: 3.56% Mixed Use Area: 9.67%		4,099,011
Urban Open Space		Percentage of Children in the City	
	Park: 42 Playground: 55		0.67 million
Water Service		Population Density	
	97% coverage*		39,353/km2
Sewage Services		Major Hazards	
	Public Toilet: 37		Urban Fire, Dengue, Covid-19 Water Logging, Air Pollution

Figure 2. Key characteristics of DNCC

The population of Mirpur is highly diverse, comprising migrants, low-income families, and some of the city's most vulnerable children and youth. Many of these children are deprived of basic rights, with significant numbers involved in child labour or forced to live on the streets. Exposure to violence and crime is also high in these areas, and a lack of understanding among policymakers and service providers worsens the neglect of these communities' needs in both policy and service provision.

Given these challenges, Mirpur was prioritised for the implementation of the CVA model. The area's diverse population, high levels of child vulnerability, and numerous slums make it a critical focus for improving access to essential services, including child protection.

## Implementing CVA in Mirpur

World Vision Bangladesh (WVB) implemented the CVA approach in Mirpur, specifically targeting child protection through engagement with law enforcement agencies. This initiative aimed to ensure compliance with Chapter 4 of the National Children Act 2013, which mandates child-friendly procedures within police stations. Recognising the critical role of law enforcement in protecting vulnerable children, WVB sought to bridge the gap between police services and the community, where citizens often feel intimidated and are unaware of their rights.

WVB's experience highlighted significant barriers, as community members were often hesitant to approach police stations due to fears of power misuse by officers and a lack of awareness of their rights. In response, WVB strategically decided to implement the CVA model across all police stations in its operational areas, with Pallabi Police Station in Mirpur as a key site. The goal was to make police services more accountable and responsive to children's rights, fostering a more accessible, community-oriented approach to policing.

The CVA approach encouraged community participation in monitoring police services, with the expectation that this would improve governance and strengthen child protection. By fostering accountability and promoting the enforcement of child-friendly services, the initiative aimed to enhance protective mechanisms for children, particularly against violence and exploitation.

Collaboration with local social development organisations – such as the **Active Social Welfare Organisation** and the **Social and Economic Enhancement Programme (SEEP)** – was instrumental in implementing various components of the project. WVB also worked closely with informal partnerships formed with local community groups, including the **child forum (CF)**, **youth forum (YF)**, and the **Urban Neighbourhood Development Committee (UNDC)**, which played pivotal roles in advancing the CVA process and bridging gaps between service providers and the community.

Leaders from CF, YF, and UNDC were actively involved in each step of the CVA process, including:

- **Community gatherings** to engage the broader population
- **Awareness raising and sensitisation campaigns** on the provisions of the Children Act and the importance of child-friendly police services
- **Formation of the CVA working group** to monitor and track the progress of police services
- **Initial meetings and monitoring standards** sessions to assess the current state of police services
- **Scorecard sessions** that allowed communities to evaluate the performance of police services
- **Interface meetings** with service providers and duty bearers to discuss findings and propose solutions
- **Action plan preparation** to outline steps for improving police services
- **Follow-up** sessions to track progress and ensure accountability.

These collaborative efforts between WVB, local organisations, and community groups provided broad support for the initiative while embedding accountability mechanisms within the police service.

## CVA for child protection

The implementation of CVA in Mirpur followed a structured, three-phase process. WVB formed and mobilised CVA working groups in Mirpur, with active leadership from children and youth. These groups played a key role in facilitating the entire CVA process, which includes three phases:

### 1. Enabling citizen engagement

In the first phase of CVA implementation, WVB focused on building a shared understanding of the National Children Act 2013 among its area programme (AP) staff. This orientation aimed to enhance their knowledge of public policy and the CVA model, enabling them to effectively engage with local communities. Given that the Mirpur AP works with slum communities, where many residents are have not been formally educated and come from diverse backgrounds, WVB developed localised materials to facilitate civic orientation and mobilisation efforts.

Furthermore, the AP identified and collaborated with like-minded organisations, including SEEP, Active Social Welfare, and Breaking the Silence, building strong partnerships with these groups and the community. However, a significant challenge during this phase was establishing rapport with local police officers, who were initially largely dismissive of the development work carried out by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). A notable gap existed between the police and the community, worsened by a lack of awareness of NGO initiatives and a prevailing attitude among police officers that reduced respect for the public.

To address this, AP staff engaged with higher-level police authorities to explain the objectives of CVA and the importance of fostering child protection. Following these efforts, Pallabi Police Station agreed to collaborate with WVB and the community to ensure that child protection measures were integrated at all levels.

### 2. Engagement via community gatherings

In this phase, WVB facilitated initial meetings with law enforcement agencies, particularly the police, to clearly explain the objectives and goals of CVA as they relate to improving child protection services. These gatherings included CVA group members, partner organisations, and community representatives. The sessions focused on building a shared understanding of Chapter 4 of the National Children Act 2013, which outlines the child-friendly procedures that police stations are required to follow.



The involvement of various stakeholders helped ensure that all parties were aligned on the importance of enforcing child protection measures. This collaborative platform also enabled the community to engage directly with police officers, bridging the gap between service providers and recipients and fostering greater accountability from law enforcement in their interactions with children and the community.



## A. Monitoring standard sessions

A critical step in the CVA process was the **monitoring standards sessions**, during which WVB and the CVA working groups engaged directly with law enforcement agencies to assess the current standards of child protection services. The Mirpur AP team initiated discussions with police officers, outlining the goals and objectives of the CVA approach, with a particular focus on aligning police services with the provisions of the **Children Act 2013** and the **Child Policy 2011**. This phase involved conducting social audits and monitoring specific government service standards, such as the quality and accessibility of police services for children. A key area under review was the **Child Help Desk** (now the Child, Women, Disabled, and Elderly Help Desk), which WVB and the CVA working groups aimed to improve to ensure it met national policy standards.





Gathering all relevant police officers – such as the officer in charge, officer of investigation, officer of operations, and the in-charge of the Women and Child Help Desk – on a single platform was a significant challenge due to their demanding schedules and duties. To address this, AP staff organised the monitoring standards sessions outside regular office hours to accommodate both the police officers and the CVA committee members. During the session, WVB and the CVA working groups presented the monitoring standards, highlighting the gaps between policy and practice. Through this collaborative dialogue, the police officers – initially unaccustomed to being held accountable by the community – became more receptive. They acknowledged the findings and agreed on areas for improvement, demonstrating a commitment to enhance child protection services and accountability.

## B. Community scorecard sessions

The community scorecard sessions provided a platform for communities and stakeholders to evaluate the performance of police services and identify areas for improvement. WVB conducted four scorecard sessions, involving separate groups of men, women, boys, and girls, with a total of approximately 60 participants. During these sessions, participants attended educational and motivational segments on key issues, including the Children Act 2013 and the services that should be available at the Child Help Desk. Trained CVA working group leaders, organised into teams, facilitated these sessions at the community level, engaging children, youth, and community members. This ensured that participants were not only evaluating services but also gaining a better understanding of their rights and the standards expected from police services.



Using a structured format, CVA members gathered information on issues, causes, and possible solutions from the participants. The feedback collected across multiple sessions was compiled into a summary report, which was later presented during the final interface meeting with law enforcement agencies. This participatory process allowed the community to highlight specific gaps and propose actionable solutions for enhancing child protection services.

### C. Interface meetings and joint action plans

During interface meetings, CVA working groups, in collaboration with police and community members, developed joint action plans to outline the steps necessary to improve child protection services. These plans were based on findings from the scorecard sessions and monitoring standards assessments. Before the interface meeting, CVA members compiled the community scorecards and thoroughly prepared to present their findings. This preparation included selecting participants, reviewing previous documents such as the monitoring standards and scorecards, and ensuring the involvement of key stakeholders, including higher-ranking police officers like the officer in charge.

Given the sensitivity of issues such as police duty schedules, potential misinterpretations of laws, and concerns about corruption (e.g., bribes), the CVA group approached the discussions with caution. They carefully chose their words and provided real-life examples to support the case for enhanced child protection services. This thoughtful and strategic approach helped foster constructive dialogue and collaboration between the community and law enforcement, ensuring that the action plans effectively addressed the most critical issues.

### 3. Improving service and influencing policy through follow-up

Continuous follow-up was conducted to ensure the implementation of the action plans and to track improvements in service quality. Following these efforts, police officers became more approachable with the community and the CVA working group, facilitating the implementation of the action plan.

Additionally, police officers reached out to other organisations to support the operation of the women and child-friendly help desk.







## Adaptations

- ❖ **Regular communication:** Consistent face-to-face communication was maintained with key stakeholders, including the officer in charge at the police station, police officers from the Child Help Desk, the CVA working group, local government authorities, like-minded NGOs, and faith leaders. The above stakeholders played a crucial role in ensuring child protection within the community. Regular communication was essential to prevent relationship gaps and to keep all parties aligned and informed of the latest project developments. Without this consistent interaction, vital information could have been missed, jeopardising the initiative's progress and effectiveness.
- ❖ **Engagement of youth and community leaders:** Skilled members from the child and youth forums (CF and YF), along with leaders from the Urban Neighbourhood Development Committee, were actively involved to ensure broad community representation. In the Mirpur area, child and youth forum members took the lead in monitoring children within their community. The AP created a bridge between the youth forums and the police station, enabling easy access to police support as needed.
- ❖ **Involvement of respected figures:** Well-known and respected individuals, such as political leaders, faith leaders, social welfare officers, education officers, teachers, and local club members, were included in the CVA working group to build trust and legitimacy within the community.
- ❖ **Partnerships with local and national organisations:** Partnerships were established with local and national NGOs, community-based organisations (CBOs), and forums such as CF and YF to enhance collaboration and resource sharing.
- ❖ **Engagement of faith leaders and ward councillors:** Faith leaders and ward councillors were involved in project activities to strengthen community outreach and support.



## Challenges and mitigations

- ❖ **Frequent transfer of police officers:** Regular changes in key police personnel (officers, assistant commissioners, office-in-charge) made it difficult to maintain continuity. Mitigation: Repeated orientations were provided to new officers to ensure they were familiar with the project's goals and processes.
- ❖ **Limited resources for the Child Help Desk:** The budget allocated for the Child Help Desk was insufficient to fully meet the required standards. Mitigation: Advocacy efforts were intensified to seek additional resources and support from both local authorities and external stakeholders.
- ❖ **Difficulties in orienting new police officers:** Frequent turnover of staff made it challenging to provide consistent orientation for new officers. Mitigation: A structured onboarding process was developed to quickly orient new officers and involve them in project activities.
- ❖ **Lack of community awareness:** Many community members were unaware of government policies and laws related to child protection. Mitigation: Educational campaigns and awareness-raising activities were conducted to increase public understanding of these important legal frameworks.
- ❖ **Political influence and external pressure:** Political dynamics and external pressures occasionally hindered smooth project operations. Mitigation: Building strong relationships with key political actors and community leaders helped to navigate these challenges.
- ❖ **Rising social issues:** New challenges, such as increased involvement of young children in drug use and other criminal activities, emerged regularly. Mitigation: Continuous monitoring and flexible adaptation of project activities allowed for timely responses to these evolving challenges.



## Results and achievement (both qualitative and quantitative)

- A separate room for children was allocated to ensure they were not placed in the same space as adults.
- A separate register for children was maintained.
- Two female police officers were trained and deployed to manage the Child Help Desk.
- The relationship between the public and the police has significantly improved, resulting in easier access to the police station for the local community. Consequently, local police have become more responsive in addressing community issues, including taking active measures to prevent child marriages and designating certain areas as child protection zones.

**Table 1. Results and achievements of CVA in Dhaka Urban Programme**

Ward/neighbourhood level	City level	District level	National level
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A separate room for children has been allocated to ensure that children are not staying in the same space as adults.</li> <li>A separate register for children is being maintained.</li> <li>Two female police officers were trained and deployed to manage the Child Help Desk.</li> </ol>	<p>A functioning, child-friendly help desk has been established at the nearest police station, operated by the police with minimal involvement or oversight from the AP, ensuring sustainable support for child protection services.</p>	<p>The police headquarters issued a directive to other Dhaka police stations to establish similar women and child-friendly help desks,' based on the successful implementation in Mirpur, aiming to improve access to child protection and women's services across the city.</p>	<p>Pallabi Police Station was declared a model thana by the Ministry, which has now become a national example. As a result, police stations across Bangladesh are being encouraged to ensure the proper functioning of women and child-friendly help desks, following Pallabi's lead in enhancing child protection services.</p>



## Key Takeaways

- ❖ Maintain effective and regular communication with both the police station and influential community leaders.
- ❖ Support the formation of CVA working groups by engaging local elites, educated individuals, influential figures, and locally respected persons.
- ❖ Engage skilled members from the CF and YF and leaders from the Urban Neighbourhood Development Committee (UNDC).
- ❖ Include well-known and respected individuals in the CVA working group to build trust within the community.
- ❖ Partner with local and national NGOs, CBOs, and forums such as CF and YF to enhance collaboration.
- ❖ Involve faith leaders in the initiative to strengthen community support.
- ❖ Engage local government authorities and representatives to ensure alignment and support.
- ❖ Ensure that the CVA working group represents the entire neighborhood, with all educational levels included through socialisation and engagement efforts.
- ❖ Increase youth leader engagement to encourage broader participation.
- ❖ Provide thorough training to CVA working groups to achieve project goals and objectives.
- ❖ Conduct more and high-quality educational sessions for targeted beneficiaries.





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