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THE FUTURE OF WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE:
INNOVATION, ADAPTATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN A CHANGING WORLD

**Decentralized rural water supply and sanitation services in
Bangladesh: a critical overview**

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The devolution approach pursued by the HYSAWA Fund project has been considered for replication all over the country. By November 2010, 317 Union Parishads (UPs) have become capable of procuring services using Public Procurement Rules and preparing schemes in the area of hygiene, sanitation and water supply. They have installed nearly 16,000 water points providing access to safe water to some 1.3 million people with a significant proportion of poor and hard core poor. Breaking the traditional dilemma of UP performance they prove to be capable of utilizing funds for development activities following government rules and procedures independently. With only one functionary or staff member (Secretary) it is in fact very challenging to ensure proper implementation of development interventions. It is imperative that the UPs be provided with adequate number of functionaries along with required funds and authorities.

Background

In line with its commitment to bring services to the “door steps of the people”, the Government of Bangladesh plans to empower and strengthen local governments, particularly the Union Parishadsⁱ, and promote decentralization of power through a number of measures, namely: (a) capacity building of the local government bodies and providing adequate fiscal authority and incentives for mobilization of resources at the local level, (b) introducing local-level planning and budgeting and ensuring budget implementation, and (c) developing partnership with local-level NGOs/CBOs and ensuring their accountability to the local peopleⁱⁱ.

The Union Parishad is the only Local Government Institution that has been active for about a century and a half, while the other tiers or levels are sometimes abolished or are not fully effective or functional. As such the focus of local government capacity building efforts under various national and Development Partner-funded by different Water Supply and Sanitation sector projects are currently on the Union Parishads. The Hygiene Sanitation and Water (HYSAWA) Project, is one of such initiatives. This project has been established by the Government of Bangladesh in cooperation with Danida and consists of the Local Government Support Unit (LGSU) and the HYSAWA Fund.

The Local Government Support Unit (LGSU) is established within the Local Government Division (LGD) to provide capacity building to Local Government Institutions for implementation of Hygiene, Sanitation and Water services to prepare for accessing the funding opportunities from the HYSAWA Fund. This Fund is a registered company under the Companies Act of 1994. It is governed by a Board with representatives of senior Government officials, local authorities, NGOs and civil society. It works as a basket fund to mobilize resources from Government and donor agencies.

A devolution approach in water supply and sanitation

The establishment of the HYSAWA Fund as an independent financial institution was a daunting task. A significant change in the funding procedure and a paradigm shift from “business as usual” to a direct demand driven approach in devolution of administrative and financial authority at local level proved to be two building blocks for decentralized service delivery in Bangladesh. The major objective of the project is to decentralize decision making and financial management to local government institutions in regard to hygiene, sanitation and water supply. Establishing direct linkage with the funding source remains a key to empower LGIs. This linkage, along with capacity building inputs, promotes greater devolution of administrative and financial powers to local governments.

Thus, under this approach, “a bottom-up planning process is being implemented in which the communities plan their own projects for hygiene, sanitation and water supply interventions according to their need and affordability. They submit the community schemes to the respective UPs for implementation. The HYSAWA Project facilitates the establishment of necessary institutional arrangements within the government institutions and engages private sector management/engineering firms and NGOs, to provide capacity building support to the UPs. Cross cutting issues like human rights, gender, culture and development and transparency are part of the preparation and mobilization processes and mainstreamed into all stages of implementation and management. Communities are encouraged and are supported to take lead in the whole process right from the beginning to the end of the local project activities”iii.

Implementation mechanism

Direct funding to the UPs without the influence of national politics or higher level authorities has been seen as the key to empower these Local Government Institutions and advance the decentralization process. To ensure effective design and sustainable use of the WSS interventions it is essential that the communities are involved in planning and implementation according to their need and ability to pay. However, both the UPs and the communities do not presently have the means and capacity to carry out these responsibilities. In order to address this, the Project facilitates the establishment of the following two support mechanisms:

1. **Financing mechanism** (the HYSAWA Fund), which, upon application and subject to certain conditions, provides funds, as grants, to the UPs to enable them (i) to help the communities in preparing their own WSS schemes, and (ii) to implement those community schemes.
2. **Capacity support mechanism** (through the LGSU), which provides the necessary capacity support to the UPs to carry out their responsibilities.

Implementation mechanism has another important facet at the community level. It has two distinct features, community development and formulation of community schemes.

- **Community Development:** Community organizations have been formed at the community level at the initial stages of the project with a view to developing their capacity to take over the responsibilities of planning, implementation, operating and maintaining community schemes. To ensure participation of all sections of population in a village or a peri-urban area, including disadvantaged groups like women and poor, federation-like community organizations comprising three groups, the poor, the women and the general members of the public, were formed. This structure ensures equity-based representation of poor, women and general families in the organization and helps all segments of the community to bring their relevant agenda into the village development plan; and
- **Formulation of Community Schemes:** The community schemes are prepared on three broad areas, (i) hygiene promotion, (ii) community-led total sanitation (CLTS) and (iii) water supply. A demand responsive strategy are adopted to formulate the community schemes – the communities, usually a Village Development Forum (VDF) plan their own schemes, according to their ability to contribute towards these investments, and are fully responsible to operate and maintain the system. These community schemes are then forwarded to the UPs through the Ward WatSan Committee for further processing and implementation. Local NGOs are hired by the UP to support the VDF in preparing the community schemes.

Success so far

Although the HYSAWA approach has been taken up as a pilot project in selected areas, its outputs are promising for replication all over the country. “By November 2010, 317 UPs have become capable of procuring works, goods and services using Public Procurement Rules, engaging community to prepare scheme in the area of hygiene, sanitation and water supply. Nearly 16,000 water points have been installed providing access to safe water to some 1.3 million people with a significant proportion of poor and hard core poor. The HYSAWA project has also motivated over 350,000 households to install sanitary latrines. The HYSAWA approach has proven its worth in providing direct and effective support to the UPs”^{iv}. The general experience in giving the UPs a real role and responsibility in management and execution of activities is promising. Hopefully, the approach will establish a model for other development areas in the future.

Lessons learnt

Along the trajectory of project implementation several lessons have been learnt so far. *First*, the UPs are, contrary to conventional beliefs, capable of utilizing funds for development activities following government rules and procedures independently. *Second*, communities are feeling more empowered and engaged in ensuring proper implementation of activities-which are in contrast with NGO implemented project wherein community perceive them as receivers of services only. *Third*, UPs are increasingly recognized as important client (service providers) by the private sectors (contractors), NGOs and civil society. *Fourth*, although project was developed for having wider collaboration among relevant stakeholders including DPHE, in reality stakeholders sometimes became suspicious about one another’s’ interests. It acted an impediment to smooth progress. *Fifth*, collection of contribution money from the beneficiaries by a political entity (UPs) seemed more difficult than by the non-political entity (NGOs). *Sixth*, project perceived that demand driven approach could be equally appropriate for water supply, sanitation and hygiene promotion. However, the ongoing implementation process indicates that for water supply demand driven approach might an effective strategy but not for sanitation and hygiene promotion.

Challenges

Although there are several achievements and successes the project has made so far, there still remain some major challenges in mainstreaming the approach. They include, among others:

One: With only one functionary or staff member (i.e. secretary of the UP) it is in fact very challenging to ensure proper implementation of development interventions starting from planning, designing, procuring and supervising in general without additional support from any project or institution. The issue of recruiting and/or engaging additional staff has been discussed with the government by both HYSAWA project and other development projects ,such as, LGSU and NGOs. Therefore, the government is seriously thinking of recruiting an additional staff i.e. assistant accountant in the UP as well as establishing a coordination mechanism with other government line agencies working at the UP. Therefore, replication of this project in other non HYSAWA project areas is likely to be possible. Since UPs under this project receive various types of facilitation supports, at present they don’t face any problem of this sort.

Two: Mainstreaming the direct funding mechanism to the UPs may create conflict among the political entities, such as, members of parliament, Upazila Chairmen, UPs as well as local administration. In the case of devolution approach in the Upazila Parishad (local government tier just above the UP), conflicts have already been observed among the Upazila Parishad, MPs, Upazila Nirbahi Officers over the authority over the Upazila development Budget.

Conclusion

Despite all these limitations and challenges the devolution approach under the HYSAWA project is very promising and it promotes development based on needs and priorities of the communities. It also improves an atmosphere of wider democratization process at the grassroots through ensuring people’s involvement in prioritizing development needs and its implementation. It is imperative that the UPs be provided with adequate number of functionaries along with required funds and authorities.

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Keywords

Public Procurement Rule, Union Parishad, the Hygiene Sanitation and Water (HYSAWA) Project, Community Development, Community Empowerment, Hygiene Promotion, Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS)

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- ⁱ Union Parishad (UP) is the lowest tier of the local government in Bangladesh. The UP consists of 13 elected representatives including a Chairman and twelve members from a cluster of 4-6 villages of an average population of 10,000-20,000. There are about 4500 UPs in Bangladesh.
- ⁱⁱ Steps Towards Change: National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction II (Revised): FY 2009-11. Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. .
- ⁱⁱⁱ Pilot Modalities and Process Monitoring in Hygiene, Sanitation and Water Supply (Hysawa) Project. *Six Quarterly, Annual Report & Fourth Quarterly Report. Participatory Management Initiative for Development, (PMID, 2010).*
- ^{iv} LGSU-HYSAWA, Semi-Annual Progress Report, June-December, 2010