SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND PRODUCTION LINKED TO IMPROVED NUTRITION STATUS, RESILIENCE, AND GENDER EQUITY

WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE (WASH) INTERVENTION: IMPROVING WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE IN BANDARBAN DISTRICT

In Bandarban District of the remote Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, geographic marginalization limits access to essential services. These include access to:

01 Safe drinking water
02 Sanitation products
03 Sanitation installation and maintenance

To address this need, the USAID-funded Resilience Food Security Activity, Sustainable Agricultural Production Linked to Improved Nutrition Status, Resilience, and Gender Equity (SAPLING), collaborated with the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) and traditional leaders in five sub-districts (upazilas) to strengthen a functional WASH system. This was done by improving household and community knowledge of, and access to, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services and infrastructure. This in turn enabled them to exercise their knowledge for sustained WASH behavior change.

4%

A base values survey revealed that only 4% of households in the SAPLING area practiced handwashing at all five critical times - including after defecation - in the twenty-four hours prior to the survey.[1]

75%

75% of households surveyed at baseline did not have an improved sanitation facility.[2]

SAPLING's WASH strategy has improved knowledge and practice of preventive WASH behaviors among families living in 1,579 villages (paras).

At the district level, SAPLING collaborated with the government Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE) to rehabilitate and construct water systems. SAPLING trained 15 DPHE mechanics in Bandarban on:

01 Appropriate improved WASH technology installation
02 Repair
03 Maintenance
04 Water safety plans
05 Water sample collection and quality testing procedures

Community-based, self-governed Water User Committees (WUCs) were established and capacitated in the 100 most WASH vulnerable communities.

The DPHE mechanics and the WUCs are connected to the 5 sub-district, 11 union, and 99 ward-level GOB Water and Sanitation (WATSAN) committees that SAPLING reactivated and trained. This created a functional feedback and resources loop to meet community-identified needs.

The WUCs are a key component of SAPLING's comprehensive, community-based approach to WASH sector development in 100 vulnerable communities.

[1]Final Report. Baseline Study of Food for Peace Development Food Assistance Projects in Bangladesh. May 2017. Five critical junctures are after defecation, after cleaning a child's bottom, before feeding a child, before eating and before preparing food

[2]Final Report. Baseline Study of Food for Peace Development Food Assistance Projects in Bangladesh. May 2017. FFP definition is an improved sanitation facility is a facility which hygienically separates human excreta from human contact and is not shared with other HHs and has no visibility of human feces inside

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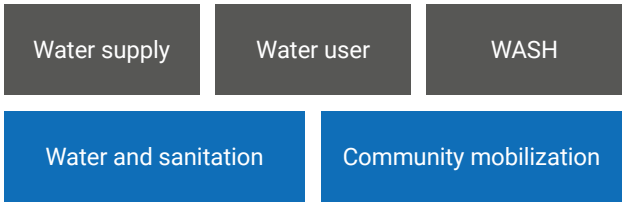
Volunteer members were trained in water point operations, fee collection, and maintenance. WUCs are self-governed and self-financed enabling communities to exercise agency to manage water sources, increasing self-efficacy and resilience.

Through participatory social resource mapping, WUCs identify priority WASH needs. When possible, they self-finance and coordinate service provision to meet these needs. For larger projects, they submit a proposal to the union WATSAN committee for review and further prioritization.

Participants in WASH campaign activities include

50,000	Women from poor and extremely poor households
All	Pregnant and lactating women
12,500	Adolescent girls
2,141	Primary school students and 'little doctors'
56	Secondary school teachers
5,778	Secondary school students

Local WASH Systems' Strengthening



SAPLING linked the WUCs with WATSAN committees and local service providers to strengthen sustainability of the local WASH system. Thus, WASH services and systems have been improved by:

01 Facilitation of linkages between Water User Committee committees and public and private sector services

02 Fee collection and transparent monitoring of service provision

03 Provision of technical support and mentoring to build the capacity

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To motivate demand for WASH services and complement improved WASH knowledge, SAPLING provided smart subsidies for latrine hardware to approximately 1,000 households. Each of these families ensured transportation and covered the related construction costs. To meet demand from this behavior change strategy, SAPLING strengthened the capacity of 37 WASH Entrepreneurs (e.g., grocers of SaTo pans and producers of reinforced cement concrete ring slabs) with improved technical and business skills.

WASH Minimum Package Areas

Community mobilization and hygiene promotion

At the onset, SAPLING shared data to help the DPHE identify and meet urgent needs. SAPLING's advocacy for DPHE to repair and install water systems identified through the WUC participatory processes resulted in the repair of 23 and installation of six water supply systems. The COVID-19 pandemic created additional demands on limited resources and shifted priorities.

As the need for water source repair and installation exceeds DPHE's available budget, SAPLING initially supported urgent needs by directly rehabilitating 35 water supply systems with the assistance of the village-level Water User Committees in the 2019 fiscal year.

After the worst floods in 20 years damaged infrastructure throughout Bandarban in July 2019, SAPLING assisted the DPHE by repairing 24 water systems. Similarly, after the outbreak of COVID-19, SAPLING supported the GOB to install 27 handwashing stations in high traffic areas and repair an additional 24 water supply systems. SAPLING supported the addition of a hand wash station, including 10 in community clinics. Furthermore, SAPLING supported COVID-19 risk communication awareness raising by:

- Producing a 3-language series (Bangla, Marma, and Mro) of WASH with Us videos
- Distributing soap and disinfectant to public facilities
- Distributing posters and handouts on handwashing

The WASH system strengthened by SAPLING increases access to safe water and sanitation services. The system links village-level WUCs with private sector providers, government resources, NGOs, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board, and the Bangladesh Hill District Council to increase opportunities for funding and other support.