

GENDER and WATSAN in court yards, schools and tea stalls:

**report on a field visit to
BRAC WASH in Khulna**



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Background

In May 2006, BRAC with support from the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (EKN), launched a 5 year WASH project in 150 *Upazilas* (sub-districts) of Bangladesh, with a total population of about 38.8 million (now BRAC WASH I). The project aimed to improve health of the rural poor, and contribute to equitable development by: providing sustainable WASH services in rural parts of Bangladesh; promoting hygienic behaviour in water and toilet-use at house-hold level; and ensuring sustainability and scale-up of WASH services. The project's emphasis was on sanitation and hygiene, and by the end of April 2011, about 65% of the covered population had improved, hygienic latrines, while hygiene promotion was targeted to the entire population in the area, and just under 5% had access to new or improved water facilities.

However, while coverage of this project was high, the use and maintenance of the sanitary facilities by the targeted population was still unsatisfactory. A 2010 research study showed that half the toilets were dirty and had lost their sanitary function¹. Moreover, the progress was uneven, and hard-to-reach areas in the coastal and border districts of the country remained largely under-served. So a second and final phase of the programme (BRAC WASH II from 2011- 2015) was developed to address these challenges. This phase aimed to cover 20 new *Upazilas* in hard-to-reach areas, while sustaining and improving the WASH interventions in the first phase of the project. Additionally, this phase aimed to focus on building capacity and empowerment of stakeholders for implementation, maintenance, and use of the services; and develop innovative solutions to low-cost toilets for areas with high water tables, and sustainable solid waste management.

The Gender and Water Programme Bangladesh (GWAPB) is a 3 year project (2013-2016) initiated by the EKN, and implemented by the Gender and Water Alliance (GWA), with the objective of building capacity of EKN supported water programmes, civil society, water professionals and government organisations in Bangladesh to adopt and implement a gender mainstreaming strategy in their water related policies and practices, in order to achieve measurable and positive impact on the lives of poor women and men.

As part of the ongoing collaboration between BRAC WASH and GWAPB, it was discussed during a meeting between GWAPB and BRAC WASH staff² in September 2014, that a field visit would be helpful for GWAPB staff to understand the integration of gender in BRAC WASH interventions, which is not directly clear from the reports. Some components of the BRAC WASH programme were explained, including:

- Focus on software (hygiene education, awareness raising on sanitation) rather than on hardware (toilets, tube wells)
- Emphasis on total coverage of project areas (each and every household)

¹Hanchett, Suzanne, Mohidul Hoque Khan, Laurie Krieger and Craig Kullmann (October 2010) Sustainability of Sanitation in Rural Bangladesh. Manoff Group and WSP World Bank Water and Sanitation Program. www.planningalternatives.com/.../sitebuilderfiles/UNC_CONF_PAPER-REV

² GWAPB - BRAC WASH meeting minutes 17/09/14

- Institution-building (WATSAN committees) for coordinating activities with local-level government agencies and following the WATSAN policy of the GoB. In addition to this, GWAPB was requested to give inputs to writing about gender practices, the gendered outcome, and impact of BRAC WASH interventions in the consolidated final BRAC WASH II programme report, which is still to be written.

Objectives of the field trip

- To have a first-hand view of how BRAC WASH interventions are implemented in the field, with special attention on women cluster group meetings, village WATSAN committees, coordination with Union Parishad (UP), School WASH with focus on Menstrual hygiene Management, and WATSAN-related enterprises of men and women
- To learn how BRAC integrates gender into its trainings and interventions
- To learn how these interventions impact the lives and thinking of different women, men, boys and girls, their sense of being empowered, and how they talk about this.
- To see how BRAC-WASH interventions compare to WASH interventions of other organisations in the same area, in their gendered impact.
- Open inquiries with men, women, boys, and girls who have been affected by BRAC-WASH interventions, using an empowerment perspective



Dumuria

Methodology

For this field visit we focused on qualitative methods of information gathering, using an empowerment perspective³ and actor-oriented approach to analyse our findings. Within this

³ [The overall goal](#) of the Gender and Water Programme in Bangladesh (GWAPB) is poverty eradication by the empowerment of poor women, girls, men and boys and the efficient, effective, equitable and sustainable management of water in Bangladesh, with a focus on the South West coastal area.

perspective empowerment is seen as a necessary condition for sustained and overall development of individuals and their environment, which results from gradual social, physical, economic, and political empowerment. This process can be facilitated by external factors and agents, but its outcome is dependent on individual agency and circumstances.

Selection of study location: GWAPB wanted to visit one Upazila from BRAC-WASH I project area, and two from BRAC-WASH II project to compare and see if there were differences in interventions and influence on people’s lives and thinking, between the two areas. The selection of the final sites was made by BRAC WASH staff in consultation with GWAPB staff.

Stakeholders consulted: : different levels of BRAC field staff, BRAC WASH women cluster members, WATSAN committee members, secondary school students, men joining a tea stall session conducted by BRAC WASH staff, UP members

Data collection methods:

- a) Structured group discussions (Focus group discussions, FGD) with various stakeholders in BRAC WASH I and II areas. (with facilitation by BRAC staff);
- b) One-to-one, open ended inquiries with different men and women in an area with BRAC WASH II interventions (without facilitation by BRAC staff).

Field visit dates and areas

On 20-24 October 2014, GWAPB team (Safina and Anamika) visited BRAC WASH activities in 3 different Upazilas named Dumuria, Koyra and Dacope under Khulna District in SW coastal Bangladesh. This area faces extra challenges in WATSAN due to its geo-physical vulnerability, and lack of adequate safe water and sanitation facilities. Dumuria is from the first phase of the BRAC WASH program which started in 2006, while Koyra and Dacope are from phase two, which started in 2011.

The Following activities were done during four days (20-23 October 2014) field visit in Khulna

Date	Place	Work
20/10/2014	Fultala, Khulna	Meeting with BRAC WASH staff and finalizing the schedule of field visit
21/10/2014	Dumuria, Khulna	Observe women cluster meeting, Meeting with Village WASH Committee (VWC) members, visit to a secondary school to see WASH activities, Observe Union WATSAN meeting, Observe adolescent girls’ cluster meeting, Visit to female Rural Sanitation Center (RSC) entrepreneur
22/10/2014	Koyra, Khulna	Observe women cluster meeting, Visit to a secondary school to see WASH activities, Observe Union WATSAN meeting, Visit to 2 male Rural Sanitation Center (RSC) entrepreneurs
23/10/2014	Dacope, Khulna	Visit water facilities (Deep Tube well) and discuss with the water users, Observe Tea stall session, Open inquiries (unfacilitated by BRAC WASH staff)

Meeting with BRAC WASH Staff

On the way to Khulna, Safina met with BRAC WASH field level staff at Fultala. In that meeting a Head office (Dhaka based) staff member named Md. Moazzem Hossain, Senior Manager, and A.F. Ahammed Gazi, Officer, MIS and Regional Staff member (Khulna based) named Mr. Sanjib Kumar Kundu, Senior Regional Manager and Mr. Raza, Regional Manager of BRAC WASH were present. Upazila Manager, Ms. Nadira Sultana give a brief of BRAC WASH programme in Fultala Upazila and all the field level staff shared their experiences related to gender issues in their work. The BRAC Gender and Diversity Unit provides gender training to the senior staff and the senior staff disseminates their learnings to the field level staff. An Upazila Manager, who has been working in Fultala Upazila since 2 years, received a 2-day gender training after she joined BRAC WASH.

BRAC WASH started their programme in Fultala, Khulna in 2006 under BRAC WASH I. Total 14 program staff are engaged (11 women and 3 men) at the Upazila level. Field level staff members are mostly women (around 80%). At field staff level the lowest tier - Project Assistants (PA) are recruited from the local area, and are all women. The PAs are 'community mobilisers' who visit the rural households in their local area (mostly by foot), and directly conduct the courtyard session with women and adolescent girls. Usually, 1 PA visits 50 households in a day and conducts 5 courtyard sessions (comprising of one female member each, from 10 households in one geographical cluster) before lunch, and in the evening 1 adolescent group meeting. Usually each PA will meet the same group once every 3 months. They also facilitate the formation of a 13 member Village WATSAN committee from around 200 households in their area (11 members elected from various stakeholder groups⁴ in the local area, 5 of whom must be women and 2 advisors from UP members or other influential people). The VWC is mainly responsible to govern and monitor the WASH situation in their part of the ward (Details of this committee will be discussed later).

BRAC WASH puts emphasis on involving women in site selection of tube wells and now village people are installing their latrines besides their houses. Previously, they preferred to install their latrine far from their house. From group discussions with women we also learned that when they are busy their menfolk help in water collection, child rearing and some other household work.

BRAC WASH has very good material for Information, education, and communication (IEC), Behaviour change communication (BCC) to conduct the courtyard session, where they try to raise awareness about gender with some of the messages like,

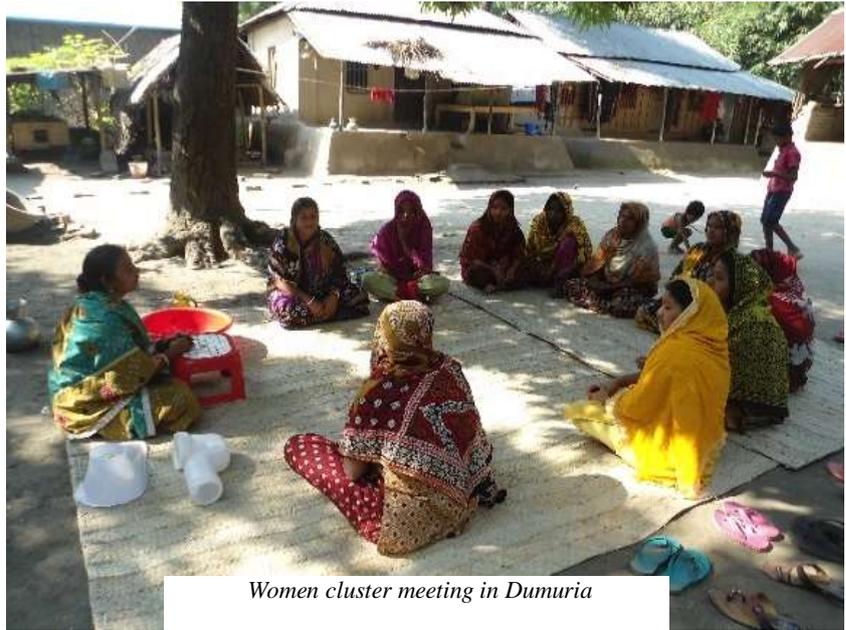
1. *Teach your son to collect water and to clean the toilet*
2. *Help your mother, /sister and wife to collect water so that they might not be harassed in road*
3. *Water collection is not only the responsibility of women, both men and women need to collect water for a healthy family*
4. *Suggest pregnant women not to carry water and heavy loads*

⁴ Like adolescent group, minority group, extreme-poor household, Local male, local female etc.

According to the BRAC WASH staff we spoke with, they have covered most of the targeted households in terms of disseminating hygiene messages but there are still challenges to overcome. Behaviour and attitude change in all the household members is the main challenge, along with cultural differences in the hard to reach areas. Also, O&M is another big challenge for sustainability. The meeting ended with a schedule of the next 3 days field visit plan, and mutual expression of interest from GWAPB and BRAC WASH staff on further collaboration.

Women Cluster Meeting

The women cluster meetings, are part of BRAC WASH's strategy to channel their messages on hygiene practices and behavior of a family through the young adult woman of the family. The meetings are conducted by a Project Assistant (PA), who are, as said, mostly women who live in the working village. Usually a Project Assistant is responsible for conducting five courtyard meetings in a day for a total of 50 households. They discuss about the existing drinking water, sanitation situation and



Women cluster meeting in Dumuria

hygiene practices of the area and then disseminate some WASH messages. The participants of the courtyard sessions are all female and mostly young and middle aged. After going back home, they are expected to share their learning with their family members. Now Dumuria is not as water scarce. The BRAC WASH project is running here for a longer time and we found more DTWs than in Koyra where people still rely on surface water sources, ponds, rain water etc. After being hit by Aila in 2009, women of this area are still struggling for safe water. They collect rain water for drinking purpose, which serves them for around 6 months and after that they have to use raw pond water for drinking purposes in Koyra Upazila. On basis of observing 2 courtyard sessions in Dumuria and Koyra, the GWAPB team noticed the following:

- **Women present in the meetings in both areas – Dumuria and Koyra - were well aware of BRAC WASH hygiene messages**, such as how to wash hands properly, safe water collection and preservation techniques, use of hygienic latrine etc.
- **Especially in BRAC WASH I areas, several houses have their own single-pit toilet.** Before the intervention of BRAC WASH, house-holds used to use the hanging latrine, whereas now they use sanitary latrines besides their house, which is a major improvement for women and girls in general, but also for the elderly, small children, and sick and disabled people. **More recently in both the BRAC WASH programmes, there has been a focus in promoting the use of sanitary latrines, which goes hand-in-hand with provision of loans to women cluster members to construct such toilets in their homestead.** Some of the poorest women we spoke to had been gifted an amount of BDT 2500 towards material costs (from the UP fund), and an interest-free loan from

BRAC WASH of about BDT 3000 towards building a sanitary (twin) pit latrine, while other needy women got an interest free loan for the whole amount. Usually in BRAC WASH programme, grant is provided to the ultra-poor families' in-kind package worth maximum BDT 2000 to 2500 in WASH I areas and BDT 2,500 to 3,000 (\$35 US) in WASH II areas. The loan amount was 1,000 BTD in WASH I area and 1500 BDT in WASH II area. The households pay back this loan, with a 10% service charge in 11 monthly instalments. WASH II also provides 600 BDT for latrine repair support for poor(est) households. The specific conditions of loan/subsidy for toilets are decided on need-based criteria. However all repayment had to be done within a year. When field staff was asked what happens if a loan cannot be repaid, they were not clear as to BRAC's policy on this, however they thought the loan would be written off.

- **Women participating in the meetings feel an elevation of their social status in their locality.** The women feel honoured to come to this meeting as they can teach other people and it gives a chance to meet with others and share their experiences. Now diarrhea is much reduced in these areas (though in Koyra people use raw pond water, sometimes after boiling) and they know how to safeguard their family's health.
- **Women present in the meetings are mostly not engaged in any paid outside work, however some are involved in home-based enterprises** such as poultry rearing, from which they get some money. Sometimes their husband hands over their earnings to their wives who in their turn need to get permission before it is spent. They say that they usually discuss big expenditure together and they feel happy about this.
- **We noted a difference in the impact of BRAC WASH interventions between the two areas (I and II):** discussions with women from BRAC WASH I areas revealed that they spend 10 – 30 minutes a day fetching water. Earlier, they did not walk far for water, however the water sources they used were not clean, so the major impact from BRAC WASH in these areas has been on the provision of safe sources of drinking water (Deep and Shallow Tube wells), rather than time spent on collecting water. In BRAC WASH II areas women still use water from unsafe sources (nearby ponds), but boil this for use in drinking and cooking. So the impact of the interventions here has been mainly in promoting hygienic behaviour practices. This is mainly oriented towards women.
- **When safe water is near at hand, it has also positively impacted on men's contribution to water collection** in BRAC WASH I areas. In Dumuria, women mentioned that their husband or son helps them to collect water and share some household work, like cleaning the toilet and the courtyard, collecting water, and with rearing poultry. BRAC WASH II areas, which face scarcity of fresh drinking water, women still spend more time in fetching water several times a day. Only in some cases do men help out here, when women are sick or old. During our visit in Koyra we observed a young man fetching water for his old mother, using his bicycle as means of transport, and older men carrying water from a nearby well on a pole with two aluminium water pots hanging from both ends.
- **Most of the women we saw in the women clusters we visited were young to middle-aged.** There were very few old women participating in the meetings. We observed older women busy in homestead activities (fetching water, feed for livestock, washing utensils, etc.), or looking on as observers during the time of the meetings.

Village WASH Committee (VWC)



Village WASH Committee meeting in Dumuria

The Village WASH Committee (VWC) is a core component & strategy of BRAC WASH Programme at community level. The Village WASH Committee was formed in 2007 from around 300 household in Dumuria and named Arajii Dumuria Village Wash Committee. BRAC WASH facilitated the formation of the committee which comprises of 11 members (6 women and 5 men). In addition, two persons (one male and one female member) are acting as advisors of this committee who are the member of Union Parishod. Different groups of

people are represented in the VWC, like the school teacher, Ansar, hardcore poor women, adolescent girls etc. from different corners of the village. The committee is headed by a male chairman and the other executive members: the secretary and the treasurer are also men. The Vice Chair is a woman. The Local Government Institute (LGI) representatives like UP members, female UP members or influential people in the village are involved in this committee as advisors. Usually the two advisors are not present in regular meetings but to take some major decisions and for negotiating with others they are involved.

They sit together once in two months and discuss to improve the WASH scenarios in their area. They try to motivate people individually and if anyone failed to do this then altogether they will go there and convince the people. They also have a good link in the local government body as the female member or member act as an advisor of this committee. Last year they got one sanitary latrine and one deep tube well (DTW) from the UP. They mentioned in 2007 sanitation coverage was 34% and now it increased to 87%, which is achieved due to their work. During the visit, the following issues were identified regarding the VWC :

- VWC Executive Committees are mostly dominated by men who hold the most powerful positions like Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer. Even though the majority of that committee are women, they don't have a voice and decision making power in it.
- Since 2007 they got support from BRAC WASH and they meet once after two months regularly. They don't have any plan for their sustainability, like they were not clear about their work after the phase out of BRAC WASH in that area. However, they feel confident that now people are aware about their health issues and practice hygiene behaviour, it will be possible to continue these hygiene practices without further support from BRAC WASH.
- The male VWC members are said to be sharing household work with their mothers or wives. In this sense they could be potential role models for the other men in their area
- The chairman and vice chairman got Leadership training after forming the committee. They mentioned that they need more training like Health & Hygiene, Gender discrimination, safe water, sanitation etc. for all the committee members.

In the WATSAN committee we visited, there were no older men and only one older woman in the committee. When questioned on this, the members responded saying that a certain level of literacy, physical mobility, and representation skills were required for effectively fulfilling the duties of the committee in advocacy, awareness-raising on hygiene, and people and resource mobilisation – which favoured younger people.

Meeting with Union WATSAN Committee

Basically, government of Bangladesh formed WATSAN Committees in Upazila, Union and Ward level in local government institutions and BRAC WASH coordinates with respective local govt. institutions by sharing WASH Programme's plan of action in both Upazila and Union WATSAN meetings to avoid duplication of work and misuse of resources. The Union WATSAN Committee consists of around 24 members (5 women out of a total of 24 members in Dumuria, and 7 out of 24 members in Koyra) is headed by the UP Chairman (male). The others are 12 UP members including 3 female members, UP Secretary, village doctor, teachers from primary and secondary schools, NGO representatives etc. The BRAC WASH Project maintains close liaison with the Union WATSAN Committee in order to ensure need based interventions and they are also present in the Union WATSAN meeting as NGO representative. The Union Parishad facilitates to coordinate different development actors at the Union level to prevent duplication in the same area.⁵ The Union WATSAN committee meets once every three months and discusses different issues like WASH, disaster relief, etc. They do the activities as per the UP guidelines on WATSAN Committees. The UP members share the situation of their ward and discuss how to improve these scenarios. They provide water options (mostly deep tube well), and sanitary latrines to the hardcore poor. Usually they collected the needs from village people through consultation with different groups of people and ensured both men's and women's different needs. After that it will be validated through *Ward Shava* (As per Union Parishad Act, 2009: It is an open forum called by the Ward member, usually male, to collect and compile information for developing UP annual plan). *Ward shava* is usually conducted twice in a year and later on they compile the need and plan at UP level accordingly. The UP also shared their plan and budget in a festive mood under *Open Budget* ceremony, in which the UP Chairman invited all the people beforehand through public announcement by mobile van using a loud speaker. He declared the annual plan and budget of that respective Union in presence of the general people and all can share their opinion in that forum. The other observation regarding this are given below:

- **In both Dumuria and Koyra, the committee is dominated by male members**, whilst women are very passive in terms of discussing, making a point, and decision making.
- **At this level we observed more participation of older people, especially men** – implying that they are more involved in local politics and government level. The president and secretary were however middle-aged.
- **The discussion in these meetings revealed the multiple activities, agencies (NGOs and government), and budgets involved in local development.** The UP mostly receives

⁵ Some CBOs and NGOs who are working for WASH in the same villages as BRAC WASH does, mention that the coordination is not functional.

funds from the government ministries, but sometimes also directly from some INGOs.



When men help with fetching water, they will use bicycles or carts

All NGOs are supposed to go through the UP to effectively target asset-transfers and WATSAN hardware. This has huge implications for the capacity of the UP staff members to disburse these funds effectively, while being accountable to their public and other stakeholders.

Also since the Aila cyclone) there are many interventions in drinking water and sanitation, however there is a big difference in the quality of hardware supplied. The UP would prefer if high quality hardware supply could be standardized.

UP members mentioned that it would

be very helpful if BRAC WASH could play a lead role in encouraging other NGOs to use better quality of services and hardware by disseminating best practices in a shared forum. Around 7 NGOs work in this Upazila and some others (like Rupantar, Muslim Aid) also work for WASH. To avoid duplication a UP male and female member need to be involved in this common, local level NGO forum.

- **There is a policy of making information (on budgets, resource allocation) public**, but women, men need to be mobile, able to read, and know where to access this information in time to avail of resources, subsidies. The UP Chairman of Dumuria Union told that they provide support as per the need as expressed by the ward members. Both male and female members get the equal opportunities in their ward. From our discussions with the women cluster members, it appears that most local women are house-bound to take care of family, domestic duties, and home-based enterprises. Also many of the older women are barely literate. These factors limit the participation of women at this level.
- **The drinking water hardware supplied is suited to the geo-physical features of the area.** As Koyra was severely Aila affected and saline prone, a DTW does not work here, so UP members prefer installing a Pond Sand Filter (PSF) or Rain Water Harvesting System (RWHS) instead of installation of a DTW. They also mentioned that they apply a cost sharing methodology, in which beneficiaries have to contribute to ensure ownership and sustainability. Although it was mentioned that priority was given to poor families, the UP has no monitoring system in place to know the details of this.
- **There was also mention of how many NGOs do not go through the UP while planning their interventions in the local areas**, leading to duplicity, wrong targeting of needy people, and waste of precious resources. BRAC WASH staff however assured us that it is standard procedure to work through the government agencies in planning and implementing their interventions.
- **There is a need for a system of accountability of government water departments and a procedure to handle requests from local government bodies.** For e.g. in Koyra UP, they expressed their dissatisfaction about BWDB (Bangladesh Water Development Board), as BWDB is mainly responsible to repair and maintain the embankment, which

is the main problem in this Upazila. The embankment is damaged and as a result all structures get damaged and will not be sustained. In this regards, they suggested that LGED might play an effective role in repairing and maintaining the embankment. This shows In Dumuria, there was mention of an upcoming programme named HYSAWA where funds from the government and foreign donors like SDC - for WATSAN activities - are decentralized through the UP, to allow for quicker service delivery to rural clients.

Adolescent Girls' Cluster Meeting

Adolescent girls' cluster meetings are usually held once in two months. The group consists of around 12 adolescent girls from 50 households, They are unmarried and study in school and college. The Project Assistant (PA) conducted the meeting in the evening after finishing their school hours and she meets the same group once after every three months. Our main observations from the discussion with this group are:

- Girls are well aware of BRAC WASH hygiene messages, and share their experiences on menstrual hygiene management openly and confidently, signifying that it is not a taboo anymore, for them.
- Four out of twelve girls use sanitary napkins (pads) which they buy from a nearby pharmacy in Dumuria. Their mother provides money for this and they never share this with their father or brother. However, their mother uses home-made pads made from used cloth during her menstruation.
- There is a general problem in the disposal of used pads, and most girls and women either bury the used pads in a pit near their home, which is covered, or burn them. So far, there is no awareness among these young girls about future pollution from unhygienic waste, or about sustainable waste management practices. BRAC WASH staff also do not discuss this in their meetings with them.
- Those who use cloths (8 out of 12) during their menstruation, they know how to wash, dry and preserve it. Due to their comfort, ability and usual practice they use the cloths instead of sanitary napkins.
- They disseminate their learnings from these meetings to their mothers and other female relatives and friends.
- They mentioned that they usually helped their mother to collect water and some household works. Their brothers and fathers usually do not help with this work.



However, in the absence of daughters, sons sometimes help their mothers to collect water.

- While most houses in the areas we visited had their own toilet, there was no covered bathing facility. Most young girls and women use nearby ponds to bathe (clothed) in groups, and do not face any problems or harassment regarding this. This was in Muslim areas (in Dumuria) as well as Hindu areas (in Koyra).

Rural Sanitation Center (RSC)

BRAC WASH promotes rural enterprises for sanitation services, which they called Rural Sanitation Center (RSC). In our visit, we visited three entrepreneurs (1 female and 2 male) in Dumuria and Koyra Upazila. They sold mainly toilet equipment along with some other



Khadija with her husband in Dumuria Rural Sanitation Center

materials made of cement and clay, like ring slab, small ring for cow feeding, pillar, rail etc. They got 10,000-15,000 BDT interest free loan from BRAC WASH initially and repaid the loan within one year. They also got a one day intensive training from BRAC WASH when they received the loan. The entrepreneurs are mostly men whilst women entrepreneurs are very rare in this business, as was told to us by the BRAC field level staff.

The entrepreneurs we spoke to had reasonably successful businesses, and earned about 10,000 to 20,000 BDT a month. They owned the land where they employed from 2 to 12 workers to make the sanitary items with the help of moulds. They also give advice to customers and masons who fit the toilets for them, and earn some commission on this.

The female entrepreneur we spoke to started this business

out of a necessity to provide for her family as her husband did not want to work (even though he was in good health). She made the highest income, but also spent a large proportion of it on childcare and domestic help in her home. Her husband did not help her much in the business and she was the main decision maker in the family about how to spend the income. It appeared to us that their marital relation was strained, however we were not able to probe further into

The female entrepreneur we spoke to started this business

The female entrepreneur we spoke to started this business

Rural Sanitation Center in Koyra



this. Interestingly she purchased 10 decimals (0,1 acre) of land and registered this in her own name as her husband got land from his parent in another place. In the case of the male entrepreneurs, they did not involve the female members in their family in the business at all, nor did they help out in any household activities besides their business.

From our interviews, it did not appear that BRAC WASH has a policy to encourage women entrepreneurs, particularly, in starting “Sanimart” enterprises, even though women face many more obstacles to come as far as starting their own business. Both men and women get access to loans on the same terms.

School WASH

BRAC WASH focuses on secondary schools for construction of separate chambers of latrines for girls’ students with additional space and running water for their menstrual hygiene management. Usually the School Management Committee (SMC) bears 50% of the costs to construct the latrine as cost sharing money.



WASH Corner in Bamia High School, Koyra

There is a female teacher who is assigned to facilitate and monitor a Student Brigade (comprising of 24 members, both boys and girls) who play a lead role in ensuring cleanliness and maintenance of the toilets, and in collection of monthly toilet cleaning money (2 taka per student per month). In the case of schools with students from poorer families, this fee was waived and instead the girls and boys took turns to clean their toilets. We are not sure how well this system worked.

The female teacher teaches the student brigade every Thursday regarding hand-washing habit, hygiene practices related to toilet use, cleanliness, etc. For menstrual management she has a separate session for girls. Before that 8 members (both teacher and student brigade) got training from BRAC WASH about WASH issues.



Our observations:

- From what we observed, BRAC-WASH toilets for girl students are well designed with light, running water facility (from shallow tube wells), mirror, and privacy. Where possible they situate these toilets in a common room for girls (like in the schools we visited in Dumuria and Koyra), for additional privacy. However when there are space constraints this is not possible, and the toilets

are stand-alone. We also observed a difference in the quality of toilets (tiled versus untiled, taps versus no taps) which depends on the schools ability to pay contribution for these toilets (50%).

- The headmasters we interviewed mentioned that a big step had been achieved in breaking the taboo over MHM among female students as well as teaching staff (male and female). Clean, private toilets, and availability of sanitary pads in school has had a big influence on improving attendance rates of girls in these schools. This was confirmed by the discussion we had with the student brigade.
- There is availability of sanitary pads for girls to purchase or get for free (per piece) depending on their ability to pay, and their own contribution to toilet maintenance costs. The pads are from commercial brands and also from BRAC entrepreneurs. Though commercial brands are expensive, they are most popular due to their comfort. Interestingly, in Koyra girls commonly use the sanitary napkins due to unavailability of water for washing the cloths. We are not sure what the practices are among the poorest families in Koyra, where they do not have the spare cash to purchase sanitary pads, and if BRAC WASH addresses this issue in any way.
- There are disposal bins inside the female toilet for dumping the used napkin. The cleaner (mostly women) collects these once in a week and dumps it in the nearby dumping pit, where it is burnt once every 2-3 months. Again, these practices signal a need for more sustainable technology and practices around disposal of unhygienic waste to avoid pollution of scarce water and land resources, and ill health.
- There is also a school appointed staff for routine toilet cleaning – female mostly - but sometimes this is done by students. When there is a blocked drain, this requires the services of a professional toilet cleaner (special caste – male).
- In general, we observed that male toilets and urinals (not provided by BRAC, and sometimes older) were less clean and always in a separate block. In one case there was no nearby water facility due to breakdown of the water pump system. This signals a breakdown in knowledge and responsibility for operation and maintenance of water facilities. It would be good if training of male and female staff, as well as senior boys and girls, for O&M of water and toilet facilities, is a structured part of BRAC-WASH interventions.
- **Drinking water options in the schools we visited in the different project areas were quite different, and depended on their geo-physical situation, as well as money available.** They ranged from DTW (in Dumuria) to filtered pond water (in Koyra, where is a major problem with salinity intrusion in surface water) and Rain water harvesting systems, funded by UNICEF (In Koyra as well) with underground storage tank. The latter was however used for washing rather than drinking even though the water seemed drinkable. This was because the staff were not convinced that rainwater was safe to drink, and besides they had another option for water near at hand (filtered pond water, delivered through a pipe to the school) Perhaps it is good to have a simple testing procedure to test this water to convince teachers and staff that it is potable.
- From what we observed the toilet facilities, as well as structure of the school buildings in Aila affected Koyra, were much worse than the school we visited in Dumuria. As BRAC WASH follows a policy of own contribution from schools when providing them with a separate toilet for girl students, this may impact adversely on the funds the schools have for their other needs. The school master we spoke to in Koyra mentioned that they try to raise funds from the local agencies, and UP funds as well.

Tea Stall Session

Tea stall session is a relatively new concept of BRAC WASH for ensuring local men's participation in hygiene promotion. As men are often the main earning member and decision maker at family level, it is urgent to include them in hygiene promotion messages and activities. The tea stall session initiated under BRAC WASH II is conducted by their male staff once in two months. Usually the session is conducted in different tea stalls in the morning or evening. The participants differ from session to session, as this depends on who is present at a particular tea stall at a particular time. BRAC staff informs the villagers beforehand about when and where this session takes place. Our main observations from the tea stall session are:



Photo 7: Tea Stall session in Dacope

- The training materials are impressive and the Programme Organizer (PO) addresses all the issues well.
- Training materials include hand washing, hygiene, latrine cleaning, latrine design, drinking water-how to collect and preserve, use of sludge for twin pit latrine, why install latrine near home etc.

The PA also incorporated some gender-sensitive messages in his session like men needing to help women in collecting water, and encouraging their boys to do this, and help to clean toilets etc.

- From our discussion with them, it seemed that men present in that meeting still believed that water collection and household and toilet cleaning is women's work. They only get involved if their wife or mother is sick or not present at home.
- Menstrual hygiene management is not discussed in this session and men present were not aware about this issue. One man, however, mentioned that he buys sanitary pads for his daughter.



Gender sensitive training material

Open Inquiries

Background:

Theoretically inquiry interview is usually structured as one-on-one interaction in which the researcher watches the user do their normal activities and discusses what they see with the user. It gives highly reliable and detailed information. Inquiry is very flexible technique and it

can be conducted in the interviewee's own place. Theoretically it is called contextual inquiry and part of qualitative research technique. It requires travel to the informant's site.

Inquiries (observation, interviews and group discussion) about gender relations in water management in a specific area/village will help to find out their urgent problems and their suggestion for improvement, which also indicate the real empowerment scenario.

Objective:

GWAPB has an objective to collect the information from the practical field by inquiries so that real empowerment scenario can be revealed. It will help to identify the pros and cons and to take the appropriate measures for the betterment of poor women and men.

Steps of the inquiry in Dacope:

Interviewee can keep in mind following issues, but not limited to:

- a. Life story of the individual person- women and men (mostly women)
 - i. From where she/he came, why?
 - ii. Why they are living in this place,
 - iii. What she/he does now means her regular activity
 - iv. How water is integrated in her/his regular life
 - v. What's the water scenario and her/his social status before
- b. What's has been changed now in terms of water services (but not limited to)
- c. What are the motivating factor for changing the scenario
- d. Or maybe she/he is happy in her present situation then try to note that only
- e. Future plan/aspirations



BRAC provides the slab and pan for Tk 2500 loan in Korya

Open Inquiries in Dacope:

Case 1: Suchitra Halder

Suchitra Halder is a woman, 40 years old lives in Pankhali village. She including her husband, brother in law and his wife all live together. Suchitra is a mother of one son and one daughter. She got married her daughter after completion of her graduation. Her son is now looking for a suitable job and do part time tuition. The bread and butter earner in that family is her husband who is a farmer and her brother in law has a tailoring business. Woman in her family take money from their husband for their personal uses. Though main economic responsibility goes to man, Suchitra took loan from NGO during her daughter's marriage. She wants to get marry her son soon and before that would like to repair home.

Suchitra and her sister in law does their household works and collect water from nearby tube well. BRAC WASH installed a deep tube well in 2013 and they use the water for drinking, cooking, and other household purposes. Before installing the tube well they were used to use the raw pond water for drinking and other household purposes. They also use rainwater during rainy seasons as tube well water is mostly saline in these areas. They got one big water tank from another NGO named World Vision to preserve rainwater. They can meet their water demands approx. for six months by using stored rain water. They



have a separate toilet besides their house. The house is made of tin and clay but the premises are very clean and they have TV as well. They also have separate room for prayer with the images of Goddess. She is happy with her position as they can eat fish almost every day as they have own pond for fish cultivation and can afford to buy meat once or twice in a week. Still they did not face any major health related problems, except some fevers or stomach upset. If requires during illness they can visit to the nearby doctor's chamber. Shuchitra didn't get chance to enrol herself for formal education. However, she received training from BRAC WASH and some other NGOs on water, sanitation, and hygiene issues. She knows pretty well about water safety, hand washing and cleanliness. In their culture, women are used to stay in home and not comfortable to go outside, she said. Their husband can meet all of their needs so they thought it is better to stay at home.

Case 2: Sorola Basar

"I didn't take any meal since morning and now I have to arrange my food then I can eat something" told Sorola in around 1 PM when we visited her home. Sorola Basar is around 70 years old lady living alone in her torn house. The land of the house provided by her neighbour. She loose her husband in 1971 during the time of independent war in Bangladesh and she do not have any child. After that she tried to survive with the help of her neighbours. Her parents' house is opposite side of the river, which is far away from her place and she seldom go there as her only brother is busy with his family. She prefer to stay alone rather to stay with him.

Sorola is used to do work as maid in some of her neighbours' house. However, she cannot work now as she has been suffered by her broken hand. She is dependent on some others who is kind enough to feed her. She is also under government VGD programme and she gets 1800 Tk in a year. She also received one cow from a local NGO named Prodiapan under their livelihood programme in 2010 as a destitute woman. Now she faced problem to look after this cow as she is sick. The cow given birth of a calf but it was died. Her neibours told her to sell

the cow but she do not want to do this. She is not involved in any cooperative society or NGO operated CBO. She is not willing to take loan from anywhere as she is afraid to repay the loan. She used to use other's toilet and sometimes she needs to wait in morning for defecation. She also suffered at night as she feels embarrassed to go other's toilet at night. She is used to collect rain water during rainy seasons. During dry seasons she collect water from nearby water sources without any cost. She is grateful to her neighbours as they provide shelter and sometimes look after her, especially when she is sick. She looks blank when she tells her story of struggling alone.



Case 3: Nitai Chandra

Nitai Chandra is a 73 years old man living with his mother, son, daughter in law and one grandchild. He was involved in agricultural work and after retirement he is dependent on his son. His wife died before 12 years and his daughter in law looking after him. Now he is suffered by stomach pain and doctor suspects this as appendicitis. He has 2 sons and 2 daughters, who stay in Khulna and other places. They seldom come to see him. His son is the main earning member of the family and he is doing hardware business along with looking after the agricultural land they have. He got around 2000 Tk per month from the products of agricultural land. He has around 1 acre land in his father's name and he inherits the land. His daughter in law is a member of BRAC WASH Women Cluster group and sit together with other women member bi monthly. She knew about safe water and hygiene and try to implement it in her family. She received loan from BRAC WASH for installing sanitary latrine and her husband repaid the loan in one year and three months. Before that they used to use the hanging latrine. Nitai is happy to see the changes like sanitary latrine, using soap for hand washing, or wear sandal to go to the toilet etc. They use rain water during rainy seasons and during dry season they are depends on pond water. Sometimes they suffered by water borne diseases. His daughter in law is collect water for her family along with other household chores. It takes 15-20 minutes to fetch water



from the nearby sweet pond. As an old person people are listen to him and they respect his advice. He also sometimes advise his son about their land and other household decision. He told us, “once upon a time I did everything and now my son do these for me. I have to depend on him”. Though he is sick he is happy and feel proud of his daughter in law.

Findings from a gender perspective

Based on the inquiries with the above 3 respondents the following can be said about the four questions:

1. What was the situation of the respondent before the project intervention?
2. What is the current situation of the respondent as a beneficiary of BRAC WASH, from an empowerment perspective?
3. What are the opportunities and limitations the respondent faces while trying to bring positive changes in his/her life?
4. How does s/he perceive her future?

Participation in the BRAC WASH cluster meetings has empowered the women in these areas to some extent as they perceive an elevation in their social status in their family and local area. They have more and better knowledge on use of safe water sources, hygiene practices to make drinking water safe for consumption, and hygienic practices related to toilet use, and how to break the cycle of contamination from unsafe drinking water and unsanitary hygienic practices. Earlier the women used to use open or hanging latrines, and use raw pond water for drinking purposes. So the health situation of the family has improved as well, and there are very few cases of diarrhoea, worms etc. This has had a positive impact on the social empowerment of the women, which in turn has resulted in improving the awareness of family members on hygienic practices, and sharing of responsibilities in household water collection with male family members. However the power-relations in the family still favour the male



(husband, father-in-law, son), keeping women to their “traditional” roles as mother, wife, and the related division of work, and water related responsibilities. Though women in this area are able to access loans from participating in the BRAC WASH cluster meetings, these are only for the purpose of toilet construction. Not all houses we passed had their own toilet, as this

is still mainly linked to the male family member's earnings, land ownership, and decision to construct a toilet. . Moreover safe drinking water facilities – still a crucial need of the families in this area, which has been affected by the Aila cyclone – is not a core component of the BRAC-WASH interventions here, and women still have to spend a lot of time and energy to collect and treat water for consumption.

Although women have received various trainings provided by different NGOs, and they opportunity to be a member of NGO committees, their lack of mobility (imposed by the male patriarchal structure) severely limits them from participating in such committees, and making use of the trainings. Interestingly, most of the households in this area are Hindu, but just as restricted as their Muslim counterparts who have to follow the system of purdah. The lack of mobility also restricts their involvement at UP level, and thus limits their political empowerment. Important household decisions are still taken by the men in the family, and this will also limit how much influence a wife or mother has on the hygiene behaviour of her husband or son, or father-in-law.

One of our enquiries depicted quite clearly how the most vulnerable groups can still be left out of most development interventions, including those of BRAC WASH. The old woman we interviewed was not a member of BRAC WASH's cluster group, did not have a toilet, did not take a loan through them, even though she was extremely vulnerable (elderly, no land or house, no savings, no income, no family to help her). On the other hand, an elderly male was in a much better condition as he owned land, and had his son and daughter-in-law to look after him.

The main challenges in this area are water scarcity and women found it difficult especially during dry seasons. The future is not always mentioned. As most of them are middle/old aged they tried to concentrate on the betterment of their next generation.



UP Watsan Committee in Koyra complain about BRAC's quality of the sanitation material.

Overall Findings and Recommendations

- **BRAC WASH has a strong organizational set-up in Khulna**, with a main office in the city, and smaller offices in the Upazilas we visited. This is a strong physical capital of the organisation and very helpful for field staff as a contact point for work-related matters, trainings, monitoring activities. Through this set-up our field visit was well planned with all necessary staff facilitation and lunch facilities even in rather remote areas. There are 150 offices in the Upazilas covered by BRAC WASH I and 20 in the Upazilas in BRAC WASH II Upazilas.
- **BRAC WASH program employs a large number of women staff at direct field level**, as Program Assistants (to conduct women cluster group meetings), however their numbers sharply dwindle at field office staff level (mostly male staff). Considering that BRAC WASH I covers 150 Upazilas and BRAC WASH II covers 20 new Upazilas, this means a large amount of female PAs at the grassroots level. They are key staff for this project- the closest point of contact with village women and their families, and are a direct source of monitoring information. Since many of them are local to the area they work in, they serve as an example to other women to study further, have a career. It is important to invest in this group with regards to capacity building in gender, monitoring with gender perspective, and other skills.
- **BRAC WASH is said to be unique among other NGOs working in WATSAN in this area in its method of targeting 100% of the houses in the Upazila in the project area, and involving at least one adult woman member from each house in the cluster.** For this it is mainly dependant on its large force of women PAs. They have to conduct 5 – 6 cluster meetings a day with 10 to 13 women (covering 50 to 70 houses a day), five days a week. So they gather a lot of information every week. These PAs are a huge human capital, which can potentially give vital input for participatory planning of interventions, and monitoring – but there needs to be a good system in place for building their skills in planning, and monitoring.
- **In general BRAC WASH II interventions face more challenges than phase I of the programme due to the geo-physical vulnerability of these areas and socio-economic conditions of its residents.** These areas are harder to reach, more prone to natural disasters, tidal surges, salinity intrusion, and depletion and contamination (iron content) of fresh water sources. Moreover most of the men and women here are poor to very poor (most men are daily wage earners, and casual labour in construction and farms, women find very little paid work. Some extreme-poor women have got cows, goats as an asset transfer from BRAC to earn additional income for the family, especially where there is little or no income from male family members. These areas pose a challenge to long term solutions to drinking water and sanitation as tidal surges are making ground water saline as well. Pockets of fresh surface water are rapidly reducing, and the ones that exist are being fast depleted by the many users.
- **Perhaps in the water-scarce areas it would be useful for BRAC WASH to work on improving technologies that people here are familiar with** (like household and cluster-

level RWH), instead of using a standardized approach in water supply interventions that it uses in BRAC WASH I areas (which are not as water-scarce)

- **We also noted that despite the fresh water scarcity problem here, BRAC WASH II interventions focus more on hygiene education and sanitary latrines** (single and twin pit). This may be because other agencies are offering options for safe drinking water to the population in these areas (UNICEF, WaterAid) so it is better for BRAC WASH to fill another gap. Twin pit toilets are a better option as far as sustainable solid waste disposal is concerned⁶, however there are also some problems related to this technology in this context. Firstly due to the vulnerability of these areas to flooding, and secondly, due to their higher cost, and the limited means of women and men to pay for them. So perhaps more temporary and eco-friendly designs for toilets and sustainable methods for waste disposal may be needed here.
- **We also noted a difference between different Upazilas regarding the gender division of labour between men and women in a family.** Women and men from Dumuria and Koyra know about household work sharing and during the visit they mentioned men sometimes share activities like collecting water, cleaning toilet etc. as per their learnings from the courtyard meetings. However, in Dacope our discussions with men and women did not reveal this kind of information.
- **Field level gender segregated data, and qualitative data will be useful for documenting gender impact and good practices in BRAC WASH interventions,** and finding out how BRAC WASH activities are benefitting the poorest women, men, and their families. As far as we were informed by field staff they do not collect gender segregated data for monitoring. After the baseline they didn't get these sort of gender data either. Besides quantitative data that is sex- and gender-disaggregated, qualitative data could give a good idea about the impact of the project on empowerment of women, poor men, and even young girls and boys.
- **In the future BRAC-WASH may need to build local actors and agencies' capacity for a sustainable phase out mechanism.** . When committee members were asked what would happen to their committee once the BRAC-WASH project finished, none of them could envisage this possibility. It is important to address this question, as this committee is a valuable social capital for the ward/village area, and needs to be retained in some form beyond the project term. It would also be interesting to know how BRAC-WASH invests in trainings in CB and gender for these committee members, especially as they serve as local ambassadors and advocates to stakeholders at higher levels of government. Moreover, it would be useful if BRAC WASH could facilitate acquiring a legal status for these established committees and institutions, for increasing their formal legitimacy and ability to network with other development actors.
- **Elderly residents of villages seem to be less represented in the cluster meetings and local WATSAN committees** which, in some cases, can lead to marginalisation and

⁶ where there is the possibility to use composted and treated faecal sludge as bio-fertilizer for crops

further isolation of elderly women-headed households, where there are no adult family members. On the other hand older men and women play an important role in the Union level WATSAN committees, and local politics and fundraising, and it is important that BRAC WASH engages these actors in developing a sustainable phase-out plan, as they could be very helpful in garnering political and financial support for this.

- **Among all the activities of BRAC WASH we observed, School WASH and especially separate toilets for girls have the most empowering effect on girls and male and female school staff.** However, proper O&M of other toilets, renovation of old or damaged toilets and cleanliness is a big challenge for water scarce and disaster-prone areas like Koyra. It would possibly be even more empowering if training of male and female staff, as well as senior boys and girls, for O&M of water and toilet facilities, is a structured part of BRAC-School WASH interventions.
- **The discussion with UP members in Koyra revealed a new area for BRAC WASH to play a role:** in coordinating a local forum for other NGOs working in WASH, to avoid duplication of activities, sharing of best practices in promoting hygiene behaviour, and use of good quality hardware, and better outreach to the most poor and needy women and men.



The only improved source of water in Koyra, by Wateraid/UNICEF, etc.

SN, AA, JM