

School Sanitation Programme in Bangladesh

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An Evolving Programme

The UNICEF supported School Sanitation Programme in Bangladesh was initiated in 1992. Initial emphasis was placed on constructing water and sanitation facilities in schools as these were considered a basic requirement. Today, construction activities are supplemented by a more deliberate focus on the behavioural development of school children. The objective is to have personal hygiene, sanitation and safe water use become integral to their life style. To encourage experiential learning, the active participation of children, teachers, parents and members of the School Management Committee (SMC) in extracurricular activities is being promoted.

This evolution mirrors the changing emphasis in the UNICEF supported programme on Water and Environmental Sanitation. Bangladesh is world renowned for successfully providing 97% national coverage for safe water supply within 150m of households. A healthy trend in sanitary latrine coverage (e.g., 48% in 1995 vs. 16% in 1990) has been seen in the last few years. However, the challenge continues. The daily deposit of about 20,000 MT of fresh human excreta through open defecation or hanging latrines still contributes to a heavy pathogen load on public land and water sources.

The country continues to have high mortality and morbidity rates due to diarrhoea and parasitic worm infection. No significant decline in the occurrence of diarrhoeal episodes has been observed in spite of the success in supplying safe water and increasing sanitation coverage. Environmental sanitation and personal hygiene practices, such as hand washing before eating and after defecation, cutting of nails, use of safe water for drinking and domestic purposes,

disposal of children's faeces in sanitary latrines, are important prerequisites for disease control. A clean environment along with related health and nutrition measures is essential for reducing the risk of diarrhoea and parasitic infestations.

The current emphasis in the WES programme is on creating a "mind frame" which will lead to a clean environment and healthy behaviours. Greater convergence with such efforts as oral rehydration therapy, diarrhoeal case management, breastfeeding, immunisations, and nutritional supplements is also part of the programme. A major focus is being placed on the potential of primary school students to motivate parents and other community members towards desirable behavioural change.

The Process

A summary of the accomplishments of the School Sanitation Programme from 1992 to 1995 is presented in Table 1. During this pilot period 2,575 schools were covered and the seeds of the programme were planted in 121 thanas in 51 districts.¹ More than 32 thousand teachers and SMC members received

training and orientation in the behavioural development of school children concerning sanitation, hygiene and safe water use.

Figure 1 outlines the process and concerned agencies in the School Sanitation Programme.

Lessons Learned

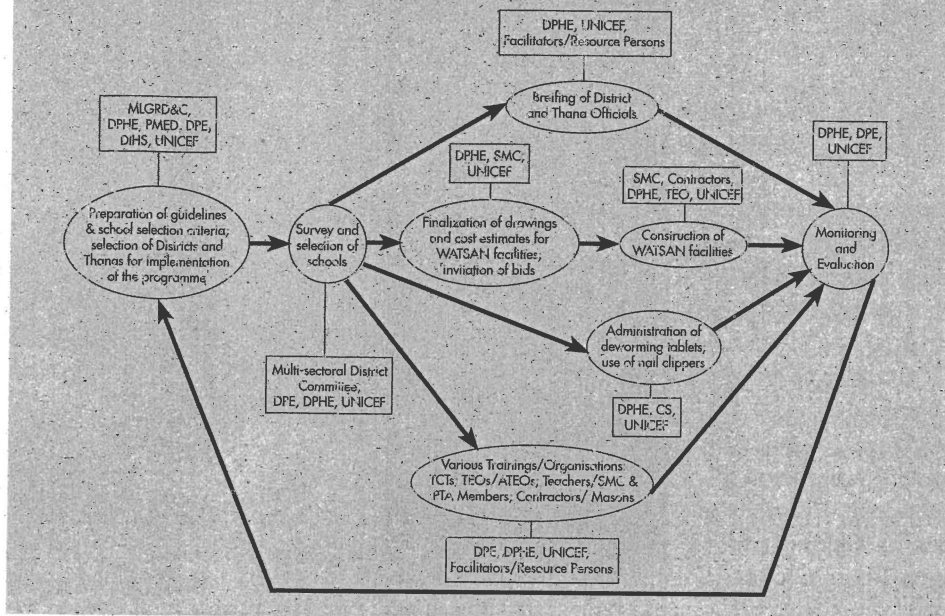
Several lessons have been learned along the way that have helped to modify and improve the programme.

1. An assessment done in 1994 showed that girls' attendance in Class III to V in the sample schools rose an average of 11%. This was partially due to the active social mobilization campaign for compulsory primary education for all. What is noteworthy is that the girl respondents said that the privacy provided by separate latrines was an important contributory factor. This alone provides a strong impetus for accelerating the School Sanitation Programme.
2. A comparison of survey results from 1994 and 1995 showed that the quality of construction and maintenance of water and sanitation facilities improved remarkably. For example, the percentage of running tube wells in the sample schools increased from 68% to 89% and satisfactory discharge of water increased from 55% to 95%. Similarly, the status of clean and flushed pans increased from 36%

Table 1. School Sanitation Programme (1992-1995)

| Year | Number of schools covered | Number of Districts covered | Number of Thanas covered | Number of teachers and SMC members trained/oriented |
|-------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| 1992 | 1,089 | 16 | 16 | 16,420 |
| 1993 | 369 | 11 | 28 | 5,840 |
| 1994 | 678 | 19 | 43 | 7,458 |
| 1995 | 438 | 05 | 34 | 2,512 (Ongoing) |
| Total | 2,575 | 51 | 121 | 32,230 |

FIGURE 1 The Process and Concerned Agencies/Actors in the School Sanitation Programme



to 80%. These are attributable to a monitoring system that combined inspection and corrective measures, showing its tremendous importance as part of the implementation process.

- The 1995 survey showed that 92% of the teachers from the sample schools received training and 96% of them said that they were actively teaching lessons on hygiene and sanitation in their respective classes. The fund for maintaining WATSAN facilities rose to 44% of the schools in 1995 as opposed to 7% in 1994. Soap or ash was kept next to water facilities in 52% of the schools; this encouraged hand washing among the students after defecation. These are examples of initiatives triggered by teacher training.
- In 1995 an action-research study in Moulavibazar was carried out in five schools to engage SMCs in implementation of the School Sanitation Programme. Several indicators showed the performance by SMCs to be far superior to that by contractors hired by DPHE. The time taken by SMCs for completion of construction was, for example, 28 days as opposed to 7-10 months by contractors. The quality of materials used and the overall construction by SMCs was cost-effective

and according to specifications and plan design. Contractors hired by DPHE generally quoted costs that were 80% higher. Most important, the initiative by the SMC promoted and ensured participation, empowerment and a sense of ownership within the community. It also encouraged local capacity building and better management of the WATSAN facilities.

- An experiment in Social Mobilization in Barisal showed that school children were very effective in prompting their parents to build and use sanitary latrines and keep them clean. The process was aided by the personal interest and political will demonstrated by the Divisional Commissioner and District officials to promote sanitation and hygiene. This is exemplary in terms of unleashing the potential of school children, supported by concerned high officials.

The Way Forward

In 1996, several measures were taken to improve the School Sanitation Programme.

- Based on the encouraging results from the experiment in

Moulavibazar, the Secretary, Local Government, from the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperatives (MLGRD&C) issued a directive that all activities under the School Sanitation Programme will henceforth be implemented through the SMCs. Multisectoral District and Thana committees composed of concerned Government officials have been formed to oversee the programme and provide appropriate guidance and technical support. This approach is being carried out in 800 schools in six districts, one in each of the six divisions. The results of this pilot activity are awaited by all with great interest.

- Distribution of deworming tablets and nail clippers is also being introduced in all 800 schools. This will act as an entry point and educational tool to promote improved sanitation and hygiene among the students, their siblings and parents. The good results already obtained from construction of WATSAN facilities will be reinforced and the active participation of school children will be encouraged.
- A module for Safe Learning Environment in Primary Schools is being developed and introduced on an experimental basis in Noakhali district. Figure 2 gives a framework for the experiment. The time has come to supplement the current School Sanitation Programme. The development of an enabling environment will encourage the active participation of students, their teachers and School Management Committee (SMC) members. There are two parts to this process: (a) the first is to inculcate in children those behaviours that lead to safe and healthy living through classroom teaching and experiential learning by engaging in school projects linked to themes as shown in Figure 2; (b) the second pertains to reaching out to the community by enabling

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children to function as motivators for change. Both would be pursued through extra curricular school projects with the help of teachers, SMC members and parents.

A preliminary action-research study has been initiated in the Noakhali district. It will examine the effects of the WATSAN facilities (4 schools) and the SLE components (4 schools) on the behavioural development of school children. These schools will be compared to those schools in which no facilities or SLE components have been introduced (4 schools). Lessons learned from this study will help to design an extension of the approach to other primary schools operated by the Government and NGOs.

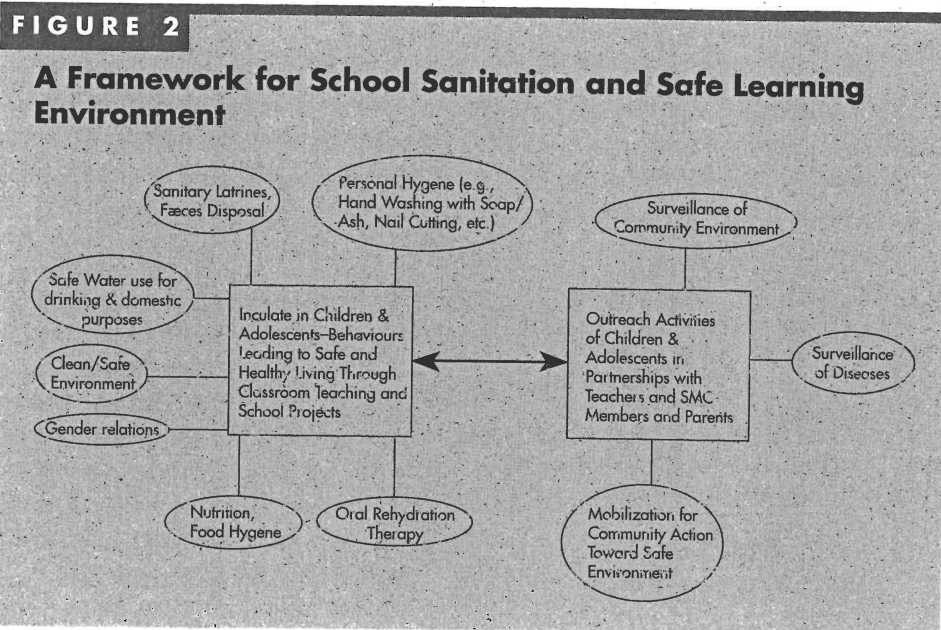
The innovations mentioned above are important developments in the continuing effort to orient the School Sanitation Programme towards more effective behavioural development in children. The initiative in varying stages has already taken root in 2,575 Government primary schools. Estimates show that there are about 57,600 schools, 45% still lack any WATSAN facilities. The goal is to ensure that all schools as well as non-formal primary schools run by NGOs have active School Sanitation and Safe Learning Environment Programmes by the year 2000. A prospect well worth pursuing.

Abbreviations

- ATEO = Assistant Thana Education Officer
- CS = Civil Surgeon
- DPE = Directorate of Primary Education
- DHS = Directorate of Health Services
- MOLGRD&C = Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives
- PMED = Primary & Mass Education Division

- PTA = Parent Teacher Association
- SMC = School Management Committee
- TCT = Thana Core Trainers
- TEO = Thana Education Officer
- UNICEF = United Nations Children Fund
- WATSAN = Water and Sanitation

¹ For administrative and political purposes, Bangladesh is divided into 6 Divisions, 64 Districts, 460 Thanas and 4451 Unions.



■ **Keynote Speech of Global Water Partnership Meeting**, from page 3

mentally sustainable but also equitable. There can be no development without water. The Global Water Partnership must provide leadership in the dangerous tensions and conflicts that will arise around access to water in the future. It must take the lead in updating international water law according to the principle of equity, not prior appropriation of resources.

Given our diverse backgrounds and interests, I must say that if we are not able to address equity as well as sustainability, the partnership will be dead before it even begins. That places heavy responsibilities on us all. It places responsibility on the members from

developing nations not to whine or deny that there are many cases in which fingers are justifiably pointed. But it equally means that "first world" agencies must be flexible — as indeed they would be if called on to address a crisis in their own country — and remember the need for development is a crisis, one which, if not properly dealt with, threatens the very future of our world community. They must also recognise that the policies of their countries and institutions are at times inimical to the kind of co-operation we seek and that they must be willing to make common cause in demanding policy reform.

And finally, the very notion of a

partnership, a true partnership, around such an important resource, requires an open and inclusive approach to other international organisations working in the same field. We must all pull together.

Chairperson, delegates, these are heavy demands which we place upon ourselves but I am confident that our common concern as custodians of what is truly the lifeblood of our world will drive us. I am confident that we agree that we cannot forget the children of today yet claim to be caring for the children of tomorrow.

In short, we can ensure that there will be "some, for all, for ever." I look forward to working together to achieve that goal.