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**DELIVERING WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE SERVICES  
IN AN UNCERTAIN ENVIRONMENT**

**Reaching the marginalised and socially isolated sex worker  
and sweeper communities of Tangail, Bangladesh**

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*Sex workers and sweepers are socially isolated in Bangladesh. Sex workers are not economically deprived, but social elites or political forces as well as the religious leaders most of the time take stance against the sex workers. Though sex workers are comparatively affluent, they can't live in the society with dignity and pride due to social stigma and isolation. They are also deprived of basic human rights including water, sanitation and hygiene services. On the other hand, sweepers are extremely poor and socially indispensable. They clean the shit of thousands, but their WaSH facilities are unhygienic and many times unusable.*

*WaterAid in its Inclusion programme included both these communities and provided special support to ensure their WaSH rights in the respective communities. In this briefing paper, we will try to explore the different level of software and hardware interventions we have taken in our programme in different communities namely the sex workers and the sweepers of Tangail district.*

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**WaterAid Bangladesh**

WaterAid has been operating in Bangladesh since 1986 as one of the lead actors in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WaSH) sector and is well experienced in innovating, scaling up and managing large scale projects targeting poor, vulnerable and excluded. It has been registered with NGO Affairs Bureau since 1996. The geographic focus of WaterAid in Bangladesh includes urban slums, hard-to-reach areas and eco-hazardous zones such as hill tract and hillocks, dry and arid *barind* tract, salinity-prone coastal belt, *haor* and flood-prone chars keeping an eye over the climate change implications.

We, along with our 26 partner NGOs, have successfully developed and implemented a model approach for providing sustainable community managed WaSH services and facilities for poor, extreme poor and socially excluded people in geographically and technically challenged contexts of Bangladesh, that covers 22 *Upazilas* under 20 Districts and 184 slums in 10 Cities and Towns. We reached 9 million people across the country with WaSH services so far.

We continue to enhance sector stakeholders' capacity for establishing systems in program delivery and monitoring to facilitate pro-poor, gender sensitive, cost effective, and sustainable WaSH services. We facilitate community people to demand their WaSH rights capacitate and sensitize Government and other duty bearers to respond to the peoples need, and advocate for the essential role of WaSH in human development.

**Inclusive WaSH programme approach**

WaterAid while implementing its regular programme in urban and rural areas realized that there are some groups who are excluded from regular programme intervention and thus need to be included for providing safe water, sanitation and hygiene services. Through a national consultative process WaterAid identified several excluded groups like tea pickers, sex workers, sweepers, ethnic minorities, garment workers, people with disability, floating people, transgender, pavement dwellers etc. To ensure equity WaterAid started a new programme titled Inclusion which is based on the principle of social justice and aims at promoting WaSH equity and access for socially excluded groups which have been mentioned above.

## Reaching the marginalized

WaterAid's partner organization Population Services Training Center (hereafter PSTC) has been implementing different projects on different issues related to health, social security and physical living conditions of the of poor and socially disadvantaged people together with development partners from the very beginning of its journey. PSTC has become a partner of WaterAid since 1998 to implement community based water supply, sanitation & hygiene promotion projects.

PSTC's partnership with WaterAid is still continuing through Improving Livelihood and Environmental Health for Excluded Population (ILEHEP) project in *Kandapara* brothel and three adjacent sweeper colonies. *Kandapara* brothel of Tangail City is the second largest brothel in Bangladesh established in 1850-1860. Around 950 sex workers and their 86 children are living in the brothel right now. Total 472 sweepers live in 3 scattered sweeper colonies namely *Kandapara sweeper colony*, *Thanapara sweeper colony* and *Police line sweeper colony* of Tangail City Corporation.

Overall environmental health, water supply, sanitation, solid waste disposal and drainage system, personal hygiene behavior and menstrual hygiene management scenario of the brothel and sweeper colonies are extremely bad. People live in congested & unhygienic living spaces. In addition to water born diseases and diseases due to unhygienic living condition, they are also vulnerable to diseases like Reproductive Tract Infection (RTI) and Sexual Transmitted Diseases (STD) and HIV/AIDs. During rainy season, most of the drains of the targeted areas are over flown and water logging becomes a severe problem. People are not enough skilled or sensitized to raise their voice to claim human rights. WaSH services are inadequate in the brothel and sweeper colonies.

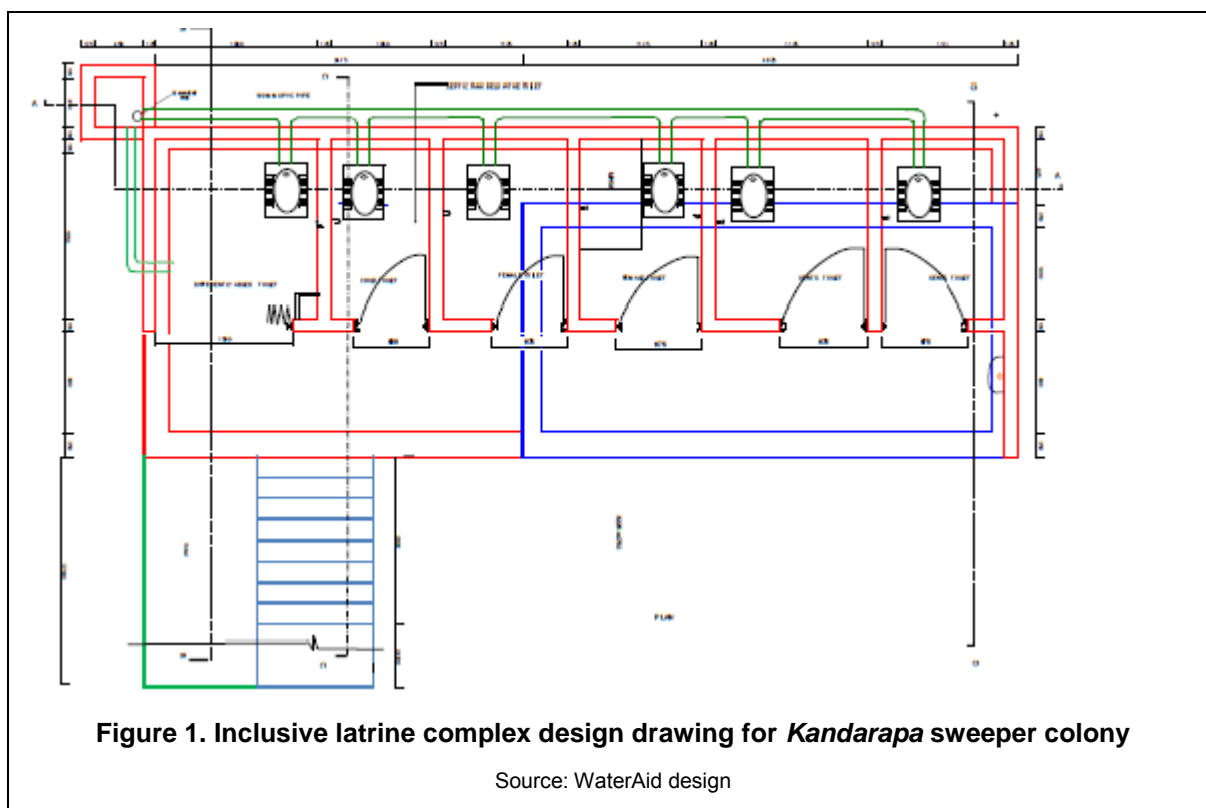
*Paurashava* is responsible for providing safe water and maintaining a healthy sanitary environment within their boundaries but *Paurashava* and other service providers do not provide any utility services to these vulnerable groups though these groups regularly pay taxes to the local authority.

Considering those gaps and based on the experience and necessary skills, PSTC with the assistance from WaterAid started a WaSH programme in *Kandapara* brothel and three adjacent sweeper communities of Tangail City Corporation since June 2010 to introduce a model for WaSH service delivery for these excluded communities.

Objectives of the project is to improve health and wellbeing of the sex workers and sweepers of Tangail through enhancing access to safe and adequate water, improved sanitation and hygiene promotion supports. To achieve this objective, PSTC has been working as per plan and found the output and achievements as satisfactory over the period.

## Programme support

While implementing the project, WaterAid and PSTC divided its work into two groups namely hardware and software. Under hardware, they provided facilities like hygienic latrines, water points etc so that people can access to safe drinking water and also can use a latrine in hygienic and dignified manner. The hardware supports provided under this project are, Seven cluster latrines with 2 chambers and bathing facilities were installed in the brothel, 1 inclusive latrine complex with 6 chambers were installed at *Kandapara* sweeper colony, 10 Tube well platforms were renovated in the brothel which were previously non functional (by platform we mean the base of the tube well. If the base is broken then the water source gets contaminated. This is why it is important to have the platforms installed properly), 8 Iron Removal Plants with RCC ring and filter media were installed at household level to provide safe drinking water for the sex workers. Previously they were getting water from tube wells with high iron concentration. Those tube wells were installed by the house owners before and after the project started they have been using water from those tube wells only after filtering, 6 Tube well platforms were constructed at *Kandapara* sweeper colony, 1 Bathing place, 1 footpath (150ft), 50 ft drainage were also constructed in *Kandapara* sweeper colony. Apart from the inclusive latrine complex, two more Cluster latrines with 5 chambers were constructed in 2 other sweeper colonies.



### Inclusive approach to ensure equity

WaterAid recently mainstreamed its Equity and Inclusion principle and WaterAid Bangladesh took the lead to roll it out in its programme. In *Kandarapa* sweeper colony there was only one disabled person, but WaterAid with its partner PSTC designed and constructed an inclusive latrine complex with ramp and rail for wheel chair user. In figure 1, the design of the inclusive latrine complex has been shared. This latrine complex has 6 chambers including 1 specially made for wheel chair users, 1 for children with smaller pan, 1 for pregnant women and elder population with high commode and 3 other with regular options. However all the latrine chambers included rails and user friendly water taps so that women, disabled people, children can use the facilities easily. For the wheel chair chamber we provided extra space with folding door facility, easy hand shower for cleaning purpose and hand rails for easy mobility. Before designing and constructing we rolled out an accessibility audit to get community consensus on our design and drawing. Accessibility audit is basically done to evaluate the level of accessibility of existing water and/or sanitation facility, and to identify possible changes or improvements (Jones 2012). Thus we conducted accessibility in the hope that it will help the community people to feel empowered and take ownership.

After the success of inclusive latrine complex in *Kandara* sweeper colony, we decided to build 2 more inclusive latrine complexes in Thanapara and Police line sweeper colonies with similar facilities. However, due to space constrain we could not build ramp in these two facilities. In addition we added drainage facilities in the sweeper colonies so that during rainy season the sweeper communities can avoid water logging and use the latrine complex properly.

For proper construction it was needed to demolish the existing facilities made by the local government. We went for consistent policy advocacy initiative to influence the local government so that they allow us to do it. We also influenced the local government through the community people to contribute 10% of the total cost of construction which is not very usual for the local authority in Bangladesh. But through our consistent persuasion they finally agreed to provide 10% contribution for the latrine complex. PSTC recently processed signing a memorandum of understanding with community people and the local government about the arrangement of constructing these latrine complexes. The mayor of Tangail City Corporation previously visited the inclusive latrine complex we made in *Kandarapa* sweeper colony and was highly pleased. As an indication of that, he appointed a full time sweeper to clean and maintain hygienic condition of that complex.

To ensure environmental health and hygiene behavior of both the sex workers and the sweepers it was not only good enough to build hardware facilities, but also integrated hygiene promotion was needed. Thus WaterAid

jointly with PSTC regularly organized meeting with Local Government Institutions, observed special days and planned activities around those, formed sanitation option management committee, arranged training for them, committees were formed and meetings were organized for solid waste management. Hygiene campaign and cleanliness drive were taken in regular intervals so that the community people maintain the latrine facilities and water points and keep them clean. Children were taught about hygienic behavior and community based organizations were formed so that they can keep up the good work even after WaterAid or PSTC discontinue their work in Tangail.

### **Remarkable changes**

After consistent persuasion and hygiene promotion in the brothel and the sweeper colonies we have observed some visible changes which has also been measured by our monitoring team. We have observed increased awareness among the sex workers and their customers regarding personal cleanliness, hygienic utilization of sanitary facilities as well as the use of safe drinking water in their daily life. The people of sweeper colonies have taken a lead in ensuring personal hygiene and menstrual hygiene management. Increased practice among the brothel and the sweeper community inhabitants regarding hand washing, personal hygiene, domestic hygiene and environmental hygiene was praiseworthy. After conducting regular sessions with the adolescent girls in both the communities, usage of sanitary napkins has been increased and that was also verified talking to the shopkeepers of the adjacent pharmacies. Initially when we started our project, the house owners were unwilling to provide their valuable land for construction of sanitary latrines within the brothel. But after our continuous advocacy efforts most of the house owners agreed to provide land for construction of water and sanitation facilities. We have successfully built up rapport with the local sex workers organization along with the City Mayor which helped us achieving our goal to provide safe water and sanitation facilities to the marginalized communities of Tangail district.

### **Challenges**

Working with sex workers itself was a big challenge considering the existing power dynamics and monetary involvement. Sometimes the local law enforce authority gets share of the financial benefit of this business and they also exploit the sex workers for their own purpose. And in case of sweeper colonies, they don't bother to consider their rights as human being. During our work local muscleman, middlemen, land owners, political leaders and their supporters created undue demand which was difficult for us to handle. As the land is privately owned and very valuable getting permission to construct WaSH facilities was the biggest challenge of all. Local religious leaders and their supporters very often threaten to evict the brothel which is also being supported by the political leaders of different parties. The general mass of the city do not cooperate any development work for either sex workers or sweepers. Masons also charge high price for their work in these areas. Non cooperation from the house owners initially was challenging and most interestingly sometimes the sex workers did not even want us to work as they assumed this would increase the price of their house rent and other services. We had to face all these challenges including raising money for cost sharing so that the residents feel ownership of the WaSH facilities and properly maintain those.

### **Lesson learned**

We have some critical and encouraging learning from this project. First, the involvement of local government is crucial. They should be reached from the very beginning through civil society organizations. If the community people are not properly aware and motivated then other stakeholders will not be responsive too.

In case of providing WaSH facilities, running an accessibility audit is must to make the facility inclusive for all. Cost of construction for socially isolated communities can be little higher than usual as the power dynamics of these areas make the market to behave hazardously. In addition, inclusive components of WaSH facilities like ramp, rail etc can be a bit costly and thus should be calculated properly in accordance with appropriate disabled friendly design.

Most of the cases the major barrier is the mind set up. We are not generally prepared to consider the disabled and socially isolated people in our programme design. It is important to change our mind set up for having dialogues with other stakeholders to make these facilities inclusive for socially isolated groups like sex workers and sweepers.

### **Conclusion**

Accessibility audit is a very important factor to make a facility usable. Involvement of the community in making a facility for them will end up in sustainability of that particular facility. WaterAid as a part of its ongoing campaign to ensure equity and inclusion has started doing this. The inclusive latrine complexes and other WaSH facilities in

the brother and in the sweeper colonies are good examples of how to construct hardware facilities in a systematic manner to address the needs of both disabled people and general mass through inclusive WaSH facilities and interactive software promotion. WaterAid will continue this initiative in the future.

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## Reference

Jones, H. (2012) *Facilitator notes: Accessibility audit of water & sanitation facilities*. Downloaded from, [http://wedc.lboro.ac.uk/resources/learning/EI\\_FN2\\_Accessibiity\\_Audit\\_final.pdf](http://wedc.lboro.ac.uk/resources/learning/EI_FN2_Accessibiity_Audit_final.pdf)

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