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WASH 5 Star approach: addressing hygiene behaviour in schools of rural Bangladesh

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Every child has basic rights to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). School are essential institutions to children's welfare, and a place where lifelong behaviours are inculcated.. The National Hygiene Baseline Survey [1] and recent WASH bottleneck analysis of Bangladesh [2] reflected the worrying state of hygiene behaviour in schools. WaterAid Bangladesh has developed an approach called 'WASH 5 Star' based on the five behavioural domains articulated in the National Hygiene Promotion Strategy (NHPS) 2012 in Bangladesh [3] to raise awareness at the individual, household and institutional level on proper hygiene practices . The WASH 5 Star approach was introduced in 2500 schools in rural Bangladesh and yielded encouraging results within a short span of time. This approach can to be introduced at a large scale to achieve wider health benefits.

Introduction

Hygiene has consistently proven to be the most overlooked component of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) despite its essentiality in preventing disease and ensuring the full benefits of water and sanitation are reaped. Hygiene, as part of overall WASH, is especially important in schools because schools are the second prime institution, after the family, to groom cognitive and psychomotor development of children. Given the centrality of school life to a child's health and well-being, as well as the role of the school as the key location of learning and instruction in a child's life, it is of utmost importance that safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene environment are available in schools so that their immediate health is ensured, and so that students can adopt positive hygienic behaviours to serve them throughout their life.

However, the National Hygiene Baseline Survey (NHBS) [1] conducted in 2014 showed that hygiene behaviour as well as the water and sanitation facilities needed to maintain good hygiene, were both lacking in many cases. The survey found that only 45% of school toilets are unlocked during school hours, though 84% schools have functional improved toilets. Out of these, only one-third of all schools keep soap and water inside or nearby the toilet. Only 32% students' hands appeared to be clean during observation. Female students faced further challenges, and only 43% schools had separate toilets for girls, while 40% adolescent girls reported missing school during menstruation.

In Bangladesh, development organisations have been initiated several programmes promoting WASH in schools; piloted different approaches on hygiene issues, conducted hygiene sessions introducing different behaviour change communication materials and set their own standards. However, these initiatives have rarely considered national level policies and their implications for ground-level programming.

This gap is problematic, as it can lead to ad-hoc programming with very weak linkages to national standards and targets. The Government of Bangladesh introduced the National Hygiene Promotion Strategy (NHPS) in 2012 [3] identifying five hygiene behavioural domains (water, sanitation, personal, food and environmental) with associated national standards for the relevant institutions, including households, schools and hospitals. The strategy is a comprehensive document, combining components of software, hardware and creating an enabling environment, in an acknowledgement of hygiene practice being a systemic issue. Unfortunately, there has been little initiative to disseminate the National Hygiene Promotion Strategy among relevant stakeholders, especially in schools.

Identifying this critical gap, WaterAid Bangladesh collaborated with Government of Bangladesh took an initiative to disseminate the NHPS among relevant stakeholders at different levels, and especially at schools in rural Bangladesh. The rest of the paper discuss the unique approach adopted to do so.

WaterAid's WASH 5 star approach

WaterAid has been operating in Bangladesh since 1986 as one of the lead actors in WASH sector. In recent years, WaterAid Bangladesh has focused particularly on hygiene as a challenging arena of WASH, playing an instrumental role during the development of the National Hygiene Promotion Strategy (NHPS) and in conducting the National Hygiene Baseline Survey (NHBS). To draw national attention towards the state of hygiene behaviour in schools, WaterAid Bangladesh took initiative to introduce an encouraging and influencing approach called WASH 5 Star in schools developed in alignment with in the recommendations of the NHPS. This approach was implemented through a collaborative project with the government, under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) of Bangladesh, titled "Disseminating the national hygiene promotion strategy among relevant stakeholders and building awareness of education and health workforces on hygiene and sanitation". The project was implemented from December 2014-December 2015.

The term five (5) star indicates *branding* and a *dignity*. WASH 5 star reflects the five hygiene behaviour domains articulated in the NHPS. WASH 5 star approach leads a process of behavioural change.

This approach was developed based on WaterAid Bangladesh's *Model School Approach* and *The Three Star Approach for WASH in Schools* 2013, UNICEF [4]. At the start of the implementation process, WaterAid Bangladesh organised basic orientation for its project and partner's staff to create a common understanding on the project's objectives and the 5 Star approach. Following this, a number of orientation workshops were organised with education officials at district and sub-district levels to introduce the approach to key stakeholders in local government. Orientation were then organised for school managing committees (SMCs) and teachers, including instruction of hygiene issues and effective use of behaviour change communication (BCC) materials. Alongside, school-based events were organised for better understanding on effective hand-washing among students.

The approach aims to encourage teachers to analyse their own WASH situation by themselves, inspire them to assess their Star Status, motivate them to initiate small doable actions and influences SMCs to mobilise resources as well as engage multi-level stakeholders. The different stages of the approach are outlined below.

Steps of WASH 5 star approach

The *WASH 5 Star* approach follows some steps to make stakeholders aware and responsive to the challenges of WASH in schools and other institutions.

Step-1: Make School Managing Committee (SMC) and other stakeholders responsive

The process starts with an aim to make responsive School Managing Committee (SMC), the decision-making body of a school, responsive to WASH challenges. An introductory meeting is organised with SMCs to share the project objectives referring to government policies including circular requiring all secondary institutions to maintain WASH in schools. SMCs then nominate a teacher as the focal to lead this process.

Step-2: Orient school teachers about their role as change maker

SMC nominated teachers attend a day long orientation on NHPS and 5 Star approach. Coordination committees of the focals are organised at district and sub-district level to play a coordinating and leadership role.

Step-3: Initiate WASH situation self-analysis

Based on their orientation, teachers are introduced with a simple tool (checklist) to assess their school's WASH situation. The *checklist* reflects the domains emphasised under NHPS, including availability of safe drinking water sources, available clean toilets, separate toilet for girls with menstrual hygiene facilities, availability of running water, hygiene kits and hand-washing devices within latrine, keeping sandals outside of latrines, availability of waste bins on school grounds, hygiene practices of food vendors selling food nearby school etc.

Step-4: Assess school WASH situation against WASH 5 star status

After analysing their school's WASH situation, teachers are suggested to compare their own situation with 5 Star standards. This simple assessment creates an enabling environment reflecting real scenario of hygiene behavioural standards.

Step-5: Develop action plan towards WASH 5 star status

Teachers are then encouraged to develop an action plan on how to achieve WASH 5 Star status. An action plan emerges with a time frame for 3-6 months based on each schools willingness and capability.

Step-6: Follow up of action plan

According to action plan of respective schools, a follow up plan prepared to share and continue the efforts at school level. During follow up, SMC and school teachers get the scope to share their reflections and progress.

Step-7: Self- assessment of school star status to achieve WASH dignity

After a certain period (at least one quarter or three months) teachers take part in refreshers course to assess progress on their previous action plan and assess further actions needed to achieve the behavioural standards.

Step-8: Declare WASH 5 star winners and award giving

A two tier assessment is then done to finalise a list of WASH 5 Star winners-self-assessment and external assessment. Respective coordination committee members act as external evaluators, assessing and finalising a list of WASH 5 Star winners, which is then reviewed and endorsed by local government institutions (LGI). According to list winners get recognition publicly for achieving 5 Star status. The award winners are provided with a certificate, crest and incentives to increase WASH facilities in school.

The indicators to achieve WASH 5 Star status is as follows:

- Each school has a source of safe drinking water and keep water safe from source to consumption;
- Each school has improved toilets with running water and hand washing facilities for students including separate chamber for girls where relevant;
- Each school has common hand-washing facilities for students before taking meal;
- Food vendors nearby school keep cook-foods covered during selling;
- Each school keeps ground clean and disposes waste safely towards a healthy environment.

WaterAid implemented this approach in 2500 schools in rural Bangladesh for over a year, covering all schools in ten sub-districts under three northern rural districts-namely Gaibandha, Panchagarh and Thakurgaon. Around 10,000 teachers participated directly at different stages in this process.

Benefits of WASH 5 star approach

2,500 SMC participated in project objective sharing meeting. Project coordination committee at district and sub-district level were formed efficiently, and a total of 10,000 teachers were engaged disseminating knowledge on hygiene behaviour change among students. A total of 592,000 students received BCC materials for using at school, 400 schools out of 2500 were finally awarded as WASH 5 Star winner during award giving ceremony.

A baseline and end-line study also conducted to assess the change in behaviour. The end line study findings [5] concluded that some significant changes in decision-making of SMCs on hygiene behaviour change issues had taken place. Improved toilet facilities increased at school to 90% against baseline figure 67%. Separate toilet facilities increased at school from 47% to 60% and menstrual hygiene facilities increased within toilets to 26% from nil. Hand-washing facilities inside or nearby toilets increased from 87% to 100% and availability of soap and running water increased to 60%, whereas baseline finding was 27%. Knowledge on hand-washing practice after defecation increased among students to 82% compared to baseline findings of 53%.

Despite the short project duration, there are certain features to the WASH 5 Star approach that contributed to the results achieved.

An interactive, reward based approach

This approach created an opportunity for *self-assessment* of WASH situation at the institutional level putting active and meaningful participation of stakeholders at the centre of the approach. The 5 Star approach led the school focal points through an interactive process of assessment, planning, implementing and re-assessing that build on the initial orientations with a structured incentive mechanism. This was reinforced by the recognition and reward elements of the 5 Star approach, creating ownership and motivation at the school level to achieve the status of an awarded institution.

NHP strategy and government directives

Orientation on the National Hygiene Promotion Strategy has created awareness among teachers to bring changes in improving WASH situation in school. Additionally, improved understanding on government directives on improving the WASH situation in schools, especially for girls, also worked as strong motivating factor to initiate an action plan.

Building cost effective and sustainable systems

This approach emphasised orienting duty-bearers including SMCs and local government to carry out their roles and responsibilities in line with government policy and instructions, including NHPS and the school WASH circular issued by the government in July 2015. This encouraged local action and mobilisation of local resources rather than relying on external funds.

Focusing on district-wide multi-stakeholder involvement

This approach focused on comprehensive coverage at district level including all sub-districts with involvement of local administration stakeholders. It covered 100% of primary and secondary schools. This approach ensured engagement of relevant stakeholders from different tiers and different discipline to address five hygiene domains at institution level.

Lessons learned

Alongside the important lessons on the design of hygiene behaviour initiatives for schools described above, the project also holds many lessons that emerged from the challenges faced during implementation. These are important for other organisations and practitioners looking to work on WASH in schools.

- Behaviour change requires sustained, long-term intervention – 13 months (intervention period of 5 months) is not adequate.
- Technical assistance is important, but needs to be complemented with availability of infrastructural support, e.g. hand-washing devices.
- The structural set up, resources, culture and shape of institutions play a major role in the impact of hygiene interventions.
- External enabling factors e.g. the government circular on secondary school sanitation, play a significant role in the take up and ownership of hygiene interventions. It is therefore key that WASH interventions at school level consider policy aspects as an integral part of programming.

Further initiatives

WaterAid Bangladesh is currently implementing this approach in its programmatic activities in Peri-urban areas, and also be introducing it in recent WASH in schools programme. Alongside, it is sharing this approach at different forums with sector actors in WASH and education.

Conclusion

While the National Hygiene Promotion Strategy provides clear guidelines on improving hygiene standards across different domains, it is rarely known or understood by one of its key stakeholders-education institutions. The WASH 5 Star approach was developed to integrate policy aspects into a school-level hygiene programme, and focused on elements of self-assessment, multi-stakeholder planning on small doable actions, and public recognition to achieve standards of facility and practice that aligned with the requirements of the NHPS. In doing so, the 5 Star approach proved to be a potentially powerful tool to drive integrated and effective school WASH programmes, with important lessons for refinement and replication on a larger scale.

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