



Key Learnings: Hygiene and sanitation promotion in schools in Bangladesh

This learning brief provides an outline of how water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) practices in schools in Bangladesh's Rangpur and Gopalganj districts were improved by supporting students to be agents of change and the lessons learnt.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Community Development Initiative - Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Program (CDI WASH) was implemented by Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) / International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and iDE. The Australian Government's CS-WASH fund supported the program through Australian Red Cross for four years to June 2018.

The overall aim of CDI WASH was to enhance the health and quality of life of the poor and vulnerable through sustainable improvements to safe water, sanitation and hygiene. The target included families, communities and students from 29 schools in Rangpur and Gopalganj districts in Bangladesh. The implementation centred on supporting government, community and school change agents to lead the promotion of changes in WASH-related behaviours.

Rangpur is in the north, on the bank of the Ghagat River. Its climate is marked with monsoons, high temperatures, considerable humidity and heavy rainfall. Gopalganj is in the southwest, where households are vulnerable to flooding and to consuming ground water with high levels of naturally occurring inorganic arsenic.

At the start of the project, schools were selected based on unhealthy school WASH environments and inadequate or non-existent WASH facilities:

- There was a lack of functional tube wells in target schools and drinking water was unsafe due to arsenic contamination in the groundwater
- While nationally 94% of schools were reported as having latrines (largely improved) within the school compounds¹, in the project schools only 40% in Rangpur and 38% in Gopalganj had latrines for students. Where available, a single toilet was used by, on average, 187 students²
- Handwashing stations or soap were generally not available, and most school environments were not clean
- 40% of school girls were not attending school during menstruation and only 3% of school had a bin inside the girls' toilets for waste. Toilets did not have washing facilities inside and there was no privacy for girls or boys

This resulted in students suffering from water- and faecal-borne diseases and in poor performance and attendance of students in schools.

1. <http://washschoolsmapping.com/projects/bangladesh.html>
2. The government standard for pupils:latrines/toilet is 60:1

“The old toilets were disastrous. Usually there was no water, the doors were broken, and the toilets were not kept clean. Now the new toilets are easy to use!”

- Student, Pegum Fatima Girls High School

THE APPROACH

The project had three fundamental parts:

1. The direct delivery of infrastructure – water, latrines, handwashing and menstrual hygiene management (MHM) facilities – to address the immediate need for improvement of services
2. Supporting School Management Committees (SMCs) and teachers to sustain improved access and usage of WASH facilities and to continue to lead hygiene promotion within the schools and associated communities
3. Supporting school children to become change agents, promoting hygienic behaviours to their peers at school but also to their families and community outside of school. The children represent the future parents and leaders of their communities, therefore the project focused on turning knowledge into practice, with the aim of creating lifelong change

“Parents are now becoming reluctant to send their students to the nearby schools that have not benefited from the program because the situation at target schools is much better, attendance rates are higher, and the children are more lively.”

- Headmaster, Faridpur Government Primary School



Mousumi is an indigenous student in year 9 in Rangpur district. Before the introduction of CHAST sessions she had little concern about her own, or others', hygiene.

That has changed since participating in CHAST. She now promotes critical times for washing hands and brushing teeth, has set up a specified place in her home for waste, and has learnt how to hygienically manage menstruation.

“Our teachers taught us all of this with the easiest and funniest way possible. Now I don't feel shy to talk about menstruation and I look forward to applying all the teachings I have learnt,” said Mousumi.

Based on assessment results, Mousumi is recognised as the CHAST champion for her school and within her community, “I felt proud, not because I could answer all the [exam] questions but for becoming the icon who others will get inspired to learn and apply good WASH behaviours in their life.”

Her family and neighbours commonly ask her to teach them about improving their hygiene. She said, “Although people know it's not easy to turn them into habits, they try hard, and I, with my other CHAST mates, remind them of the importance of living a hygienic life.”

Mousumi, who aspires to be a doctor, dreams of continuing to help people improve their hygiene. She noted that, “since the CHAST program started the occurrence of diarrhea, hepatitis, typhoid and other water-borne diseases has reduced significantly in this area.” She does however hold concerns about the ignorance of MHM among villagers. She plans to help build better understanding and recognition of this in the future.





IMPLEMENTATION

Direct delivery of infrastructure

- Safe water points with arsenic removal filters
- Segregated toilets for girls and boys and separate toilet with increased accessibility for people living with a disability (PLWD)
- Hand-washing facilities
- Toilet blocks in all 29 schools for girls and boys, designed with a strong focus on safe and dignified MHM to ensure girls' continued participation in school. Latrines fitted with lockable doors to allow for privacy
- Incinerators, waste bins and washing facilities

Students

- Children and Hygiene Sanitation Training (CHAST) sessions introduced to encourage changes in behaviour practice via peer-to-peer learning, reaching over 13,000 students
- Treated as change agents within their schools and communities
- Each school awarded CHAST champions, which further highlighted the importance of peers as role models in promoting behaviour change

Teachers and SMCs

- Teachers and SMCs played a key role in encouraging and monitoring WASH behaviours. They were trained to support CHAST training and disseminated WASH messages through Parent Forums
- 29 female teachers were trained in MHM and disseminated messages about good MHM practice in both schools and communities
- SMCs have committed to maintaining infrastructure, including budget provisions

Community

- The link between school and community was developed to reinforce and leverage knowledge building and change practice. Parent Forums, organised by SMCs, provided opportunities for teachers and students to openly discuss hygiene-related issues and encourage parents and family members to support good hygiene practice at home
- Quarterly Parent Forum meetings were attended by approximately 13,000 parents
- Commercial suppliers conducted sanitation marketing school campaigns and demonstrations at schools to increase awareness of the products and services they offer, and to encourage students to talk to their parents about improved sanitation in households
- Community committees collaborated with SMCs on hygiene promotion (HP) campaigns and celebration of international WASH days

Government

- DPHE – provided technical support for designs (endorsed universally accessible latrine designs) and reviewed progress
- DoEE / DoE – helped facilitate school planning, and promoted hygienic clean and safe environment
- DPHE tested school water points



GLOBAL HANDWASHING DAY

SMCs, teachers and students have led Global Handwashing Day events to provide information and promote the importance of handwashing to the community. Students led the handwashing demonstrations and were successful in persuading their peers and community members to commit to replicating this practice at home.



“We do much work in a day and our hands can be dirty with germs. I share handwashing information with my parents and other students so that they are not affected with diarrheal diseases.”

- Female student, Grade 8 Sahadat Hossain VIP Junior school, Rangpur

THE RESULTS

- Students have increased access to safe water
- Water and faecal borne diseases have reportedly reduced significantly with fewer incidences of diarrhea, belly-aches and admissions to the doctor
- Improved environment at the school and home
- Substantial change around the attitudes, visibility and management of menstrual health (MH), allowing girls to better manage their MH at school. In some/many cases:
 - This has broken cultural barriers where menstruation was often not previously discussed with peers or family members
 - Girls have improved access to sanitary pads at school
 - SMC and teachers have increased knowledge and skills to better address MHM and other topics
 - Teachers encourage peer-to-peer learning on MHM amongst the girls



Md. Naoshad Ali is the Head Teacher of Paddmapukur High School, Rangpur and is also Vice-President of the school’s SMC. He tried for many years to improve the hygiene situation of his school, contacting national and international organisations for help without result. He described the school situation before the project:

“There were no separate toilet blocks for male and female student or teachers. Beside this, the teachers and students used to go the same latrine, students often felt shy to go to those latrines, specially the female students. Hence most of the time students went their home for latrine in a certain time of a day and did not come back. As a result, they usually used to miss the rest period of the school day”.

The project built a tube well, latrines with separate blocks for male and female and specialised toilets for PLWD. CHAST training made the students aware to drink safe water, use improved sanitation and ensure hygienic practices.

“Now, I personally advise my family members, relatives and neighbours even outside of the community area to follow good hygiene and sanitation practices. Beside this, when I attend different meetings in Upazilla and district level then I convey the success of us to other institutions as well as practise these. Currently, students of the school clean the toilet blocks on a weekly basis and student leaders along with their classmates always monitors the latrine blocks to see if all the facility is properly functioning. Hence, the School Management Committee is also planning to employ a sweeper for the toilet cleaning. Beside this, SMC will continue its endeavour to support any other assistance in relation with the program activities such as repairing and maintaining the water and sanitation options for future time. The CDI WASH initiative helped our school in a great extent as improving the hygiene behaviour of students has resulted in educational improvement in class attendance and academic results.”

“Continued efforts including CHAST (information) sessions and ongoing monitoring of practice mean that the children, both at school and home, are making sure everyone washes their hands before and after meals and using the toilet,”

- Md. Akhtaruzzaman, Head Teacher, Sahadat Hossain VIP Junior School, Rangpur



“Girls are now the most regular students at the school. The situation regarding menstrual hygiene has changed completely. This is because the attitudes of those around us has also changed. We feel comfortable talking about these things now. Before we were afraid to talk about menstrual hygiene and thought it was like a sickness or a curse. Now we are confident and secure. Sanitary napkins are available at the school and teachers support us.”

- Student, Nagiridigor High School

Changes at the individual level, students

- Improved hygiene behaviours and practices including using safe water, improved sanitation and hand washing facilities
- There is continuing momentum within student culture and new hygienic behaviours are becoming the norm (including hand washing with soap and water and personal hygiene such as brushing teeth and cleaning nails)
- Girls are adopting good MHM practices and have more confidence to discuss MHM. Female student leaders are helping other girls to be more aware about MHM
- Improved school attendance, with students more focused and productive
- Girls more likely to attend school, and remain in school all day, when they have their period
- Students are influencing the hygiene behaviours of their fellow students, family members and neighbours
- CHAST has built the leadership quality and ability of the students, enhanced communication skills, and given young people a voice
- Increased privacy and dignity through sex disaggregated, lockable and MHM-friendly latrines

Changes at the individual level, teachers

- CHAST training and materials have strengthened the capacity of teachers to promote hygiene behaviour, which has led to changes in practice. Teachers reflected that the training changed their own personal habits and the way their household practiced hygiene
- Improved knowledge and practice of good hygiene behaviour in areas including handwashing (previously little understanding of the value and proper practice of handwashing) and cleanliness of latrines (teachers coordinate regular cleaning and monitoring)
- Teachers are committed to continue CHAST training and Awards and have the necessary skills, systems and motivation to continue the work without additional support
- They have the skills and confidence to present some of the more challenging aspects of the school curriculum – especially adolescent health and have also started discussing and addressing wider gender issues, such as early marriage
- While hygiene had been in curriculum previously, the project had changed the way they delivered messages – teachers now feel that they are able to fully engage with students on these topics and their practical applications. CHAST provided an understanding of the impact of personal behaviours – good and bad
- Teachers feel a sense of pride in maintaining their new clean school environments and continuing with waste management practices

“I feel proud to be the CHAST champion. Us students are applying what we have learned at the school, in our lives, and spreading the messages among our families. Other younger students are interested to know how they too can become champions in the future.”

- CHAST champion, Paikkandi Bahumukhi High School



“Previously there was embarrassment in discussing by teachers and students and girls felt shame when menstruating – now is no longer taboo. Girls are no longer shy to raise issues that affect them, especially health during menstruation but also early marriage, and speak with each other, their teachers and their parents about what they have learnt.”

- SMC, Paikkandi Bahumukhi High School

Changes at the household and community level

- Students are disseminating HP messages to parents, relatives and neighbours – and it is estimated each student is reaching 21 people⁴
- Messages from students, reinforced through Parent Forum meetings, have encouraged families to adopt good hygiene practices at home including
 - hand washing, cleaning latrines, MHM
 - investing in improved household latrines
 - adopting safe storage practices using clean and covered containers
 - establishing solid waste management systems within the household
- All SMCs report an increase in discussions and support for MHM. Anecdotally there is evidence of changing attitudes of parents related to MHM

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Before the project many students were absent from school due to diarrheal diseases and other illnesses. Now, regular attendance at school has improved for both boys and girls. A survey of school attendance was conducted in a sample of target high schools to assess changes in attendance between March 2016 and March 2018 when project interventions were completed. The results indicated a 16% increase in boys' attendance with 65% now attending and 11% increase in girls', with 74% now attending.

However, attendance rates do not capture the full change as girls and boys often used to leave school during the day when they needed to use a latrine. This appears to have been more frequent for girls: interviews with teachers revealed that girls would go home when they needed to use the toilet, especially if they had their period, and once they left they did not return. The CHAST sessions, which has improved their confidence, combined with improved access to latrines and washing facilities, has meant that they now stay at school throughout the day.

At school focus groups³, students and teachers noted students were now more focused and productive during classroom hours, and the students' health had noticeably improved since the time before the program was implemented.



3. Conducted in May 2018 as part of the End-line study

4. Study conducted by IFRC on CDI WASH CHAST programming



“Before, students did not know about soap or latrines – didn’t have at home or school. Exposure through the project created momentum through the broader community – has been like a ‘tidal wave.’”

- SMC, Paikkandi Bahumukhi High School

Changes to the enabling environment – school and government level

- SMC have WASH plans and are taking responsibility for maintenance and cleaning of school toilet blocks and hygiene promotion activities
- Commitment from SMCs and government departments to allocate budget for regular maintenance and cleaning. 22 schools have appointed cleaners and the remaining seven are cleaned by teachers and students. All 29 schools have signed MOUs with BDRCS
- Replication of latrine designs and use of education materials by government departments beyond this project
- DPHE and DoE have recommended sex disaggregated and universally accessible toilet designs to other organisations
- DPHE are promoting inclusion of MHM in school latrine designs within their districts, and DPHE and DoE are disseminating MHM information to various schools and communities outside of the project areas
- SMCs share successes and challenges in local government meetings

Arisha, a student at Nagiridigor High School, Rangpur, describes how things have changed following implementation of the project:

“Nowadays, I do not have any constraint to go school in menstrual period. I have no shy to talk and advise other girls about menstruation to find solutions. The CHAST teachings helped to identify difference between good and bad practices about hygiene and menstruation. In recent time, other classmates and I have shared various WASH and MHM issues among the community people also. Now I know the good practices like marking calendars to track menstruation cycle, using sanitary pads and changing pads every three hours during period, talking proper medicine, disposing and burying in proper place, advising to prepare homemade sanitary napkins by cotton cloths and those who have financial ability to buy sanitary pads, properly washing and drying used cloths in the sun before reusing and disseminating the learnings among youngers and elder girls. Now, I am coming school with full energy and confidence. Before, two years ago, I was ignorant about MHM. But, the support of CDIWASH like installing the separate toilet and MHM box and disseminating the learnings through CHAST session pushed me in a place to know for myself and to disseminate the learnings about MHM to others.”



KEY LEARNINGS

The project has shown that:

- Students can, and have, become key change-makers within their family and community
 - Participation in CHAST, including peer-to-peer learning and the championship awards, has increased students' - particularly girls' - confidence and they are seen as role models
 - Linking schools and community is vital for long-lasting success – it reinforces and leverages knowledge and behaviour change
 - Working with Parent Forums helps strengthen ownership and results inside and outside the school boundaries

“Children seem to listen to their teachers more than their parents. After learning good practices at school, they can push their families to invest in facilities at home and change their behaviours. This can create a chain of change in the communities.”

- CHAST teacher, Nagiridigor High School

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- Schools can be WASH learning centres for the whole community
 - Sanitation marketing campaigns and demonstrations at schools by Commercial Service Providers (CSPs) were effective in marketing products and services
 - CSPs are now continuing campaigns and extending to new schools beyond the project
 - Strengthening the capacity of local government and involving them throughout the program is important for sustaining changes
 - Through exposure and involvement in the project, government change agents have increased recognition of the importance of gender and diversity and are including sex disaggregation, MHM and disability features in latrine designs beyond the project, though limited budgets exist to implement this
 - CHAST requires building both technical understanding of hygiene, as well as capacity to adapt information to reach students. The students themselves need to be involved in shaping key themes for behavioural change. The improved capacity of teachers to promote improved hygiene behaviour to students has led to significant increase in their and SMC's commitment and confidence to continuing these activities in the future

- CHAST provided an entry point to raise more difficult topics related to gender and inclusion
 - However, there are differences across schools in level of comfort in addressing MHM and the open-mindedness and empathy of school leadership and administration is a major factor in culture change. Lower levels of engagement require more tailored responses
- Access to WASH facilities is critical for implementing hygiene training
 - If hygiene promotion is conducted in schools where students do not have access to working latrines or water they are not able practice what they have been taught. Infrastructure support was provided to 29 schools where repairs to existing or entirely new systems and latrines were required
- Improved WASH facilities and practices at schools can have positive impacts on educational outcomes, including through improving school attendance
- The value of investing in universal access to latrines has not been well understood or prioritised by all SMCs. While significant gains were achieved, additional advocacy was needed to further embed changes
- Sustainability prospects are highest where SMCs are leading and committed to change. While teachers and students are committed to improved hygiene, including handwashing and cleaning of latrines and surroundings, there is often a lack of budget for items such as soap, cleaning material and maintenance funds

NEXT STEPS

The CDI WASH provided the start point. The leadership and commitment of SMCs, teacher and students, as well as local authorities and the communities themselves, are key to achieving changes in WASH practices. The challenge now for these change agents is to continue the momentum gained.

The SMCs have committed to continue to promote the importance of safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene and maintaining access to existing facilities. The frequency of school CHAST sessions are unlikely to continue at the level provide during the project however this high intensity programming is no longer required as the core knowledge and commitment has been established. SMCs have plans to continue CHAST champion awards, promoting MHM in schools as well as the broader community, and continuing Parent Forums. A key motivator is new students at school; they need to make them aware of sanitation and hygiene (FGD with SMC, Poddopukur High School).

There are potential longer-term sustainability risks given the limited financial resources available to schools. However, SMCs and teachers are seeking ways to reduce this risk, including organising contributions from parents, community leaders and utilising general reserves and BDRCS will continue to monitor school progress in line with MoUs between BDRCS and SMCs.

“If the program wasn't implemented at our school, we would have the same problems as before - belly aches, diseases, bad hygiene behaviours, and poorer attendance.”

- Student, Nagiridigor High School

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are key recommendations for future projects working with schools to improve WASH outcomes:

- Use integrated approaches to reinforce messaging. Linking through Parent Forum meetings, commercial service providers and sanitation marketing events, local authorities, community events etc to complement CHAST
- Work with SMCs to build their understanding of the issues and actions required to support disability access and to tailor latrine designs to address current and future needs of schools
- Consult with girls and PLWD to ensure designs appropriately meet the needs of all
- Involve government change agents at all stages of project to strengthen program design and, where relevant, to inform future policy setting through learnings
- Identify best performing schools and showcase how and why they are achieving – link to exchange visits to accelerate learning and motivation
- Capacity building of CHAST trainees as ‘peer educators’ needs to focus on ‘training of trainer’, equipping them with teaching aids / resources and skills on adapting these to reach audiences
- SMC plans should include resources for WASH activities including operations and maintenance for water systems and latrines, ongoing cleaning, as well as for HP activities
- Identify options to improve students’ access to sanitary pads/cloths
- Include monitoring of impact of improved WASH on school attendance and educational outcomes in program design



Provati Mondal is a CHAST teacher at Baladanga M.S. Musa High School, Pathgati Gopalganj

“Previously, I wasn’t conscious about hygiene or comfortable talking menstrual hygiene practices myself, thus we can’t blame the students for being ignorant about healthier habits. Nonetheless, the CDI WASH program has come to us and created the necessary realisation to lead a hygienic and upgraded life.”

Groundwater contaminated with arsenic and iron resulted in the community suffering regularly from chronic gastric, diarrheal and abdominal diseases. Students had a lack of knowledge about good hygiene practices and girls were unaware of good MHM practices. This all resulted in students being “sick for a certain duration in every month and the students miss academic days which were hampering their academic activities.” Further, “the girls in their adolescence periods didn’t know what to do and often remained absent from school. On average, the students used to miss 5-10 days every month.”

Provati taught the girls about good MHM management as well as helping students identify bad WASH practices and start good practices. The project built separate toilet blocks for boys and girls, including an MHM box for girls, and fitted SONO filters in every classroom ensuring safe drinking water at school. These initiatives have had a positive impact on the health and education of the students.

“Now, students rarely suffer from any abdominal diseases due to drinking unsafe water thus don’t remain absent: as a result, school attendance has tremendously improved, especially the girls as they don’t skip schools during menstruation.”

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International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies