

INSTITUTION BUILDING  
FOR LAND RIGHTS

## Bhumi Committee



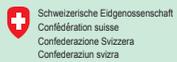
Funded by:



EUROPEAN UNION



UKaid  
from the British people



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development  
and Cooperation SDC



মানুষের জন্ম  
manusher jonno

promoting human rights and good governance

4



Uttaran

**INSTITUTION BUILDING FOR LAND RIGHTS**

## **Bhumi Committee**

Disclaimer

*This document has been produced with the financial assistance and technical support of the European Union, Manusher Jonno Foundation-MJF, Shiree, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and Bangladesh Government. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of Uttaran and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the positions of donors.*

## Credits

Published by : Uttaran  
Flat # B1 (1st Floor), House # 32, Road # 10/A  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka 1209, Bangladesh  
Phone: 88-02-9122302  
e-mail: [uttaran.dhaka@gmail.com](mailto:uttaran.dhaka@gmail.com)  
Website: [www.uttaran.net](http://www.uttaran.net)

Published : September 2015

Content edit / design : Philip Humphreys

Translation support : Farhana Khan

Photos by Rupal Shah : Cover, and pages 9, 16, 17, 18, 20 and 21

*All other photographs are property of Phil Humphreys and/or Uttaran, except where indicated and acknowledged*

Printers : Runic



## Contents

Introduction	4
Overview	5
The roots of the Bhumi Committee	6
Structure and guidelines of Bhumi Committees	8
The Bhumi Committee in practise	19

## Introduction

“Our greatest achievement of the Liberation War is an independent state named Bangladesh. However, even four decades later the poor people of this country have not achieved economic liberty. The principal reason for this is that the people engaged with agricultural activities have not received cultivable lands.

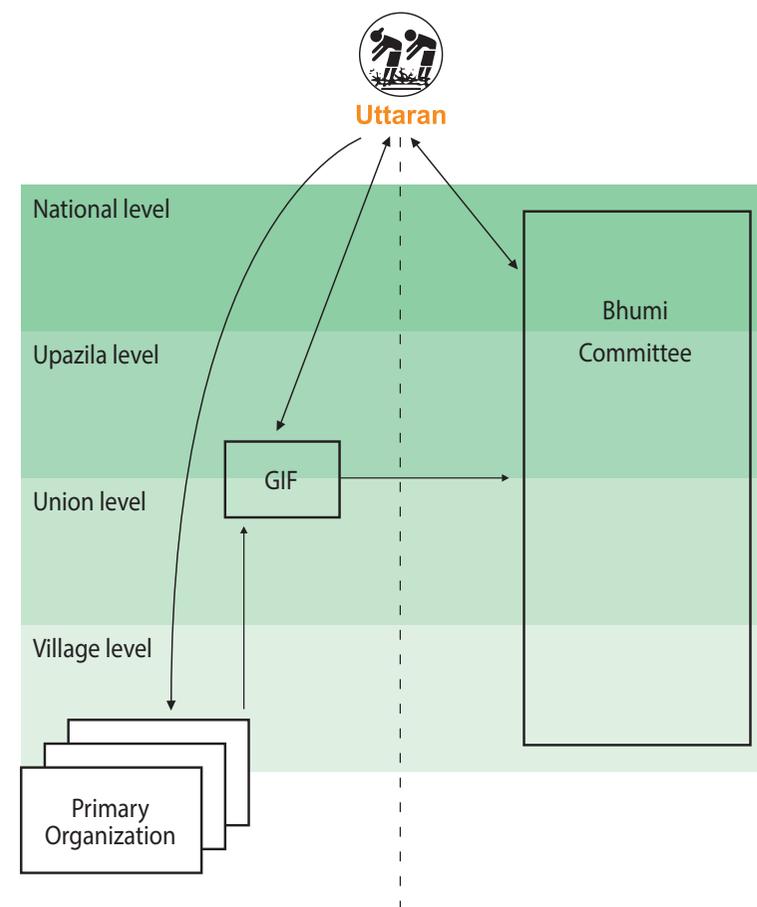


By Uttaran's APARAJEO project coordinator, Md Moniruzzaman Jamaddar

“It is extremely important to conduct an equitable distribution of land in an agriculture dependent country like Bangladesh. But because people remain landless, poverty is not lessening. There have been some sessions learned from land reformation initiatives, but they have not been too productive. Though there have been several work plans conducted on land reforms at the state level in order for the poor to gain wider access to land, the government has not taken the necessary steps to implement them wholeheartedly. This is the reason why the landless' rights over khasland are still to be fully established. If lands were in the hands of farmers in this agriculture dependent state, production would have increased multiple times and poverty could have been reduced.

Bhumi (literally meaning 'land') committees want to help the poor, landless people establish their rights over khasland. Initially, bhumi committees have done this in the southwest. Deprived Bangladesh is rising every time from the movement and protests against the seizure of their land by elite groups. An unstable situation prevails due to bloody conflicts, unlawful grabbing and occupying of khasland. Hence, bhumi committees are formed at the local and national level to stand in favour of the landless, build up public opinion and conduct voluntary activities to create unity amongst the citizens.”

## Overview



For more information on the Gono Unnayan Federation and Primary Organisation, see booklet 2 in this series

Bhumi Committees operate at all levels of local government and draw their members from civil society

## The Roots of the Bhumi Committee



**Civil society is playing an increasingly important role in the peaceful diffusion of conflict and the establishment of the land rights of the people in Bangladesh.**

At the core of civil society is the bhumi committee – a working group formed at national, upazila, union and ward level by representatives drawn from various strata of civil society. They support the voice of the disadvantaged, give impetus and gravitas to their cause, and assist in the identification of the landless people and help facilitate the distribution of khasland.

Uttaran began working with such committees soon after its foundation in Tala, Satkhira, in 1985. At that time Satkhira was all too often a scene of struggle. Landless people were being persecuted by powerful elites, with forced evictions and violence creating a climate of fear among the population. As the conflicts escalated and became more serious in nature, there was a need for the landless people to become better

organised. Equally as important, the desire among the civil society was to present a united front against the land grabbers.

In Satkhira in 1998, all of the notable persons from all walks of life joined together to form a cooperative committee (Bhumiheen Uched Protirodh Songram Somonnoy Comity) to resist the eviction of the landless. Included under one umbrella were the professional organisations and associations of doctors, lawyers, teachers and the press club. The enlightened citizens formed the Satkhira cooperative committee for the struggle to resist the eviction of the landless, while at the same time the Dhaka-based natives of the district also formed their own committee to apply pressure from afar (*for more information on the Satkhira Landless Resistance Movement, please see booklet 1 in this series titled 'History'*).

Uttaran helped to keep these various groups synchronised and united, providing medical and legal assistance where it was needed, and collaborating with the ADAB – at that time the topmost NGO (at Khulna Division and at the central level) - and the ALRD, an organisation engaged in land reforms, to bring the plight of the landless to the forefront. The Chairman of ADAB placed a memorandum before the prime minister and senior ministers, detailing the justification of the demands made by the landless. It was through the hard-work and dedication of the bhumi committee and NGOs including Uttaran that these demands were entered into the limelight on the national stage.

Over three decades after it first began organising the landless movement in Satkhira, Uttaran still sees bhumi committees as an integral part of the facilitating approach to redistribution khasland in Bangladesh.

# Structure and guidelines of Bhumi Committees



## 1. Nature of the committee

The bhumi committee is a neutral, social citizen committee formed of voluntary individuals in collaboration with small, poor, marginalised landowner, landless and representative of civil society to help in implementing the land rights of all citizens (especially poor citizens).

## 2. Objective of the committee

Civil society committee helps to establish the rights and accessibility of small, poor, landless, marginalised landowners and landless people

## 3. Purpose of the committee

- Unity of backward landless people assisting the landless selection programme of government
- Raising awareness among the landless of the application for getting



- land recommending techniques to the landless men and women to form a Federation.
- Assist in the govt. activities in establishing rights of the landless and the modern land management system through digitalization.
- To raise awareness among the disadvantaged, poor, and marginalised land owners during the time of the digital survey and recording process
- Assist in the legal assistance activities in establishing the rights of the landless and obtaining khasland permanent settlement preserving the land rights of marginalised.
- To raise awareness of the circulation of the draft publication and the collection of new DP Khotian accordingly and resolve disputes at the field level during the digital survey and recording process
- To help in objection raising and solving during the digital survey and recording process
- To help facilitate the system of appeal during the digital survey and recording process

## 4. Qualifications for membership of the committee

- Personal belief in and commitment to protecting the land rights of disadvantaged, poor, and marginalised land owners
- Cultural worker, teacher, lawyer, journalist, freedom fighter, local government representative, or leader of a women's organization
- Socially active people with progressive values
- Upazila agricultural demesne management and landless selecting committee related people.

## Special Notes:

- If any member is a Chairman or Secretary of any Upazila, Zila or Central Committee then he/she can't be Chairman/Secretary of another committee
- If a person possesses multiple specialisation, then in accordance to the committee quota of appointment, he/she must be appointed in any one department. This means that only one member will be appointed in one field and in this way there will be separate

respective members for each department. Moreover, a single person cannot be appointed in different departments in the same organisation/institution

### 5. Structure of the bhumi committee

- Ward committee - consisting of 7 members
- Union committee - consisting of 15 members
- Upazila committee - consisting of 55 members
- District committee - consisting of 31 members
- Central committee - consisting of 31 members

### 6. Termination of membership

- a. If any member resigns, abandons, or withdraws membership
- b. If the activities of any member go against the interests of the committee, then their membership will be terminated on the production of proper evidence
- c. If any member leaves the locality or country
- d. If any member continuously remains absent for five meetings without providing any satisfactory reason
- e. If a member becomes involved with any unsocial or anti-State activities, then their membership will be terminated on the production of proper evidence
- f. If an individual's membership needs to be cancelled, then a show cause notice is sent to the associate members, and after self defense of that member the membership will be cancelled by the recommendations of a simple majority of members
- g. Besides the reasons mentioned above, if any member's social acceptance has been deemed to be tarnished beyond repair then the upazila committee can terminate their membership.

### 7. Responsibilities, liabilities and powers of a member

In the collective interests of the committee, each member must:

- a) Participate actively in decision making and implementation
- b) Participate in organisational discussions by attending the regular meetings
- c) Obey all the rules, ideology, and values of the committee.

### 10. Ward Land Committee

- a) In every level of committee, 20 percent of memberships will be reserved for women; later increasing to up to 30 percent
- b) In terms of member selection, primary school teachers, professors, young leaders, farmers, businesspeople, lawyers, other professionals and women representatives should be given priority
- c) The ward committee will be formed as follows:

SL	Position	Number
1	President	1
2	General Secretary	1
3	Legal Secretary	1
4	Press Secretary	1
5	Member	3

### 9. Union Land Committee

- a) According to the ex-officio right every ward committee's president will be a member of the union committee
- b) In every level of committee, 20 percent of memberships will be reserved for women; later increasing to up to 30 percent
- c) In terms of member selection, primary school teachers, professors, young leaders, farmers, business people, lawyers, other professionals and women representatives should be given priority
- d) The union committee will be formed as follows:

SL	Position	Number
1	President	1
2	General Secretary	1
3	Financial Secretary / Treasurer	1
4	Legal Secretary	1
5	Press Secretary	1
6	Member	10

## 8. Upazila Land Committee

- Along with the 55 members of the upazila committee, every union president will get the membership according to their ex-officio.
- Upazila level Bhumi Committee will be divided in two levels- General Committee and Executive Committee
- In every level of committee, 20 percent of memberships will be reserved for women; later increasing to up to 30 percent
- In terms of member selection, primary school teachers, professors, young leaders, farmers, businesspeople, lawyers, other professionals and women representatives should be given priority
- The upazila committee will be formed according to the below ranking:

SL	Position	Number
1	President	1
2	Vice-President	2
3	General Secretary	1
4	Joint Secretary	2
5	Organisational Secretary	1
7	Legal Secretary	1
8	Jolmahal Secretary	1
9	Women & child affairs Secretary	1

## 9. District Land Committee

The members of District Committee will total 31 and be divided as follows:

- Ex-officio Chairman and Secretary of every Upazila can be members of Bhumi Committee-
- One landless from every Upazila will be appointed representative of Bhumiheen Federation

- Respective Uttaran Project Coordinator will be appointed member-1 person
- Leader of women primary organisation at District Level
- Civil Lawyer at District Level-1 person
- Criminal Lawyer at District Level- 1 person
- Journalist at District Level-2 people
- Citizen organiser at District Level (one who works in favour of the landless)-1 person
- Govt. DKKBBC member at District Level- 1 person
- Govt. Water Body Management Committee member at District Level-1 person
- The others will be respectable people of the locality who were/are engaged with the movement of land and citizen rights

SL	Position	Number
1	President	1
2	Vice-President	2
3	General Secretary	1
4	Joint Secretary	2
5	Organisational Secretary	1
6	Finance Secretary/ Treasurer	1
7	Legal Secretary	1
8	Press & Media Secretary	1
9	Agricultural & Fisheries affairs secretary	1
10	Women & child affairs Secretary	1
11	Jolmahal management secretary	1
12	Office Secretary	1
13	Environmental affairs secretary	1
14	Members	16

## 9. Central Land Committee

The members of District Committee will total 31 and be divided as follows:

- a. Ex-officio Chairman of every Upazila committee can be members of Central Bhumi Committee- (8 persons)
- b. Ex-officio Chairman and Secretary of every District can be members of Bhumi Committee- (4 persons)
- c. 1 elected representative from every district will be member of landless Gono Unnayan Federation (2 persons)
- d. Uttaran Director and respective Project Coordinator will be considered a member (2 persons)
- e. 1 member will be appointed from the landless movement areas of Debhata-Kaliganj (1 person)
- f. Citizen organisers, who contribute actively to Land Rights Movement (2 persons)
- g. Minority/Indigenous/Antaz representative (1 person)
- h. People engaged with mass media 3 persons
- i. The others will be respectable people of the locality who were/are engaged with the movement of land and citizen rights

SL	Position	Number
1	President	1
2	Vice-President	2
3	General Secretary	1
4	Joint Secretary	2
5	Organisational Secretary	1
6	Finance Secretary/ Treasurer	1
7	Legal Secretary	1
8	Press & Media Secretary	1
9	Agricultural & Fisheries affairs secretary	1
10	Women & child affairs Secretary	1
11	Jolmahal management secretary	1
12	Office Secretary	1
13	Environmental affairs secretary	1
14	Members	16

## 11. Responsibilities of committee officers and members

### 11.1 Responsibilities of the president

- a) The president will be considered as the head of the committee
- b) The president will preside over all meetings
- c) The president will approve agenda of meeting
- d) In case of decision making, if the number of votes is equal then the president will take the decision by a casting vote
- e) Assists in decision making

### 11.2 Responsibilities of vice-president

- a) The vice-president will perform the responsibilities of the president in their absence
- b) The vice-president will assist in decision implementation.

### 11.3 Responsibilities of the general secretary

- a) The general secretary will be the executive head of the organisation
- b) They will call meetings after consulting with the president
- c) Will maintain good relations and a congenial atmosphere with the members
- d) Will lead the implementation of approved decisions
- e) Will present the action plan and report of the committee
- f) Will prepare and preserve all the organisational documents of the committee
- g) Will maintain liaisons with other organisations and institutions on behalf of the committee
- h) Will keep a log of meetings and approve and preserve meeting agendas
- i) Will maintain communication with the members to ensure they participate in all declared activities.

### 11.4 Responsibilities of the vice-general secretary

- a) The vice-general secretary will perform the responsibilities of general secretary in their absence.
- b) They will assist the general secretary as needed.

### 11.5 Responsibilities of the organisational secretary

- a) The organisational secretary will maintain regular communications with all members of the committee
- b) They will play a defined role in implementing decisions made by the committee

### 11.6 Responsibilities of the legal secretary

- a) The legal secretary will increase legal awareness around the digital land survey and recording process
- b) They will provide the legal support for executing decisions.

### 11.7 Responsibilities of the office secretary

- a) The office secretary will maintain all kinds of information, documents, and resources of the committee.

### 11.8 Responsibilities of the press secretary

- a) The press secretary will produce publicity of the work of the committee.

### 11.9 Responsibilities of the finance secretary

- a) The finance secretary will maintain the financial affairs of the committee
- b) They will keep all income-expenditure records,

### 11.10 Responsibilities of the active members

- a) The active members will positively participate in meetings
- b) They will participate in decision making processes
- c) They will assist the president and the secretaries as required
- d) They will help to implement approved decisions
- e) They will make an effort to protect and enhance the reputation of the committee
- f) They will participate actively in the digital survey and recording process.

## 12. Procedure of the board meeting

- a) Upazila, union and ward committee meetings must be held at least once every three months.
- b) Emergency board meetings may be called with 24 hours' notice in the event of an urgent situation or during the digital survey and recording process
- c) If more than one-third of members are present in the meeting then the quorum will be filled and a decision can be taken.
- d) If a quorum is not filled, then discussion can be conducted in the meeting but decisions cannot be taken.
- e) Discussions should be held serially according to the agenda.
- f) All present members will sign a register of the meeting
- g) Decisions should be taken on the basis of the participation and opinions of all members.



## 13. Member Inclusion

- a) In case of a vacancy in the committee, the board may appoint a new member to fill the vacancy
- b) If any member is so moved, then a new member can be included in his or her position if approved by the committee.

## 14. Membership Withdrawal

- a) Any member can withdraw their membership willingly.

## 15. Fund of the Committee

- Donation by the members
- Voluntary donation by the common people
- Voluntary donation by the benevolent
- Voluntary donation by the institutions who work to establish land rights
- Donation by various donors

## 16. Organisation Fund Management

- In order to keep account of all the financial transactions an account will be opened in a local bank. Financial transactions will take place with the joint signature of the Chairman and the Secretary
- If any expenses need to be incurred for the interest of the organisation, then it must be approved in a meeting

## 17. Reformation in Formation

- A written approval must be submitted to the Chairman if any addition or deductions are to be made to any of the Acts
- Chairman will distribute the proposal to everyone present in the meeting and chair the meeting with the agendas
- In the meeting of the Central Committee reformations will be made upon the opinion based on 2/3 population. In order to approve or disapprove of any reformations Uttaran and Bhumi Committee will jointly form a committee where reforms will be made and granted upon appeal.

## 18. Priority of the formation

If any Act of the Reformation remains unclear, incomprehensible, or not mentioned in the Acts then the explanation provided by the Central Committee has to be considered final.

## 19. Termination of the Federation:

- This organisation will not be terminated until and unless the rights of the landless are established
- Central Committee in consultation with Uttaran preserve the right to include, halt, exclude or terminate any Upazila or District Committee and simultaneously preserve the right to terminate membership of any Upazila or District member

# The Bhumi Committee in practise

**Venue:** Debhata Uttaran Office

**Bhumi Committee:** Debhata Upazila

1	Md Amzad Hossain	Businessman and local political leader	President
2	Md Nizamul Islam	Ex-member, chairman, and director of the rural electricity board	General Secretary
3	Md Abu Taleb	Journalist / college zoology teacher	Joint Secretary
4	Md Saiful Islam	Member of Union Parishad	Member
5	Md Abdul Wahab	Journalist / Freedom Fighter	Member
6	Pushpa Biswas	Member of Union Parishad	Member



### How many people are there in your committee?

**Abu Taleb:** “There are 55 people in total in our bhumi committee, of which 11 are executive committee members selected in accordance to our qualifications and experiences. We are drawn from across civil society.”

### How are you organised?

**Hamida Begum:** “There are three committee levels: upazila, district and central.” Meetings are normally held every three months but are also frequently called based on an emergency.”

### What would constitute an emergency?

**Abu Taleb:** “Such meetings are based on urgent situations, for example a mishap occurring in the society which requires immediate action like someone’s house being burnt down, someone’s land is being seized or people being thrown out of their houses. In these cases, teamwork is required to make a final decision such as taking these people to the district level.”



### How are you made aware of an emergency?

**Abdul Wahab:** “In case of occurrence of any problem, the leaders of the landless committees bring these to the attention of the bhumi committee members. The primary organisation informs the gono unnayan federation and the GUF presents the problems to the upazila bhumi committee.”



### What support can the bhumi committee provide?

“Our activities help to support the landless and provide them all with the legal support, and take their cases to various media such as press and print as necessary.”

### What support can the bhumi committee provide?

**Nizamul Islam:** “Due to the complexities of the law and order system, land possession is being distorted. These cases are taken to the High Court by the bhumi committee.”

**Abu Taleb:** “If any news or events require press attention, then a member of Uttaran staff has to take it into their consideration. The landless leaders bring it to the attention of the Uttaran staff and they in turn advise the bhumi committee, who have links with local, regional and national newspapers.”

### What linkages do you have with Uttaran?

**Abdul Wahab:** “Uttaran staff members and bhumi committee members are interdependent on each other. They support each other in turn.”

**Abu Taleb:** “Stories and pictures of deprived landless or burnt houses, along with their movements and rallies, are printed in newspapers with the aid from Uttaran.”

**Md Amzad Hossain:** “When a land is first getting registered, Uttaran bears all the costs of registry. Uttaran has also given a stipend of 1,000 BDT to those families who just received DCR to help with developing their livelihoods or other important matters.”

### What has been the biggest success of the bhumi committee?

**Md Amzad Hossain:** “When there was a movement for land rights in 1998, there were huge fights and conflicts among the people in which a lady named Jaheda even died (*see page 18 of booklet 1 in this series, titled ‘History’*). The bhumi committee stood by the landless in these tough times. The death of Jahed caused all the major political figures of Bangladesh like the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina, BNP opposition leader Khaleda Zia, former president Hussain Muhammad Ershad and others to visit Debhata and conduct sessions to console the landless. This has all been possible due to the devotion of the bhumi committee members.”



“Stories and pictures of deprived landless or burnt houses, along with their movements and rallies, are printed in newspapers with the aid of Uttaran.”

**Md Saiful Islam:** “The success of the landless is the success of the Bhumi Committee. Previously, the landless did not know where to file for applications for obtaining khasland.”

### What practical assistance can you provide to the landless people?

**Abu Taleb:** “There were so many landless without documents or proper land records. Laws are complex but even then we did not want to keep people waiting anymore. Previously the landless did not have any courage to move to places but with assistance from Uttaran and the bhumi committee, they can roam about freely. The administration respects the landless and the bhumi committee because they are not alone; they are united as a whole. The district administrator himself even came and distributed land record documents among them. The land grabbers now do not have the courage to torture the helpless and throw them out their residences because they are aware that the bhumi committee is at their side.”

### How did Uttaran help?

**Hamida Begum:** “Uttaran took the initiative of making a list of the landless and formed a group. Together with their help, they created pressure on the administration to give rightful land to the landless.”

### How do you feel about the time you give to the bhumi committee?

**Nizamul Islam:** “We are really proud of our work and achievements, especially when we achieve success. We feel sad when our cases fail.”

**Md Amzad Hossain:** “All the members of our bhumi committee have been associated with the common people for a very long time. They not only stand by the landless people, but also work against all the social injustices like child marriage and dowry, and arrange for safe drinking water, hygiene, sanitation, and the provision of electricity and so on.”

