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**SUSTAINABLE WATER AND SANITATION SERVICES
FOR ALL IN A FAST CHANGING WORLD**

**Child rights based water, sanitation and hygiene in
practice in Bangladesh, India and Nepal**

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The child rights based WASH programme was implemented by WaterAid and Save the Children in South Asia from 2008-13. Child rights situation analysis showed that lack of participation of children in WASH programmes is compounded by the lack of accountability of duty bearers towards ensuring children's rights. As a result WASH programmes often fail to ensure that services are accessible to children or targeted to the most excluded. Two key areas of focus were identified; to develop accountability mechanisms at the local level for provision of WASH services that meet children's needs; and to ensure children's meaningful participation in WASH activities, especially the poorest and most marginalised. This paper will share the approaches developed, the key outcomes, and learning to take forward. It will also demonstrate how the child rights based approach to WASH brings children's needs and opinions into WASH discussion at community and institutional level and can lead to improved access, and a better realisation of children's rights overall.

Background

In South Asia, diarrhoea caused by dirty water and unsafe sanitation is the second biggest killer of children under five. Whilst children bear the brunt of lack of access to water and sanitation they are rarely consulted or involved in implementing WASH projects in their communities. This lack of participation is compounded by a lack of accountability of duty bearers towards ensuring children's rights. As a result WASH programmes often fail to ensure that services are accessible to children or targeted to the most excluded.

To address this, a strategic partnership was formed between WaterAid and Save the Children Finland, to implement a three year action learning initiative "Child Rights Based WASH in Bangladesh, India and Nepal" with implementing partners Village Education Resource Centre (VERC), Samarthan and Nepal Water for Health (NEWAH). It aimed to draw upon the WASH experience of WaterAid and Save the Children's expertise in the area of child rights, and to develop a WASH programme and way of working that could generate a considerable impact for children.

Intended impacts

There were three intended impacts of the initiative which were reflected in the approaches developed and in the monitoring systems used by those implementing the programme:

- All children in the project areas of the three countries have better access to WASH services and practices
- An enabling environment is created, where children, their parents and communities claim and respect WASH rights
- Improvement in WASH services and practices will help the realisation of children's right to survival, health and education.

Development of approaches

The initiative started as an 18 month long preparatory phase with a focus on developing approaches for implementing WASH which incorporated some key principles of child rights programming. During this period, Child Rights Situation Analysis was conducted, staff and others involved in the project were made

familiar with the principles of a child rights based approach to WASH, and lessons were drawn from the preparatory or 'pilot' phase to inform the main project. The experience gained during this phase brought a consensus among all actors involved – that a child rights approach brings a new dimension to WASH in which it would be possible for children to access improved services and adopt appropriate WASH practices.

From January 2011 to December 2013, the programme focused on refining, consolidating and applying the approaches developed, to ensure their effectiveness.

Key components of the initiative

Three key components were identified under which approaches could be developed, focused and measured in terms of effectiveness. Detailed examples of what these key components have meant in practice will be shared later in the paper.

Component 1: Develop accountability mechanisms at local government and community level for adequate provision of WASH services and practices for children.

1. Work with duty bearers, parents and caregivers to inform them of the WASH rights of children and the importance of WASH for their health and development. Duty-bearers in this case are those responsible for ensuring the respect, protection and fulfilment of children's rights to WASH.
2. Develop community based mechanisms for:
 - a. Making parents and caregivers responsible for children adopting appropriate WASH practices
 - b. Holding to account service providers and local government for providing appropriate WASH services for children.

Component 2: Ensure meaningful participation and involvement of all children in WASH activities, especially the most poor and marginalised.

Children may be marginalised for many different reasons including geographical, social or economic situations. They may also be marginalised if they are not attending school.

1. Build capacity and confidence of children so that they are able to voice their opinion.
2. Set up and institutionalise norms for the participation of children according to their capacities; and develop ways of including the most poor and marginalised.
3. Develop the skills of field teams to work with children; create an enabling environment where children can interact and communicate with adults regarding WASH related concerns.

Component 3: Advocate for the adoption of a child rights approach in WASH programming and policy.

1. Generate evidence from this action learning initiative.
2. Influence networks, existing platforms and relevant actors to advocate for child rights based WASH.

The programme in action

To measure progress, four result areas were used, which reflect the desired impacts of the three programme components.

Result area 1: Inclusive community based responsive mechanism established to secure WASH entitlements of children, especially the poorest and most marginalised

Result area 2: Inclusive and effective institutional accountability mechanisms developed to establish child rights to WASH, especially for the poorest and most marginalized children

Result area 3: All children especially the poorest and most marginalized participate meaningfully in establishing their WASH rights

Result area 4: Networks and forums developed or strengthened for advocating child friendly and child rights centered WASH approaches in policy development, planning and implementation of WASH programmes.

The flexibility of the programme is reflected in the diversity of approaches developed and used by the country programmes to suit the socio-cultural, economic and political contexts of their project areas. Some examples of the tools and approaches used in each country are provided below.

Bangladesh

Result area 1:

To embed an approach effectively, meaningful engagement of right holders in the entire process is crucial. As part of its strategy, the Bangladesh programme delivered relevant support to local leaders and duty bearers for mobilization and meaningful engagement. Under this initiative more than three thousand community leaders were trained and developed as WASH rights advocates through several practical and professional training sessions, exposure visits, mapping exercises, and formal and informal coordination.

Through this continuous influence and negotiation a total of 11,601 people (3,534 children) benefited directly through water and total 10,807 people (3,417 children) benefited directly through sanitation services. Overall hand washing practice has increased significantly through organizing massive hygiene promotion sessions. A total of 78,823 people have been reached indirectly through various hygiene promotion sessions, campaigns and mobilizations. To internalise the special requirements of disabled children, CACs (Citizen Action Committees) - community level groups formed under the programme, and UP (Union Parishad - local government) level conducted an accessibility audit jointly with the project staff to identify the particular needs and blockages regarding access to WASH of persons with disability in their respective areas. Consequently, a number of local adaptations were undertaken to make latrine facilities user friendly for both able and disabled children.

Result area 2:

Inclusion of child-friendly budget and technologies by local government institutions was one of the significant achievements of this initiative in Bangladesh. The actions taken under the programme were instrumental for tapping resources from several external agencies and specifying the age specific WASH requirements of children and disabled persons. It has also been successful in mobilizing budget review bodies at UP level to track regular and committed expenditures at their respective jurisdictions and further support and influence schools/institutions for adopting child friendly technologies and approaches.

Local government leaders have also been trained on WASH rights, institutional accountability, meaningful child participation and engaged in various activities. Influence through obligations and a positive and enabling approach was extremely helpful for them to internalize the key objectives of the project and recognize demand for water and sanitation services. Female teachers also received exclusive orientation on menstrual hygiene management. Thus special requirements of children received proper attention from the local government leaders and duty bearers who have internalized the necessities of child friendly technologies at school and community level, and hence initiating technical readjustment or modification of the facilities through technical assistance from VERC and WaterAid.

Result area 3:

Through an inclusive approach, which aimed to ensure that the WASH needs of non-school attending children, disabled and marginalised children were covered, children were encouraged to participate in the decision making process around WASH related issues. For enhancing support to all marginalized groups and children, respective CACs prepared lists of poor and vulnerable groups, underprivileged children and their families in 172 communities. Children's leadership was developed and expanded through joyful sessions over the last 4 years. Joyful sessions are informal and inclusive gatherings of children, which engage children through play and learning materials which focus on helping them become confident and capable to learn, share and express themselves in a supportive environment. The project provided continuous support to evolving children platforms – gatherings of children which provide an opportunity to share and learn about rights and WASH related issues - gradually at community, ward and union level. Three hundred child leaders were trained to identify their needs and raise their voices together to realize their rights to WASH in a collective way.

Realizing the special requirements of adolescent girls during their menstruation period, Saipara High School Authority of Basupara Union has demonstrated in a shift in awareness. The school amended its girls' toilet and common room to accommodate a special space for the girls to wash and dry used rags, supplying low cost sanitary napkins and ensured sufficient ventilation and water with the toilets. Such examples of change provide evidence of the success of the programme and the child rights based approach.

India

Result area 1:

Right from the beginning of the programme, emphasis was given to the community taking the lead in ensuring children's rights to safe drinking water and access to sustainable sanitation services. Parents had often not recognised that children too had their rights and water and sanitation was not high on their agenda. The project had to design a mechanism which could help identify children's issues with respect to water and sanitation and whereby it could then be taken up with the concerned duty bearers. There were educated youths in the village with a lot of enthusiasm to do something for their village. Several rounds of discussion were held with these youths on issues around water, sanitation and hygiene, and how children in the villages were being deprived of their rights due to the lack of accountability of the duty bearers. These youths were then organised into groups which were called Village Support Groups. These groups started engaging with the duty bearers – especially Gram Panchayats (elected village council), schools and the parents of the children. The groups identified children's issues through discussions and from observing children's notice boards where any child could write the issues that they were facing. The support group would then take up this issue with the concerned duty bearer and articulate it – thus giving a voice to the children. This resulted in examples of schools ensuring that safe drinking water is always available in the village; children being served food in a hygienic environment; parents taking action to get toilets constructed in their homes and Gram Panchayats prioritising children's issues in their plan and diverting some of the development funds to meet children's requirements.

Result area 2:

The Gram Panchayats take decisions based on the recommendation of the Gram Sabha (all voters in the village). Since children are not Gram Sabha members, they did not have any opportunity to raise their needs to the Gram Panchayats. The project team facilitated organising Bal Samvads – a dialogue of the children with the elected representatives in the village. This was the first time that the elected representatives got an opportunity to listen to the needs of the children. This helped the Gram Panchayats to recognise children as 'citizens' of the village and look into the issues that they were facing. The Gram Panchayats took decisions like ensuring that the village had water quality testing done regularly, ensuring cleanliness in the school campus and also mobilising the community to access funds for construction of household toilets. Usually, provision of safe drinking water in schools is left to the school management and the Public Health and Engineering Department. In several villages, Gram Panchayats ensured provision of safe drinking water in the school campus from their development funds.

Result area 3:

Child Notice Boards (Bal Soochna Patal) were put up in public places within the villages. Children were then oriented on using these boards by writing the problems that they were facing. This provided an effective medium for the children who were shy and discriminated against to express their WASH related needs. Children would write their problems on the notice boards and these would be erased by them only when the problem was solved. It was found that the duty bearers, such as local level government members, would take immediate steps to address the issue for the fear of embarrassment in front of the whole village. These notice boards have proved a powerful tool to attract duty bearers' attention to ensure child rights and timely delivery of services in favour of the children.

Another medium for bringing forward the WASH related issues of children was through children's newsletters. These were newsletters where all articles were written by children. Costs for printing were covered by project funds and distributed by the village support groups to different stakeholders. Some of these articles were also published in the mainstream media as letters to the editors, thus highlighting the issues children were facing. Support groups also gathered the issues of children through play and discussion, ensuring that those children who are unable to read and write are also represented and heard.

Nepal

Result area 1:

Children, through the medium of Child Clubs, are approaching community level duty bearers at schools, community forest users' committee, and the Village Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Coordination Committees (VWASHCC) with demands concerning their WASH rights. Two village-level WASH Coordination Committees and 18 ward-level WASH Coordination Committees are monitoring the extent to which the WASH services resulting from the programme's demands target the poorest families.

School management committees report an improved link between schools and communities as a result of the project. Provision for menstrual hygiene management, separate latrines for boys and girls and improved access to drinking water in the schools of the project area, evidence demands of Child Clubs being met.

Child friendly facilities in communities including lower toilet blocks, the availability of soap and child accessible water points result from training and information provided to both child clubs, and community members.

Result area 2:

In Letang and Kerabari Village Development Committees (VDCs), the Child Rights Programme established and maintained a 'Claim Register' with the purpose of tracking the issues and demands of community men, women and children in a systematic manner at the Village Water Sanitation and Hygiene Coordination Committee (VWASHCC) level. In practice, every claim for WASH facilities has been registered in the log-book and VWASHCC consider the demands in their meeting, and make a plan to address the issues. The VWASHCC also categorizes the issues – which ones are to be taken by them, or which ones are to be forwarded to the respective higher institutions/authorities. This mechanism helps to systematize the flow of demand and response for WASH services from rights holders to the duty bearers.

Result area 3:

All children including those from the poorest, most marginalized and vulnerable families in the project areas are actively involved in Child Clubs. Children are directly engaged in planning with WASH committees, whereas before only parents were consulted about their children's needs. Out of 23 Child Clubs in the project areas, 19 are active in the Child Networks, and represent the interests of community Child Clubs at the VDC level. Evidence of the growing strength and status of children's networks is the allocation of Rs 50000 this year by the VDC. This was used to mobilise, support and train the Child Clubs and organise events and competitions.

Result area 4: Networks and forums developed or strengthened for advocating child friendly and child rights centered WASH approaches in policy development, planning and implementation of WASH programmes.

There have been some examples of impact beyond the project area, and influencing national networks and forums, but primarily it has been local level and rooted advocacy that has been a core component of the programme. This has been delivered mainly through the capacity development and support activities described above.

In Bangladesh the project team approached Fresh Water Action Network South Asia and the horizontal learning programme of World Bank (WSP) to share learning. The communications materials developed in India and Bangladesh are also being used by education departments outside of the direct project area. In Nepal local media campaigns raised issues of children's rights and WASH.



Photograph 1. Children make drawings of their local water and sanitation situation

Source: WaterAid/GMB Akash/Panos



Photograph 2. Children's Club, Bangladesh

Source: WaterAid/GMB Akash/Panos

Conclusions and lessons learned

Experience from Bangladesh

- A rights based approach to development does not need to be a confrontation with duty bearers; it can be an act of building motivation of the duty bearers through systematic support, with space given to them to take the lead, this providing them with dignity and credit for changes made, both at a personal and institutional level.
- Joyful sessions and their results received immense appreciation from the partner involved and any external people who visited the project. Engaging children with role-plays and learning materials helped children to enhance articulation skills and confidence in a cost effective and informal set up. Approaches and materials from this project can also be embedded in other project components for VERC and WaterAid.
- Schools can be potential platforms for child rights based WASH programming at the institutional level. Adequate input and facilitation to mobilize teachers and School Management Committees (SMCs) can help to serve many children and ensure fulfilment of rights to health and education. School teachers and the SMC members need proper orientation on inclusive access to WASH to address issues regarding disabled and child friendly provision. Government should pursue compliance with the approved WASH in Schools national standards throughout the country.
- Addressing vital issues like equity and inclusion and marginalization is crucial for achieving the desired outcomes of a particular project. In this project we have generated gender segregated data, we have addressed the needs of disabled children with the highest priority and conducted a community led accessibility audit to demonstrate that children have specific requirements regarding WASH which is applicable for all children.

Experience from India

- Issues of children in general and those from the most deprived sections are often not heard. The project helped in establishing a support system for the children through the youth in the village in form of the support groups. Being young and just out of adolescence and getting into adulthood, these young men and women were able to relate with issues very passionately. This group was instrumental in influencing the duty bearers in a very effective manner.
- A lot of sensitisation and capacity building of the duty bearers – parents, teachers and the Panchayat representatives in particular was essential. All duty bearers had different types of relationships with the children, and as adults, the duty bearers took all decisions relating the children without really consulting the children or understanding the issues that they were facing. It emerged as a major learning that it is equally important to work with the duty bearers and engage with them as intensively as we engage with the rights holders to ensure that there is a shift in power relations.
- Alternative communication mediums – particularly children's notice board (Bal Soochna Patal) and the children's newspaper were effective in giving voices to the children. These were non traditional ways of communication between the children and the duty bearers. This helped a lot in cases where children belonged to the most deprived sections or those children who were too shy to raise issues.

Overall experience

- The flexibility and trial and error approach employed in developing the programme was appreciated by all and has allowed healthy partnerships and competencies to develop, with strong ownership by community bodies to take it forward. Programme staff and key members of community support and children's groups are a resource to be nurtured and engaged with for future work.
- It is an inclusive approach that enables meaningful participation (of children as well as adults) and promotes non-discrimination. The non-formal processes and structures created by the project succeeded in reaching out to the most marginalised children and their families.
- This approach builds social capital to promote children's rights within the community. It changes people's attitudes and equips both children and adults with life skills that remain in the community even after the project has ended. The community-based structures in each country played a pivotal role, as mobilisers for children's rights, and supporting children and their communities to demand greater accountability from local duty-bearers.
- The approach appears to provide good value for money: it is very intense in terms of time and effort, but not in terms of direct expenditure on water and sanitation facilities. Its effectiveness is evident by the fact

that partners (NEWAH, VERC, SAMARTHAN) have already started to use many aspects of the approach in other projects.

- Components of the approach can be gradually incorporated into other WASH programmes, building up experience and skills, and looking for specific ways to bring children into community mobilisation.

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