ACCESS TO SAFE WATER & SANITATION FOR ALL

BEST PRACTICES AND APPROACHES FROM THE WASH SDG WAI SUB-PROGRAMME IN BANGLADESH

WASH SDG programme

WASH ALLIANCE International
Accelerating WASH

Simavi
Powerful women, healthy societies.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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1. INTRODUCTION

As part of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the international community has committed to ensuring access to safe water and sanitation for all by 2030 (SDG 6). There is still a long way to go. More than 2 billion people in the world do not have access to safely managed drinking water services, while 4.5 billion people, more than half the global population, lack access to safely managed sanitation services, severely compromising safe hygiene. This also puts progress on other SDGs in jeopardy. The effects of unsafe WASH[1] conditions on health (SDG 3) are far-reaching, while it is often women and girls who face the most severe consequences, compromising gender equality (SDG 5).

To respond to the challenge of ensuring universal safe water and sanitation, the Dutch government launched the 5-year WASH SDG Programme, running from 2017 until 2022. The programme is implemented by the WASH SDG Consortium, consisting of the WASH Alliance International (WAI)[2] , SNV and Plan Netherlands. This makes it a highly collaborative effort, bringing together a wide range of organizations with expertise on WASH. The programme aims to sustainably deliver access to, and use of, safe drinking water for at least 450,000 people and improve sanitation for 2 million people, in 4 African countries (Zambia, Tanzania, Uganda and Ethiopia) and 3 Asian countries (Bangladesh, Nepal and Indonesia).

In each of these countries, there are two or more sub-national programmes, each led by one of the WASH SDG Consortium Partners. The Bangladesh programme consists of two sub-national programmes. One is the Urban Sanitation programme, led by SNV. The second, and the focus of this report, is the WASH Alliance sub-programme, which is led by Simavi, and implemented in 7 municipalities, 2 rural sub-districts (17 Unions) and 3 tea gardens.

The programme has a dedicated Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) component with accompanying structures for data collection and reporting, focused on measuring and documenting progress against a set of performance indicators. Although essential, both for learning and accountability purposes, it does not necessarily uncover the approaches and practices that can explain the achieved outcomes.

For this reason, Simavi commissioned The Broker for additional analysis to capture the processes and approaches that enabled the local Bangladeshi partners to achieve their results on the ground. It is equivalent to an earlier knowledge project that The Broker carried out for Simavi, documenting approaches and experiences in the Watershed programme[3] .

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1. Water, Sanitation & Hygiene

2. The WASH Alliance International is a multi-national network of over 100 partners worldwide. The Netherlands chapter of WAI consists of 9 organizations: Simavi (lead), Amref Flying Doctors, Akvo, RAIN, WASTE, IRC, Wetlands, Practica and RUAF.

3. Goris, Y. (2021). Capacity Building in Bhola: Identifying approaches and experiences of implementers and local communities in the Watershed programme Bangladesh. The Broker report for Simavi.

This report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 will provide further details on the WASH Alliance sub-programme in Bangladesh, providing an overview of the main impact pathways, the local Bangladeshi civil society organisations implementing the programme on the ground, and the geographical locations. Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology that was used to collect the information that is analysed in this report. The next two chapters present the main findings. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the identified good practices, discussing them in relation to concrete examples from the programme. Chapter 5 goes a level deeper, discussing the factors that enabled good practices to come to fruition, while also highlighting some of the challenges that were encountered during implementation. Chapter 6 highlights the main recommendations and concludes.

2. THE WASH ALLIANCE (WAI) SUB- PROGRAMME IN BANGLADESH

The WASH Alliance sub-programme is primarily implemented in two districts in Southern Bangladesh, Satkhira and Barguna. In Bangladesh, each district is subdivided into rural upazilas and urban municipalities. The programme has been running since its start in six municipalities (Satkhira and Kalaroa in Satkhira District; and Barguna, Pathargatha, Amtali and Betagi in Barguna Distict) and two upazilas (Satkhira Sadar and Barguna Sadar). At a later stage, further locations were added: the municipality of Kalapara, in Pathuakali District in the south, 8 unions in Barguna and Tala Upzaila, as well as an area in the Tea Garden region, in the north-eastern part of the country.

The programme is organized around four pathways of change:

1.   Improving demand and use of equitable WASH services: The focus here is on raising awareness with households, schools, and communities about the importance of investing in water and sanitation facilities and practising safe hygiene behaviour. There is also attention to community-based monitoring to leverage relations between peers in order to sustain changed behaviour.

2.   Increased participation of women and the socially excluded: This pathway is aimed at economic and social empowerment of socially excluded groups and communities, including the landless and the extremely poor. Gender receives particular attention. By promoting female WASH entrepreneurs and decision-making power of women within households and in broader WASH sector governance, the needs and perspectives of women and girls will be better taken along in decision-making and service delivery.

3.   Improved public sector equitable and sustainable WASH service delivery and governance: This pathway focuses on strengthening the capacity of local government institutions at union and municipal level to design and implement inclusive public WASH sector policies. Through inclusive policy dialogues and bottom-up accountability, the quality of public service delivery and WASH governance can be improved, facilitating systemic change.

4.   Improved private sector sustainable and equitable WASH service delivery: The final pathway seeks to support local entrepreneurs in the WASH sector, linking them with (micro-) finance   institutions. Ensuring reliable and trustworthy suppliers of WASH products and services is essential in order to respond to, and sustain, increased demand. At the same time, it can provide a source of income for the entrepreneurs.

The WAI sub-programme does not invest in hard infrastructure. Instead, its intervention logic centres on capacity building of key actors to allow them to play their role in stimulating systemic change for a sustainable WASH sector. Implementation on the ground is taken care of by 6 local Bangladeshi NGOs. Rooted in the local context, they are best placed to support the different actors in the WASH system. The Bangladeshi implementing partners are:

- DORP (Development Organisation for the Rural Poor). NGO with decades of experience in diverse areas of development. Within WASH, DORP has particular experience on governance and community-engagement in inclusive budgeting and budget tracking. Additionally, DORP has worked on rights-based approaches to WASH, private sector development, and gender and social inclusion.

- Hope for the Poorest (HP). Linked with micro- finance provider Association for Social Advancement (ASA) and specialised on WASH entrepreneurship promotion and private sector participation.

- Uttaran. Local NGO, with its roots in Southwestern Bangladesh, focused on social development, employing a rights-based approach to alleviate poverty and empower poor communities. Within WASH, Uttaran specializes in community mobilisation and awareness raising , gender and social inclusion. Uttaran has a niche area of social mapping, community based monitoring and ensuring people's rights.

- Stichting Land Ontwikkelings Project Bangladesh (SLOPB). Local NGO from Southern Bangladesh focused on community-based development and local empowerment for sustainability. Within WASH, the emphasis is on inclusive budgeting and awareness creation and providing WASH services through revolving funds.

- WaterAid Bangladesh (WAB). International NGO focused on the WASH sector in Bangladesh, with particular experience on policy advocacy and national level stakeholder coordination. WAB supports other partners with policy advocacy and implementation.

- Practical Action (PA). International NGO promoting multi-stakeholder collaboration to transform the lives of poor people, both in urban areas and the countryside. In the area of WASH, the organisation has developed exper-tise on public governance, particularly in urban settings, and technological innovation.

- In addition to these core partners, the programme is also implemented in collaboration with **IDEA**, a partner sub-con-tracted by **WAB** in the Tea Gardens, and **Dalit**, a partner sub-contracted by Uttaran.

Within the WASH SDG Programme, the six organisations work in different geographical areas and some focus on particular pathways of change. First of all, there is the '4-city-programme', which is run by HP, Uttaran and Practical Action in 4 urban municipalities (Barguna, Satkhira, Kalaroa and Kalapara). The division of responsibilities is primarily organised around the different pathways, whereby Uttaran focuses on demand-creation and inclusion, HP on supply-side and entrepreneurship, and PA on the institutional pathway around public sector governance. Besides, there is also a geographic element to the division of tasks, as in each of the 4 municipalities one organisation has been assigned the lead role. The lead partner in a municipality is expected to not only work on their own pathway of focus, but rather to stimulate integrated approaches, linking up the activities of the three partners on the different pathways.

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[4]Kalapara was added at a later stage

In the other geographic programme areas, namely the municipalities of Patharghata, Amtali and Betagi, and in the rural upazilas of Barguna Sadar, Satkhira Sadar and Tala Upazila, localities are divided between implementation partners (DORP, SLOPB and Uttaran) so that, in these cases, only one partner is working in each location.

WaterAid Bangladesh, meanwhile, is focused on influencing national level policy processes, involving close collaboration with central ministries and other stakeholders.

Finally, just like Kalapara municipality, the Tea Garden area, in Sreemangal upazila of Moulvibazar District in north-eastern Bangladesh, was only added at a later stage, when the Bangladesh programme received additional funding. HP and WaterAid are the two Bangladeshi partners working there. HP, WAB and Idea are jointly working in tea gardens. HP focuses on private entrepreneurs and micro finance, while WaterAid and IDEA focused on gender and social inclusion, demand creation, and public sector development pathways.

Simavi, as the lead partner of the WASH Alliance International, is responsible for overall programme management and coordination. The Simavi team, based out of the capital Dhaka, is also tasked with supporting the local Bangladeshi partners in implementing the programme, through capacity strengthening initiatives, and seeks to establish effective collaboration and coordination across the different partners.

The other international partners of the WAI have a technical assistance role to provide support on their area of expertise to the Bangladeshi implementing organisations. This assistance takes place on the basis of a demand-driven model, so that the local implementing partners are in the position to take the initiative. They may reach out with requests for assistance to the international alliance partner that would most fit their need.

- **RUAF/HIVOS** on multi-stakeholder approaches and integrated planning.
- **WASTE** on sanitation services and WASH infrastructure planning and development.
- **IRC** on monitoring WASH services
- **Akvo** on monitoring and evaluation and digital data collection tools
- **RAIN/Aidenvironment** on the technical and environmental sustainability of WASH solutions
- **PRACTICA** on rural water business models, asset management tool development and technical implementation support.

3. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this study is to uncover and document the underlying mechanisms and approaches that are driving impact in the WASH SDG WAI sub-programme in Bangladesh. This will enable the learning of lessons, both for the programme partners themselves and for interested external stakeholders.

The Broker's approach consists of two main elements: (i) capture impact narratives through three case studies of specific interventions by specific partners in specific locations; and (ii) identify and document best practices that enabled impact through in-depth interviews with programme staff.

Hereby it is important to clarify what is meant by the term 'best practice'. The implementing partners had already drawn up descriptions of best practices, but often these were in fact descriptions of successful interventions. For the purpose of this study, we understand 'best practice' as a type of approach, or way of working, rather than a specific intervention. Indeed, the identified best practices will be illustrated by means of a range of different interventions that share a relevant common element in terms of approach.

The Broker used the following methodology and sources of information to produce this report.

- **Analysis of available documentation.** The Broker reviewed existing write-ups of best practices and impact narratives that had been drawn up by the local partners, as well as the Mid-Term Review and Annual Reports, to identify best practices to be documented in more detail, and assess information gaps.

- **Initial round of interviews with Bangladeshi implementing organisations.** Introductory meetings to get an overview of all the activities and potential best practices and impact narratives from the different organisations.

- **Quick-Scan** presenting the main findings of the initial review and interviews, yielding a long-list of best practices and brief analysis of how existing documentation can be strengthened.

- **Interviews with the international members of the WAI-alliance.** Capture the experiences of the international partners and collect their input in terms of best practices and lessons learnt.

- **In-depth interviews with local implementing organisations.** This round of longer in-depth interviews aimed at distilling concrete best practices. The interviews started by discussing two or three types of interventions in great detail, talking through the problem-analysis, intervention logic, challenges and results. This was followed by a discussion of programme management aspects to identify factors that allowed best practices to emerge.

- **Field visits and stakeholder interviews.** Following the in-depth interviews, three types of interventions were selected to be documented in more detail. A local researcher travelled to the project area to interview the implementing partners, beneficiaries and other relevant stakeholders.

The impact stories of the three selected specific interventions were captured in 2-pager story sheets, which are included in the Annex of this study

4. BEST PRACTICES FOR SUSTAINABLE IMPACT IN WASH PROMOTION

This chapter will detail the best practices that emerge from the work and experiences of the local implementing partners. A best practice refers to an approach, or way of working. Each section starts with a general introduction, followed by examples from different implementing partners within the programme. others and drive change.

4.1 CREATING COALITIONS FOR CHANGE

WASH outcomes are the result of an intricate interplay between many different factors and actors that combine and interact within the wider WASH system. Significant and sustainable change in outcomes requires adaptations to that system. Such changes are rarely the result of individual action. Rather, it demands that different actors in the system get together and collaborate. Organising such collaboration can be challenging, due to different interests and perspectives and collective action problems. A crucial element for stimulating effective collaboration is getting the right people together, thus creating effective coalitions for change. This demands careful selection and facilitation, geared to the specific context. In some cases, it may be important to simply involve as many people and organisations as possible. In other cases, too large a number may inhibit the effectiveness of the coalition. For all coalitions, it is important to identify and engage a number of very committed and pro-active individuals who can motivate others and drive change.

One example from the WAI sub-programme in Bangladesh relates to the interventions of **DORP** and **Uttaran** aimed at strengthening inclusive governance and bottom-up participation. Traditionally, policy making and budgeting for the WASH sector took place behind the closed doors of local government. There was little to no dialogue with citizens about the details. Plans and budgets predominantly reflected the ideas of local government institutions, while those segments of society with the largest influence and access to local government officials were most likely to have their concerns addressed. The majority of citizens did not feel involved. They only saw the final outcomes, which are often disappointing given persistent challenges in improving WASH services, giving rise to distrust. To break this cycle, local NGOs like DORP and Uttaran support the creation of many different types of citizen committees, to engage with the union parishad and municipality about WASH governance issues.

This creates more structured mechanisms through which citizens can discuss their needs and concerns in the area of WASH with the local   government. DORP's and Uttaran's long-standing experience with this kind of interventions shows the added value of creating coalitions that cut across society. Just mobilising the most marginalised communities to engage and lobby local government officials may have little impact when their demands consistently fall on deaf ears. It works much better to pro-actively link up the marginalised groups with more powerful and influential members of the community, such as education professionals, businessmen or former government officials. The key is to identify those with influence and power who also have an interest in or feel strongly about the need for improved WASH governance for marginalised groups.

Local NGOs, with strong connections throughout the local community, are best-placed to kick-start effective Citizen Committees by identifying and engaging those individuals, both among marginalised groups and from more influential sections of society, who are or could become dynamic change-makers.Overall, the programme directly supported the creation or reactivation of more than 200 WASH Citizen Committees. These include different types, such as Village WASH Committees (VWC), Ward Level Wash Committees (WLWC), Mother Groups, Union Dalit Federation (UDF) and others.

The first Story Sheet in the Annex, on inclusive WASH governance, provides the concrete example of the WASH Citizen Committee of Pathargatha municipality.

Amongst other results, the discussions in the Citizen Committee led to the inclusion in the municipal budget of dedicated resources for   investments in public toilets.

Another example of the importance of coalitions comes from the work of Hope for the Poorest (HP) in terms of supporting local WASH entrepreneurs. Although the focus of its interventions is on supporting individual entrepreneurs, the importance of the sector-specific enabling environment cannot be underestimated. For that reason, HP also supports the creation of WASH small business and cooperative associations, joining all WASH-sector entrepreneurs in a given municipality. HP also began supporting such specific structures for women WASH entrepreneurs.

Without such joint structures, each individual entrepreneur is left to themselves to engage with the municipality on issues that are needlessly constraining their operations. Through coaching and regular meetings, HP provides support to the associations to establish clear internal processes that do not depend on HP support to run in the long-term. The Associations are a platform for WASH entrepreneurs to meet, learn and support each other. Just like in the case of WASH Citizen Committees, getting together to raise concerns collectively is much more effective. It is also positive from the government's perspective. Rather than having to deal with many actors individually, it can engage with the association. This saves a lot of time and political manoeuvring. The programme led to the creation of 10 WASH small business and cooperative associations in different towns and cities.

A final example, this time at the national level, comes from the policy advocacy work of WaterAid Bangladesh (WAB). In 2020, the government adopted a revised Pro-Poor WASH Strategy that includes, among other things, a generous subsidy for WASH services for the poorest and marginalised groups of society. The creation of a coalition uniting a wide range of different stakeholders was essential in order to reach this outcome. There are many stakeholders with a general interest in pushing for a pro-poor WASH Strategy, including many different national and international NGOs, multilateral organisations such as UNICEF, academic researchers, and others. Each of them, however, has their own points of emphasis. When they all lobby the central government separately, using their own contacts and points of entry, a successful and coherent end result is unlikely. The creation of synergies and alignment between the different actors is vital, but also requires a lot of work. WAB was actively involved in forming a working committee, as a way to get actors around the table to seek alignment. Sometimes, this requires individual organisations to compromise on the inclusion of detailed issues of their particular interest, in order to reach a feasible joint advocacy strategy. In this case, alignment was achieved, which played an important role in shaping coherent engagement with the national government. The end result of this was the development and adoption of a coherent and widely supported pro-poor WASH Strategy.

A further example of effective joint advocacy in which the various partners played an important role is the successful campaign to get the government to exempt locally produced sanitary napkins from Value Added Tax. This decision, taken in 2021, increases the access to this important product for women and girls throughout Bangladesh.

4.2 PATIENCE TO OVERCOME RESISTANCE

Change is never easy. The previous section showed how carefully selected coalitions, driven by dynamic changemakers, can get things moving. That is just the beginning, however, in most cases, resistance will be encountered along the way. Sometimes, resistance is driven by opposed interests. After all, change, or even progress, is not always a win-win for everyone. Those benefiting from the status quo may lose out. Often though, people and organisations are simply accustomed to the ways things worked in the past, and resist change for that reason. To overcome resistance, it is important to understand what is motivating it, what are the underlying concerns. That understanding provides the basis for meaningful engagement of potential forces of resistance. Such engagement can consist of discussion and dialogue to alleviate concerns, or to show how change can be in their benefit too. Sometimes, it is required to make compromises to get people on board. Generally, dealing with resistance demands a patient approach.

The efforts by DORP to promote open budgeting by municipalities and local governments at the upazila level, and to get them to collaborate with the WASH Citizen Committees provide a good example. As the local government councillors were used to drafting the budget behind closed doors, they were hesitant at first about making the process more transparent. They feared this would compromise their authority. Changing their mind, and getting local government on board required a patient and careful approach by the DORP staff, in close collaboration with local partners and civil society organisations. They would start with informal conversations with local government personnel, seeking to understand their concerns and day-to-day reality, and gradually gaining their trust. As the conversations progressed, they started explaining in more detail what open budgeting involves, and how local government also stands to gain from the process.

By engaging the citizen committee, the local government gets access to information they did not have before, improving the quality of their plans. Furthermore a transparent dialogue also leads to a better understanding by citizens of the difficulties and constraints faced by government. This can promote a more positive attitude by citizens of their local government, which facilitates their operations across the board. The first Story Sheet in the Annex provides the concrete example of open budgeting success in Pathargatha municipality.

Hope for the Poorest actively seeks to support female WASH entrepreneurship as a catalyst for socio- economic women's empowerment. Furthermore, on the customer side, it is easier for women to interact with female entrepreneurs about the sanitary facilities in the household than with male entrepreneurs. Therefore, female WASH entrepreneurship makes it more likely that women's needs are given due attention in sanitary service provision.

But Hope for the Poorest is very well aware of the sensitivities around female WASH entrepreneurship and always makes sure to carefully assess the local context before training and coaching a beneficiary. They first organise extensive discussions with the family and influential members of the wide community in the neighbourhood, especially with those who may be critical of the idea. It is important not to condemn them for their views, but engage them and try to convince them of the benefits and take away their fear that becoming a WASH entrepreneur diminishes a woman's respect or ability to be a good mother. Introducing them to women who have already become successful WASH entrepreneurs can be helpful in this regard. Across the programme, more than 400 entrepreneurs were successfully supported, out of which 169 are female. Story Sheet 2 in the Annex presents the concrete case of two entrepreneurs supported by HP in Satkhira Municipality.

The patient approach can also be seen in the work of Uttaran, DORP, IDEA and SLOPB to promote the establishment of menstrual health management (MHM) facilities at schools and, in a general sense, more open discussion of menstrual health. The lack of such discussions, and of dedicated facilities, leads to significantly higher rates of absenteeism among girls, as it makes them feel unsafe coming to school during their menstruation. Many schools do not have any dedicated WASH facilities for girls at all, let alone specific menstrual health corners where they can get access to and dispose of sanitary napkins. Sometimes, the problem is just to get the conversation off the ground, as it is considered a taboo to talk about. Then, local partners can come to the school and facilitate such discussions.

At other times, though, there may be active resistance on the part of more conservative individuals on the School Management Committee to the idea of promoting open discussion of girls' menstrual health and providing dedicated facilities. Such cases demand a more cautious and patient approach by the Uttaran team, gradually trying to convince them that providing MHM-facilities will improve their students' well- being, reduce absenteeism and improve school performance, a core objective of the management committee. It also demands a strategic approach, for instance by making sure that you have at least some influential people, such as the local government education officer and one or two senior members of the School Management Committee, on your side before discussing the issue with the entire committee. That may help convince more sceptical committee members. In total, the programme supported the establishment of 95 Menstrual Health Management facilities at schools. Story Sheet 3 in the Annex provides more details in relation to one specific example, the Nobarun High School in Satkhira.

A particularly challenging environment was faced by WaterAid Bangladesh and its local partner IDEA in particular, in trying to improve WASH governance in the Tea Garden areas in Moulvibazar District in north-eastern Bangladesh. This is an area with a highly particular institutional history. In colonial times it was run by the tea estates, an institutional model that found some form of continuation after independence in the form of the Tea Garden Authorities. They are leasing land from the government, but some regard it as effectively being a state within the state, as they are also responsible for public service provision in the area. However, the Tea Garden Authorities, institutionally falling under the Ministry of Commerce's

Tea Board, are primarily focused on sustaining competitive tea exports, even if this means very low wages for the tea plantation workers. General living conditions, including in terms of available WASH facilities, are much lower than in other parts of the country.

The Tea Garden authorities have been reticent to let the central government's WASH-department deploy activities and make investments in the area, and they have been even more suspicious of letting NGOs like WAB and IDEA work there, fearing that they will mobilise labour unrest. Being able to get anything done in such a challenging political and institutional environment is extremely difficult. WAB and IDEA had to adopt a patient approach, engaging the local authorities through local volunteers. Together, they sought to convince the authorities that it is also in their own interest to ensure better WASH-conditions for the plantation workers. Better conditions will improve the workers' health and well-being, and as a result, their ability to work on the plantations. The interaction with labour unions, ponchait and other groups that led to the positive results is further detailed below in the section on interactions between policy and practice.

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5 It should be noted that the different local partners have different sets of criteria on what MHM-facilities entail.
  Generally, it includes a proper toilet door that can be locked and a bin space for changing cloth, for instance.

4.3 LEVERAGING INTERACTIONS BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE

Often, when thinking of policy advocacy and influencing, we envision a linear top-down pathway. A national policy is adopted by the central government, which then needs to implement it, through its various ministries, departments, and local governments. There is another pathway, however. With the national policy in hand, citizens and NGOs at the local level can go to their local government officials to demand change. Through this channel, policies also affect internal government dynamics. Government officials at the lowest level can pro-actively use policies adopted at the national level to internally lobby for the things they need to work on implementation, including financial and human resources. In other words, adopting a policy is only the first step. Actual implementation is extremely hard work, and requires both top-down and bottom-up engagement, both within and outside of government.

Such interactions are very visible in the work of WaterAid Bangladesh (WAB) and its local partner IDEA. Previous sections highlighted two different dimensions of their work. On the one hand, there is WAB's work on national WASH policy advocacy. On the other hand, its local partner IDEA directly implements pro-poor programmes on the ground in the challenging context of the tea garden region, working for instance with the communities on improved access to drinking water and with the local schools to improve sanitation facilities. These two areas of work, national-level policy advocacy and programme implementation on the ground, influence each other. Central government departments have always had a hard time getting the space to work in the region, where the Tea Garden authorities are regarded as the lead actor who decide what happens.

With the newly revised pro-poor WASH Strategy in hand, adopted at the level of central government, WAB, together with local partner IDEA, started carefully mobilising and coaching different actors to demand change. Three types of actors are of particular importance. Firstly, the local labour unions, who act on behalf of the tea plantation workers. Secondly, the Ponchait, or the traditional local leaders, who are selected by the tea plantation workers communities to interact with the tea garden authorities on issues of social welfare. And thirdly, the lowest-tier civil servants, at the sub-district level, who previously had not been asking the central government for financial allocations for the WASH sector in the tea garden area, based on the understanding that this was the responsibility of the Tea Garden Authorities. By pro-actively disseminating and discussing the new pro-poor WASH Strategy of the central government with all these different actors, WAB and IDEA started building momentum for these different actors to engage with more powerful actors higher up, both within the Tea Garden Authorities, and within the central government. They started insisting that there is in fact a need for the central government to become more engaged in the region, to allocate resources for WASH services in the Tea Garden areas. After all, the pro-poor WASH Strategy is a national strategy that is valid for all Bangladeshis, including the tea garden communities.

A similar dynamic can be seen in the work of SLOPB, DORP and Uttaran to promote the establishment of MHM-facilities at schools. Following surveys showing the absence of dedicated facilities for girls at most schools, and the negative impacts on girls' well-being, the central government adopted a circular demanding that all schools ensure adequate facilities.

Although of great importance, subsequent developments confirm that a change in policy is just a step in a long trajectory. Implementation does not follow automatically, meaning in this case that the circular did not immediately lead to improved facilities. The policy change was not without effect, however. Organisations like SLOPB, DORP and Uttaran, working with schools and communities on the ground, can use the policy change in their advocacy work. Having an official government circular they can refer to really helps in kick-starting discussions at the school-level, mobilising students to demand better facilities and getting school management officials to take these demands seriously.

4.4 INFORMATION FOR CHANGE

Information can be seen as the oxygen that is required on a continuous basis to feed and sustain processes of change. Different interventions and experiences of implementing organisations within the programme illustrate different dimensions of the importance of information.

First of all, as people and organisations get used to the way things are done, information about alternative models can be a crucial facilitator of change. It enables people to envision different ways of doing things, which is essential to mobilise action. Many of the implementing partners effectively integrate this dimension into their strategies, by using role models and examples that people can easily relate to. Hope for the Poorest, for instance, sets up interactions between women who are potentially interested in becoming WASH entrepreneurs, but still have some doubts, and women who come from a similar background who have already become successful female WASH entrepreneurs. As many women do not know of other female WASH entrepreneurs, and because traditional social norms dictate that it is a male-profession, introducing potential beneficiaries to role models is a very effective way of helping them to envision a future WASH entrepreneurship role for themselves. Exposing people to relatable examples does not have to take place through physical interactions, however. In promoting dedicated MHM-facilities at schools, for instance, Uttaran has found that showing videos of similar schools where such facilities have been installed can be of great help to increase the self- confidence of students and teachers to lobby with their school management committee for the need to establish such facilities in their own school.

A second dimension of the role of information relates to its importance for designing and implementing policy. Local governments need good information on the situation on the ground, to understand the problems that policy could help solve, and to get a sense of where the needs are highest. In the absence of such information from the ground, allocation of public investments takes place without being grounded in evidence. Then, political connections or individual communities' ability to mobilise, are likely to determine public resource allocation. Through better information collection and sharing by NGOs, the quality of public policy can be strengthened. The WASH SDG Programme partners, notably DORP, Uttaran and SLOPB, have contributed to this through the use of social mapping tools. Such participative tools seek to monitor and document WASH service provision at the local level, together with communities.

Each partner meets with different community members. With the help of a map, they identify the households and key features of the area. For each household they assess the WASH service level according to the JMP ladder[6]. Simavi and IRC are also working on a tracking methodology to systematically collect information, using not only the SDG framework, but also the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation (HRWS) framework. The role of the partners is important because they have to identify people who can attend and meet with them.

Partners also facilitate the process, and use the data to discuss gaps with the local authorities. Ultimately, the local authorities can facilitate the process, but the local CSOs have a strong role to play in ensuring that the discussions are representative of the realities of the different members of the community.

Improving exchange of information is also needed to guide actors in navigating a complex system. Here, the WASH Desks that are promoted by Practical Action, Uttaran, SLOPB and DORP provide a good illustration. The WASH system is made up of many actors, with different roles and responsibilities, and is guided by a large range of strategies, policies and regulations. For an individual citizen, it can be daunting to navigate this space and get answers to specific questions or feedback on specific complaints. Dedicated WASH Desks, located at the local government's office, can fulfil an important role as a first point of contact for citizens with queries. These desks are staffed by local government officers, who can answer questions from citizens directly if possible, or refer citizens to the right institution. A concrete example is to provide information on dedicated public tube well mechanics. Each sub-district (upazila) has four such tube well mechanics for maintaining public WASH infrastructure, who are employed by the Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE). Most citizens, however, do not even know that such public mechanics are available, let alone their names or contact details. Where applicable, the WASH Desk staff can refer citizens to these mechanics. Furthermore, many of the WASH Desks have a notice board where information and contact details of the public mechanics, or WASH entrepreneurs, is made available. Finally, some WASH Desks organise for a public mechanic to be present at the desk itself on pre-announced dates and times, so that citizens can pass by to interact with the mechanic directly. The WASH Desks aim to take up additional roles going forward, such as promoting accountability, by enabling the population to provide feedback and file complaints, or providing information on tariffs or the availability of water.

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[6] The Joint Monitoring Programme service ladders are used to benchmark and compare service levels across countries

5. LESSONS LEARNT: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

This chapter will highlight elements related to programme design and management that are important to enable best practices to emerge on the ground, based on the experiences of the WAI Bangladesh sub-programme. It will highlight features that were successfully adopted in the programme, as well as some challenging factors that could be addressed in future programmes to further boost best practice development and results.

5.1 COLLABORATION BETWEEN PARTNERS FOR CROSS-LEARNING

In a complex programme such as the WAI sub-programme in Bangladesh, with many different implementing partners, there is much scope for learning from each others' approaches and best practices. The programme has invested a lot in facilitating such learning through regular joint exchange meetings. This has resulted in many concrete examples of mutual learning taking place between different partners, for instance between Uttaran and DORP. Uttaran promoted a Community-Based Monitoring approach to awareness raising on the importance of safe hygiene. By creating and facilitating exchange through active community peer groups, Uttaran successfully leveraged social relations for scaling up the results of its awareness raising efforts. In regular exchange sessions, Uttaran and DORP would present on each others' experiences. The Community-Based Monitoring was a tool that DORP had not yet taken up within its own programmes. Following the sessions with Uttaran, it adopted this approach in its own intervention area, tinkering to make it fit the local context and the organisation's own particular expertise.

In reverse, Uttaran, SLOPB and other partners learnt from DORP about its innovative approach on facilitating budget tracking approaches, including open budget sessions and inclusive and gender-responsive WASH budget monitoring. As Uttaran and SLOPB had traditionally focused more on working with communities directly, rather than working with local government officials, they were very eager to learn from their DORP colleagues, who organized a 3-day training session and supported the other partners with making concrete follow-up plans In this way, best practices can spread throughout the programme, and strengthen the capacity of the local implementing partners. Via this mechanism, the positive results will not be limited to this programme alone, but can also strengthen other programmes in which Uttaran takes part, today and in the future.

5.2 KEEPING AN EYE ON FEASIBILITY

Best practices can only come to fruition when implementing organisations understand what is feasible given the local context. In turn, it is important that funding agencies trust the assessment made by local implementing partners, so that they are not pushed to produce results that are not feasible given the local context.

For instance, the WASH Desks promoted by Practical Action, Uttaran, SLOPB and DORP run into the challenge of limited government human resources to staff these desks, or to respond to citizen queries or demands. It is important to take such constraints into account, rather than being overambitious and aiming for permanently-staffed WASH Desks as a programme outcome. This would not be feasible and, more importantly, would draw scarce public sector human resources away from other tasks. In such a constrained context, it is better to design WASH Desk models on the basis of flexible arrangements, rather than permanent availability and operation.

Practical Action and DORP have been creative in finding such flexible arrangements that fit the local context. For instance, some of the WASH Desks only have a member of staff present on certain days of the week. On the other days, however, the physical space where the WASH Desk is located is not shut. Citizens have open access to the location, where they can find relevant information, such as the contact details of the public WASH mechanics, but also a registry where they may leave their contact details if they wish to be called back by the WASH Desk officer.

In promoting and supporting female WASH entrepreneurs, Hope for the Poorest also pays close attention to feasibility and context-sensitivity. As described in the section on overcoming forces of resistance, the organisation makes sure to first engage important people in the social surroundings of a potential beneficiary. When influential members of the family or wider community are not on board with the idea, then insisting on it can lead to failure and frustration. Carefully assessing how far to go in terms of pushing the idea in each situation is an important part of the work of HP. In general, then, it is important for programme management to recognise that promoting female WASH entrepreneurship in conservative settings is a challenging endeavour, as many different pieces of a puzzle need to fall into place. Integrating this perspective into performance assessments is important, as overambitious targets could lead to superficial results and broken dreams.

5.3 SUSTAINABILITY: OWNERSHIP, LONG-TERM OUTLOOK AND FLEXIBILITY

Sustainability of interventions deserves to be put left, right and centre. As pointed out by monitoring assessments during the programme's duration, such as the sustainability check, this is a point of attention. Some of the interventions aimed at strengthening local WASH governance were initiated by the local implementing partners. They dedicated a lot of effort to obtaining the buy-in from local officials, through early and pro-active engagement, discussions and critical thinking. For the establishment of WASH Desks, for instance, local partners facilitated Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) between local governments, civil society organisations and entrepreneurs, detailing the functions of WASH Desks and the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders. Not with standing such efforts, processes of change that are initiated by local NGOs, but need to be continued later on by local governments independently, will always carry the risk of not being sustained after the end of the programme. Time will tell, for instance, whether the idea of WASH Desks caught on with local government officials to the extent that they will keep running it after engagement efforts coming from the WASH SDG programme will come to an end. Similar risks exist in relation to the city sanitation plans or digital solutions that were developed for municipal governments.

To maximise the potential for long-lasting and sustainable change, early and deep engagement and ownership by beneficiaries from the very beginning is crucial. Another effective approach is to integrate interventions into existing structures.

For instance, many of the implementing partners went to great lengths to link the new Citizen Committees to existing institutions, like Upazila Standing Committees, that serve a similar purpose but missed the participative element. It is often better to start from what is already existing and work to improve its functioning, rather than to set up new parallel structures from scratch. Setting up entirely new structures should happen only if there is clear demand to do so from the beneficiary side. Then, DORP adjusted its focus: By stressing that meaningful engagement with local government through participation in citizen committees is not just a nice opportunity provided by DORP as an NGO, but actually a human right, they managed to strike a different chord. This approach proved more effective in stimulating active participation in the citizen committees.

Simultaneously, DORP began using the Make Rights Real approach, whereby they discuss what the role of local government authorities is in making these rights a reality.

The local partners praised the programme management for providing the space and flexibility to adjust interventions along the way. At the same time, some of the external partners pointed at scope for improvement, highlighting that there could be more active guidance within the programme to stimulate and facilitate continuous internal reflection on activities and challenges. The coordinating partner organized bi-annual workshops and regular meetings to reflect on progress and possible adjustments. There could be scope to increase the focus and structure of these sessions. One promising avenue could be to adopt elements of approaches centred around Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA).

Besides ownership and engagement, sustainability also benefits from a long-term perspective, geared towards systemic changes. In a development cooperation context, this can be challenging, as funding agencies mostly want to be able to show concrete results in the short term. The local implementing partners in the WAI Bangladesh sub-programme were highly appreciative of the fact that, in this case, they were given the space to work on long-term challenges. Many of their representatives stressed the difference in this regard with many other programmes.

Finally, achieving sustainable results demands the flexibility to engage in true learning-by-doing, adjusting interventions along the way, and this certainly happened in the WASH SDG Programme. DORP, for instance, was able to adapt its community engagement along the way, towards a more rights-based approach. At first, community engagement took place primarily on the basis of information-sharing, telling citizens about the opportunities to participate in citizen committees to discuss relevant WASH issues directly with government officials. Real and meaningful participation remained limited, however.

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The PDIA approach is characterized by zooming in on very specific and carefully defined problems, seen within the local context. From the problem-definition, it lays out an experiential, yet highly structured approach, whereby a lot of learning takes places through very frequent iterations of possible interventions[7].

A final challenge in relation to sustainability that was highlighted by several interviewees is the high rate of staff turn-over, both with implementing partners of the programme, and with external stake-holders, like local governments. Having developed a productive working relationship with a high-level official, such as a Mayor, the departure of such a key individual,

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[7] More information on PDIA can be found in Andrews, M., L.Pritchett, S.Samji and M.Woolcock (2015). 'Building capability by delivering results: putting Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) principles into practice'. A Governance Practitioner's Notebook: Alternative Ideas and Approaches, 123-133. Paris: OECD

following elections or otherwise, has large implications for the sustainability of results. A key lesson, therefore, is that engagement should never centre on one individual alone, but should target people throughout an organisation, at different levels of hierarchy. The local partners are very well aware of this issue, and have invested in broadening their relations and engagement. Even then, the departure of a key individual can still mean a major setback for the sustainability of results. To further reduce this risk in future programmes, it could be worth engaging in more political economy analysis at the local level, which can help to identify political dynamics and find ways to frame the programme's interventions in such a way that they are aligned with local political imperatives.

5.4 LOCAL LEADERSHIP AND HIGH-LEVEL STEERING

The local implementing partners are highly enthusiastic about the set-up of the programme, as it provides them with a lot of space to develop, adjust and run their own interventions. There is no micro-management by the donor, which stimulates ownership and creativity.

At the same time, it is important for the coordinating actor to guarantee overall coherence, and collaboration between the different sub-programmes. Some stakeholders stressed that the integration between the four different pathways (demand, supply, governance, inclusion) could have been much stronger. In a number of municipalities, three different local partners were active, each on different pathways. Relations between the different partners were good, and exchanges took pl ace at monthly or quarterly meetings, but there was no truly integrated programming at the activity-level. That would have required much more frequent interactions between the partners. A truly integrated approach, with direct links between specific efforts to promote demand, boost supply and improve governance may have even reached stronger results.

Similarly, fruitful collaboration between local partners and external partners did not always emerge spontaneously. Particularly the smaller local partners typically find it harder to formulate and voice their needs, or absence of needs, for technical assistance from external partners. This may require more active steering, support and guidance by the coordinating actor. In the chosen set-up, the external partners were engaged to support individual local partners, based on their demand. That did not lead to effective support for the integrated aspect of the programme, stimulating effective ways to bring the pathways together. It can also lead to missed opportunities. Practical Action, for instance, has been working extensively on digital tools and solutions for local government. At the same time, one of the external partners (Akvo) has particular expertise on digital tools and solutions. The link between them, however, was never made, since Akvo mostly works with SLOPB. The external partners knew what their direct local counterpart organisations were doing, but did not have much information on what other local organisations were doing within the programme. Furthermore, they had little idea of what the other external partners were doing. More pro-active programme-level steering could have dedicated more time and human resources to sharing such information between the various partners and pro-actively identifying and exploiting opportunities for collaboration or synergy.

Other factors may have impeded effective collaboration between external and local partners as well. The fact that the role of external partners was not clearly defined beforehand led in some cases to divergent expectations on the nature of the collaboration. The local partner, for instance, could be focused on its own activities and ways of working, and only seek to engage the external partner with very specific, but relatively minor requests, whereas the external partner was expecting a more substantial role as a structural partner. From a local ownership perspective it makes sense that local partners are in the lead and only engage external assistance when they see fit.

It is important, however, to have full clarity on each stakeholders' roles and responsibilities, to avoid mutual frustrations. Besides that, in the context of one integrated programme there is also an imperative to work together, and the coordinating actor may sometimes need to nudge different actors towards certain partnerships, in order to leverage synergies and avoid missed opportunities..

In this context, it is important to stress the effect that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the programme. Virtually all interviewees praised the flexibility of all stakeholders, internal and external, to adapt activities to the pandemic-related constraints on physical interactions. Many activities and engagements were continued in an online setting. However, interviewees were equally unanimous in stressing the importance of face-to-face meetings, particularly when it comes to certain activities, like capacity-building or brainstorming.

5.5 CAREFUL SELECTION OF GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE

For a truly integrated programme, where interventions on demand, supply and governance really reinforce each other, it could have been advantageous to select a more limited number of locations and have dedicated local partners for each of these pathways in each location. In the chosen set-up of the programme, there are some areas, for instance in the selected rural sub-districts, where only one partner is active. That partner inevitably focuses on the pathway of its own strength. For instance, SLOPB naturally focused on demand-side issues and awareness raising, in communities and at schools. Consequently, in the geographic areas where SLOPB was working on its own, there was little substantial work on private sector development or strengthened public governance. In such a set-up, the integrated philosophy of the programme, linking demand, supply and governance does not really get off the ground.

Conversely, as stressed before, in areas where different partners are working on different pathways, it is important to stimulate truly integrated planning and implementation, to get the different pathways to come together and reinforce each other. This requires substantial amounts of coordination and investment in relationships and joint activities. Achieving mutually reinforcing impacts on different thematic fronts may be facilitated by focusing on a more limited number of geographical locations, so that all the different pathways can be addressed simultaneously in integrated fashion.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the WASH Alliance sub-programme in Bangladesh, part of the larger multi-country WASH SDG Programme, has booked highly significant results in improving access to WASH products and services over the past 5 years. The structure of the sub-programme, with six Bangladeshi NGOs in the lead, driving impact on the ground, ensured a high level of local ownership. It also facilitated the emergence of a multiplicity of approaches and practices. This report has tried to document these approaches and best practices, and distil the lessons learnt along the way.

One crucial approach driving successful interventions has been the creation of coalitions for change. Throughout the programme, the implementing partners invested a lot of effort in bringing together stakeholders with an interest in and ability to drive lasting change, such as inclusive governance reforms. Secondly, in various cases the adoption of a strategic and patient approach in terms of engaging forces of resistance proved important for reaching lasting results. A third type of approach that has facilitated impact is the leveraging of interactions between policy and practice. The programme successfully combined policy advocacy and interventions on the ground. Finally, attention to improved collection and dissemination of different types of information has proven important to facilitate change at various levels.

Looking at the programme design and management, the report draws a number of lessons on the factors that facilitated or constrained the emergence of these approaches driving impact. First of all, collaboration between partners for mutual exchange of experiences and learning was of central importance. Second, the high degree of local ownership meant that implementing partners could pay sufficient attention to the local context and feasibility. Third, local ownership was also important for enhancing sustainability. At the same time, a more structured approach to internal learning and iteration of interventions could further strengthen sustainability. Fourth, the importance of local ownership does not take away the need for pro-active programmatic steering and coordination. Finally, for complex programmes with a multitude of pathways and stakeholders that should be working in integrated fashion, careful selection of the geographic set-up of the programme is essential.

ANNEX – STORY SHEETS

To provide concrete illustrations of some of the best practices and approaches documented in this report, this Annex contains three case studies in the form of story sheets.

Story Sheet 1 on the interventions of DORP in Pathargatha Municipality on inclusive WASH governance through the promotion of citizen committees.

Story Sheet 2 on the interventions of Hope for the Poorest in Sakhira Municipality on supporting female WASH entrepreneurs.

Story Sheet 3 on the interventions of Uttaran in Satkhira on improving WASH facilities for girls at schools.

In order to provide a concrete picture of some of the activities carried out as part of the WASH SDG Programme, these case studies limit themselves to one implementing partner and one geographic locality each. It is important to note that this does not mean that similar activities were not undertaken with equal success by different partners in different places.

STORY SHEET 1:
INCLUSIVE WASH GOVERNANCE

The Bangladeshi NGO Development Organisation for the Rural Poor (DORP) has been working on the inclusion and governance pathways of the WASH SDG WAI sub-programme. Local governments are in charge of guaranteeing basic public WASH services. In many cases, the gap between the local government's WASH department and the population is large. Most people do not have a good idea of what local government is doing, what decisions and investments are made, and why. By promoting more bottom-up participation and accountability, the results of the public sector's efforts can be improved.

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This case study is one in a series of three, which aim to highlight particular interventions and best practices run by the Bangladeshi partners.

CITIZEN COMMITTEES

Shofikul Islam is the president of the WASH Citizen Committee of Pathargatha municipality in the South of Bangladesh. He explains how, in the past, the local government's budgeting process took place behind closed doors, run from start to finish by the councillors, the mayor and the accountant. Even though national legislation, such as the Right to Information Act, provides for open budgeting and transparency, this was rarely put to practice.

Most local people only knew the Municipality from when they needed something from it, like a birth certificate or authorisation. They were often not aware of the different thematic committees that are in charge of public policy and investments for the collective good.

DORP supported the establishment of a WASH Citizen Committee to engage with the municipality on WASH governance. The committee consists of citizens from all walks of life, making it a highly diverse body, with people from different social classes, occupations, and religious backgrounds. DORP played a key facilitating role by identifying and coaching the committee members.

Mr Islam praises the fact that the committee created a place where citizens can discuss directly with local government about the day-to-day issue they face on WASH. This is echoed by Ms Shilpi Shila, a female member of the Citizen Committee:

" Previously we were not aware how much budget was allocated to the WASH sector. Now, before the budget allocation, there is open discussion, where people from all the communities are invited. People share their concerns, raise the issues faced by them. The budget is now prepared by keeping the people's real needs in mind "

An example given by another committee member, Ms Ayesha Akter, relates to the installation of public toilets. The citizen committee collectively voiced this concern, wrote a coherent application, and as a result the costs for creating a public toilet were included in the budget.

Encouraging participation by all citizens, including women and people from marginalized communities is also stimulating a change in attitude, although completing this process will take time. For instance, she points out that when women would speak up and raise their concerns during the citizen committee meeting, some men had a tendency to cut them off and repress their voice. Breaking the male domination will require many more citizen committee meetings.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Although some members of the local government were at first hesitant about opening up the budgeting process, most now clearly see the benefit. As Mr Zahirul Hoque Chinu, local government councillor says:

"The Citizen Committee helps us to shed light on the sanitation problems, to identify sanitation facilities that need to improved, which helps us to draw up the budget. It changed things. Before, we hardly allocated any budget to fix the sewage system, to install public toilets in the bazar (market), or to clean out the ponds in our municipality. Now we know that these are concerns of our citizens"

Mr. Bellayat Hossain, the head accountant of Patharghata Municipality, also sees the effect of the WASH Citizen Committee. Since it started operating, the total budget allocation for the WASH sector has increased. The citizen committee clearly had success in influencing decision-making.

There are remaining challenges, however, on the road to effective public sector delivery and accountability. Right now, the Citizen Committee discusses the needs of the population, influences the budget allocations and monitors the level of spending. The next question, however, is whether the resources are spent effectively and efficiently. This would require looking at tendering procedures, to ensure that contracts are won on the basis of cost and quality, not personal connections. Besides monitoring budget allocation and spending, it will also be important to verify real outcomes. DORP and other partners within the WASH SDG Programme have taken up this challenge, for instance by promoting the development and use of budget monitoring tools.

The partner organisations Practical Action, Uttaran and SLOPB also worked on citizen committees. Read more details about the work of HP and these other organisations in the main report.

STORY SHEET 2:
FEMALE WASH ENTREPRENEURS

The Bangladeshi NGO **Hope for the Poorest (HP)** has been one of the partners working on the private sector development pathway of the WASH SDG WAI sub-programme. A crucial element, because many WASH services are delivered by private entrepreneurs. It also offers opportunities to boost inclusive development. Traditionally, the WASH sector is dominated by men. By training female WASH entrepreneurs, the further development of the sector not only improves the WASH situation of the population, but also supports women's empowerment directly.

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Until a few years ago, Farida Begum was a housewife, in Satkhira in the West of Bangladesh, spending most of her time on running the household, including her three children. Although Farida was interested in developing her own economic activity, she would not have taken the step to start a sanitation business, because she thought that is something for men. This changed when she heard about the advantages and opportunities in the sanitation sector. She learnt that there is a growing number of female WASH entrepreneurs and that the WASH SDG programme could support her in taking the first steps.

This can be about seemingly simple things, like going to the wholesale market to buy equipment. Such markets tend to be male-dominated places, and Farida would not have had an idea of what to look for when purchasing equipment. How do you know if something is of good quality for an acceptable price? This can turn a trip to the market into a daunting prospect. Through HPs trainings and coaching along the way she gained the self-confidence that she needed to successfully embark on her journey as a WASH entrepreneur.

Today, she is a well-established entrepreneur who stands her ground. Sometimes, male customers come to her house wanting to talk with her husband about sanitation products and materials, or to bargain over prices. Farida has no time for such attitudes and is supported in this by her mother-in-law, who responds to customers seeking to speak to her husband as follows: "You can see the banner; it says 'Farida Sanitary'.

Her name is there, so you should look for Farida, not her husband, if you want to talk about anything related to the sanitary business." Thus, besides supplying good-quality WASH products and services, Farida is also helping to shift social attitudes towards women, improving gender equality. Farida is very content with her new life as an entrepreneur. She is proud of the additional family income, which they have used for the education of her son and to buy a fridge. Besides the material gain, Farida stresses that

"I also feel empowered as a woman because now all my neighbours and relatives respect me more and appreciate me for the work that I am doing. My female neighbours come for advice. They express that they also want to become like me, to earn money, and to become self-sufficient "

Taslima Begum

Taslima Begum is a widow and mother of two children. She comes from an economically disadvantaged and vulnerable background. When her husband passed away, on whose income they had depended, she faced destitute conditions. She was socially isolated, could not count on the support of neighbours or distant family, and had no idea how to start earning a living.

Through her connection to a micro-finance programme, she got introduced to HP, who pointed her at the possibility of becoming a WASH entrepreneur. This created new perspectives that she was so severely lacking at that time. She joined the HP trainings with enthusiasm, learning how to run a business and how to make affordable sanitary products.

Now, she is producing about 40 ring slabs a day, which are the foundation of basic latrines that are in high demand by the community. Her monthly income is now enough to cover basic family expenditures and to be left with some resources to re-invest in her business.

Her WASH business really lifted Taslima and her family out of the gutter. Her social and economic state-of-being are incomparable to the time following her husband's death. As Taslima herself stated:

"I have been doing this business for the past two years, and I have the intention to expand further. I have regular customers, and all my products are sold out regularly. My neighbours are frequent customers, since they receive good quality and affordable products and services. Therefore, they keep coming back and refer my name to other people who need to install new sanitary facilities "

New WASH entrepreneurs like Farida and Taslima can only flourish in the context of strong demand and a good enabling environment, which the WASH SDG Programme has supported. In particular, the establishment of WASH Business Associations has helped create an effective platform for dialogue with local governments, to resolve issues faced by WASH entrepreneurs.

The partner organisations SLOPB and DORP also worked with entrepreneurs. Read more details about the work of HP and these other organisations in the main report.

STORY SHEET 3:
WASH FACILITIES MAKE SCHOOLS A SAFER PLACE FOR GIRLS

The Bangladeshi NGO Uttaran has been one of the partners working on the awareness raising pathway of the WASH SDG WAI sub-programme. By informing people of their rights and the importance of good hygiene practices, Uttaran's activities stimulate their demand for better WASH services, as consumers and citizens.

One good example relates to WASH facilities at schools. Many secondary schools lack dedicated WASH facilities for girls, let alone specific menstrual health corners where they can get access to and dispose of sanitary napkins. To avoid embarrassing situations, many girls then choose to stay at home during menstruation, negatively impacting their education.

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FROM PROBLEM TO SOLUTION THROUGH THE EYES OF THE TEACHER

The sanitary conditions at Nobarun Girls High School in Satkhira in the West of Bangladesh used to be poor. Openly talking about menstruation was a taboo. There was no discussion with students about good menstrual health practices or availability of sanitary napkins at school. Many girls would use old clothing items by way of protection during their menstruation, and dispose of them in the toilets. As a result, these would regularly get clogged and unusable. In such a context, it is no wonder that many girls decided to stay at home during their menstruation. The school management understood the problem. They saw the relation between menstruation and absenteeism, but they did not know how to go about tackling the problem, because it was seen as a sensitive topic.

Nazmul Laila, who has been a teacher at the school since 1996 explains the situation:

> *When I joined, there was not even a separate girls' toilet. The male teachers, female teachers, and students had to share one toilet, that was mostly unclean and clogged. During my menstrual cycle I would often go home to use the toilet, as I was uncomfortable managing my menstrual hygiene in a toilet shared with the male teachers. The rate of absenteeism was high. Many girls did not have proper protection. We had to grant leave to 20-25 students every day because of this issue. I was hesitant to talk about the menstrual problems with the students. I did not know how to start a conversation openly, as people think it is a private conversation that cannot be discussed in public*

The staff of Uttaran, experienced in starting and facilitating conversations about menstruation, managed to change the situation around. They would come to the school every few months to talk with small groups of students, to create a safe environment. They would use a dedicated guidebook to discuss the biological aspect of menstruation as well as menstrual health practices, such as the use of sanitary napkins.

Furthermore, they showed videos of other schools in Bangladesh with dedicated WASH facilities for menstrual hygiene management. All this information and discussion helped the girls, and the female teachers, to gain the self-confidence to lobby the school management to improve the WASH facilities. The results are unmistakable. In the words of Nazmul:

> *Now, the situation has completely changed. The rate of absentees decreased as we have a sanitary corner from where the students can take sanitary napkins at 10 taka per piece (about EUR 0,10). Also, we have separate toilets for male teachers and female teachers, and for the girl students. We also have a proper sanitary napkin disposal system in the toilets. The female teachers also talk with the girls now, to ask if they are facing any problems. From the discussions led by Uttaran, we learnt many things about the menstrual cycle. The relationship between teachers and students has developed significantly as a result. The students can freely share their concerns with the teachers and the teachers try to support the students as best as they can*

FROM SCHOOL TO HOME

Rita Moni Misri, a class 10 student who has been studying at the school since class 4, is very content that the hygiene facilities have changed so much for the better since Uttaran started its engagement. Furthermore, she stresses that the relationship with teachers has now become much more flexible, as they feel more at ease to talk about any issue they face during the menstrual cycle.

And what happens at school does not stay at school. Students also take their new insights back home, leading to further positive change.

Rita's mother, Lipika Rani Mistri, points out that the engagement with Uttaran has facilitated discussions about sensitive issues at home. Awareness raising on menstrual hygiene is thus leading to a safer and more supportive environment for girls all around, both at school and at home.

The partner organisations SLOPB and DORP also worked on menstrual health. Read more details about the work of Uttaran and these other organisations in the main report.

ACCESS TO SAFE WATER & SANITATION FOR ALL