

Improving WASH accountability in Bangladesh

*Improving governance
and transparency to
ensure equitable and
sustainable WASH
services for the
poor and marginalised*



Villagers mapping their village with coloured dye, Akkelpur village, Rajshahi, Bangladesh

Introduction

The governance and transparency programme

2008 saw the launch of a five-year governance and transparency programme, funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and coordinated by FAN Global and WaterAid.

The programme recognised that effective, well governed states are better at protecting people's rights and providing services and aimed to *improve the accountability and responsiveness of duty bearers to ensure equitable and sustainable WASH services for the poorest and most marginalised communities in the global South.*

With an understanding of governance that extends beyond the state alone, the programme fostered engagement between governments, civil society organizations and service providers. It was implemented by more than 30 local civil society organizations (CSOs) in Africa, South Asia and Latin America.

In South Asia, the programme was implemented by Freshwater Action Network South Asia and a number of its members in India and Bangladesh. This document outlines the work undertaken Moulvi Bazar, Bangladesh where FANSA's Bangladesh chapter worked with NGO Forum, a national networking and service delivery organization working on water, sanitation and the environment and dedicated to improving public health, especially for poor, marginalized and excluded communities in Bangladesh.

The governance and transparency programme in Bangladesh

Reaching people with water and sanitation is difficult in Bangladesh due to the country's geophysical landscape, which makes many communities hard to reach, particularly in the river islands, haor wetlands, off-shore islands and hill tracks. Systematic problem including the volatile political situation (which deferred NGO Forum's entry into the programme to 2011) present further barriers to WASH development. Frequent changes in governments and varying levels of commitment have resulted in poor WASH service coverage of these communities.

NGO Forum's approach

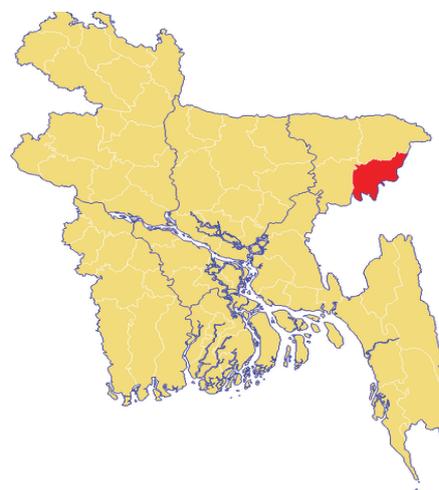
NGO Forum for Public Health Development reached out to 200,000 members of tea garden, wetland and hill tract communities in the district of Moulvi Bazar to improve the water and sanitation provision by holding those who should be providing services to account.

NGO Forum's approach to the programme was to support local budget advocacy. Few public decisions have a greater impact on people's lives than decisions about public budgets and spending. Unfortunately, all too often budgets for water and sanitation exist but remain unspent. Too often water and sanitation policies are not suited to the local context or do not exist at all.

Civil society groups can play a crucial role in tackling this problem by holding their service providers to account to ensure budgets are spent and policies exist and are fit for purpose. By giving evidence of what works on the ground, civil society can bring the needs of poor and marginalized to the fore. Furthermore, in the long term, holding those who should be providing services to account reduces reliance on outside actors such as NGOs to support greater long-term sustainability.

With this in mind, NGO Forum undertook a three-pronged approach consisting of:

- **Gathering information** - to collect the evidence needed to make informed demands
- **Budget advocacy** - to ensure government spending is on track and well spent
- **Establishing Citizen Forums** - to ensure the longterm sustainability



Under the governance and transparency programme, NGO Forum focused on Moulvi Bazar, a district home to some of Bangladesh's hardest to reach communities.

Picture credit: CC-by-saPlaneMad /Wikimedia

Gathering evidence

To undertake effective evidence-based dialogue with local service providers, NGO Forum supported communities to gather evidence of the status of water and sanitation provision using a number of participatory situation analysis tools such as social auditing and water point mapping. In total, 126 surveys were completed, covering 14 sub-districts and involving 5,572 people.

Community empowerment in Khasia

One of the communities supported was in Khasia, an area which had suffered from inadequate WASH services for a long time. Here, situation analysis tools helped to initiate and inform valuable dialogue between community members and service providers.

To support the community in Khasia to collect evidence about the status of their water and sanitation services, NGO Forum organized a meeting in which all members of the community participated - including local leaders, men, women, young people, the disabled and many others. Using a number of methods, including community social analysis and resource mapping, they collected information in their area to gain awareness of the reality of their situation.

As well as carrying out a participatory evidence gathering exercise, the meeting was a first step in mobilising the people of Khasia to engage with local

service providers and a 15-member committee was formed to improve the WASH situation in the area.

The community then submitted a formal demand to a number of officials, including the local authority's Chairman, the Sub-district Officer, the Deputy Commissioner and the local Member of Parliament. The community also flagged the issue at local, sub-district and district meetings.

As a result, the local MP recognized the community's needs and arranged for a community rainwater harvesting system to be installed using the sub-district budget. Even though the system is insufficient to meet the needs of the entire area, it has been a vital first step towards realising the community's demands. The people of Khasia now understand their rights and how to claim them to demand vital services and will continue to exert pressure on the authorities until all their needs are met.



Budget advocacy

To improve WASH service provision to the poor, NGO Forum increased awareness of the open budgetary provisions of the Local Government Act 2009.

As a result of the NGO Forum's awareness raising on budget transparency, a total of 21 out of 67 local authorities in Moulvibazar increased average WASH allocations and, for the first time, published their annual budgets for the year 2012-13. The programme initially lobbied 14 local authorities to publish their budgets, which in turn influenced another seven.

Furthermore, 19 out of 21 budgets studied have increased their annual budget by 59,095,805 Takas and budget allocation for WASH in 14 out of 21 budgets was increased by 2,396,726 Takas in 2012-13, compared to the year before.

The district and sub-district authorities, as well as most of the local authority chairmen, expressed a commitment to publicizing their budgets in the next fiscal year. Also, demonstrating NGO Forum's success in sensitising communities about the importance of open budgets.

A local authority WASH champion Giashnagar, which has a population of 26,000, is one of the areas in Moulvibazar to have benefited from the governance and transparency programme. Half of the area's territory is wetland and the other half is covered by tea gardens,

making communities in the region particularly hard to reach. The region also suffered from insufficient and mismanaged WASH budgets. Regular local authority and village-level meetings were held on water and sanitation to involve community members in decision making.

"I opened up our annual budget with increased allocation in WASH for the first time. Last year the total budget of my union was Tk. 2,117,362, whereas this year I set my union's budget to Tk. 2,791,568. WASH allocation in last year's budget was only Tk. 5,000, whereas this year I increased it to Tk. 120,000. Ensuring community participation in open budget formulation process and interaction between communities, I have tried to make the budget more transparent and demand-driven. It is really impossible to address all the community demand in a year due to our limited resources, but the initiative created scope for reflecting community demand for ensuring poor people's rights."

**Giashnagar local authority
Chairman, Monower**



After taking part in a number of sensitization workshops, the Chairman of the Giashnagar local authority, Monower, became a key champion of pro-poor service delivery. Thanks to Monower, information on water and sanitation coverage was collected and the poorest people in the area were identified for prioritization.

Monower also became involved in opening up the local authority's annual budget. To make his budget more participatory he mobilized local allies, civil society and local authority colleagues to hold local meetings on the budget. Through these meetings, the local authority developed an understanding of community demands, which were then taken into consideration when Monower and other local authority members sat together to prepare the proposed budget for 2012-13.

To finalize the proposed annual budget, he also organized

an annual open budget sharing programme involving representatives from different segments of the local, sub-district and district administrations as well as the media and civil society.

Once the annual budget was finalized, Monower forwarded it to the Sadar Sub-district Chief Executive Officer for approval including demands for adequate allocation for sanitation in the sub-district development fund.

CSO Forums

To ensure sustainable change, NGO Forum has set up a number of civil society committees, called CSO Forums.

At district level, the CSO Forum is a 25-member committee uniting the representatives of civil society organizations. The district-level forum has established an effective relationship with government representatives responsible for decision making on WASH issues in hard-to-reach areas.

The forum has also focused on selecting and orientating civil society representatives and strengthen their voice in policy implementation. By arranging meetings between NGOs and CSOs, important issues have become apparent, such as appropriate selection and targeting of the poorest families and the quality and transparency of services.

Alongside the district CSO Forum, similar forums have been established at the local level. At this level, CSO Forums focus on arranging advocacy meetings between communities, local government and CSOs, providing a bridge between communities and decision makers.

In order to ensure that the forums would be sustainable and continue to be a source of help and advice after the governance and transparency programme came

to an end, NGO Forum provided them with essential training and fostered support from respected community members.

NGO Forum continues to play a role in building the capacity of the CSO Forum members in advocacy and other key issues including the rights-based approach, the Right to Information legislation and other key policies. For instance, local government officials were trained in influencing policy-makers for adequate WASH facilities, while civil society organizations were trained on sector policies and practices.

To encourage long-term support, the programme and its partners have also persuaded local doctors, teachers, faith leaders, the media representatives and other respected local people to join CSO Forums.

Results have been good. Dialogue with officials and service providers at all levels is continuing. The CSOs are engaging in sector policy discussions and the forums are recognised as useful partners for dialogue. For example, the district CSO Forum has become a regular part of the District Sanitation Taskforce and all NGO Forum's CSO partners take part in sub-district and local-level coordination meetings.

Programme achievements

By facilitating dialogue between representatives from national and local government institutions, CSOs and communities, NGO Forum began to **influence duty bearers to address their responsibilities to the poorest people:**

- In line with NGO Forum's goal, the government instructed 20% of sub-district Annual Development Programme funds for WASH services to be spent on sanitation for the poorest families.
- As a result of the NGO Forum's sensitisation activities on open budgets, a total of 21 local authorities in seven of Moulvi Bazar's sub-districts opened their annual budgets for the year 2012-13 for the first time.
- 19 out of 21 local authority budgets increased their annual budget by Tk 59,095,805 Takas. Budget allocations for water and sanitation increased in 14 out of 21 budgets, by 2,396,726 Takas in 2012-13.
- As a result of sharing the experiences of open budgets, the district and sub-district authorities, as well as most of the local authority chairmen, expressed a commitment to open their budgets in the next fiscal year.
- CSO Forums are actively engaging in sector policy discussions and are recognised as useful partners. One of the CSO Forums has become a formal member of the District Sanitation Taskforce and all NGO Forum's partners took part in sub-district and local-level coordination committee meetings.



NGO Forum is a national networking and service delivery organization working on water, sanitation and the environment and dedicated to improving public health, especially for poor, marginalized and excluded communities in Bangladesh.



NGO Forum is a member of regional civil society network FAN South Asia, a South Asian civil society network uniting over 450 civil society members in five South Asian countries to influence decision making on water and sanitation. FANSA is a regional member of the global network FAN Global.



The Governance and Transparency Fund was a joint WaterAid and FAN Global-supported programme funded by the UK's department for international development