

# **A Silent Social Awakening**

## Foreword

NGO Forum for Drinking Water Supply & Sanitation since its journey towards development of the WatSan sector has been giving its efforts for ensuring safe water supply and sanitation facilities to the community people, which are particularly targeted as the most disadvantaged communities in various social parameters. Therefore, NGO Forum has been operating its programmes, in association with its partners, in the most unserved and underserved pocket areas of the country. Considering sustainability of the WatSan achievements as the prerequisite to the sector promotion. NGO Forum has been implementing low-cost, affordable and demand-responsive WatSan services mainly to the poor community.

As a major thrust of its programme implementation approach, NGO Forum has been implementing its Programme in a community-managed fashion, designed and implemented centering the community people while the community people play the key role for the overall WatSan promotion in the respective community. Hence, through its partner NGOs the Forum forms a Village Development Committee (VDC) involving the community leaders, school teachers, religious leaders, elected local government representatives and other local allies for smooth functioning of the programme and for ensuring the sustainability of the WatSan achievements. They play a significant role for development of all aspects of the community, and specially guide the community people towards safe WatSan practice and hygiene habits.

NGO Forum always initiates to march forward assessing the impacts of its programmes and philosophy sharing its success, failure and experiences with its partners, relevant agencies, donor bodies, potential information seekers and other stakeholders. As an integral part of it this year the Forum has conducted a study focussing on its Community-managed WatSan Programme in Natuapara village under Jessore district. The programme was implemented by Barinagar Samaj Kallyan Sangstha (BSKS), a partner NGO of the Forum.

I express my heartiest thanks and gratitude to them who either directly or indirectly contributed to make the study successful. Special thanks to Mr. Iftikhar A. Chowdhury who conducted the study as the resource person. I also extend my gratitude to my colleagues who gave untiring efforts for bringing out this publication.

I hope the interested and potential WatSan programme implementers and other stakeholders will find this Book useful to replicate the idea of Community-managed WatSan Programme in light with NGO Forum's success and experiences.

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## Preface

Unlike other development agencies NGO Forum for Drinking Water Supply & Sanitation follows the community-responsive and community-managed approach instead of target group approach in its programme implementation. Because NGO Forum realizes that, the spontaneous participation of the respective community at every step is a prerequisite for the successful implementation of any development programme. Organizing and ensuring the participation of only a particular class or sector of the community cannot attain the aim and goal particularly of the WatSan programme. Rather all classes and sectors of the community should be organized and their active participation should be ensured. This is why community approach instead of target group approach is proved more effective in successful implementation of WatSan programme. In the Community-managed WatSan Programme of NGO Forum a Village Development Committee (VDC), formed with the participation of the respective community, works in the focal point for ensuring the successful implementation and sustainability of WatSan services.

Awareness building and social mobilization process of NGO Forum has substantially strengthened the issue of community participation in the Community-managed WatSan Programme. After selection of the villages different tools and techniques of participatory planning are used to assess the needs of the villages. This process has ensured the effective implementation of the WatSan programme in a community-managed approach. Participation of various community groups has mobilized the villagers to feel demand for safe WatSan facilities. Through effective participation people have realized implication of using unsafe water and unhygienic latrine. The programme has been implemented mainly by the village development committees, which has ensured the participation of both male and female members of the community. The synergistic efforts of the villagers have also created the sense of self-monitoring system to sustain the achieved success of WatSan coverage and practices.

NGO Forum attempts to consolidate and reflect on its programmatic success considering the Community-managed WatSan Programme approach. Therefore, for bringing it into the light a study has been conducted, and has helped this Book published by the Forum. The Book exclusively focuses on the success of safe WatSan and hygiene habits of the villagers of Natuapara in Jessore district among many in NGO Forum's Community-managed WatSan Programme intervening villages that presenting the process and strategies of the WatSan programme, the progress in WatSan situation, and the improvement of the health status of people. Natuapara is a solid example of how an entire community could be geared towards social development in an inspiring manner through the right kind of awareness, motivation, institutional guidance and support mechanisms.

NGO Forum implements its programme in line with the National WatSan Policy objectives of sustainable WatSan promotion and hygiene practices. The community-managed water and sanitation programme is designed for making the community active through different strategies and techniques that help make them aware and enable them to understand the reality through experiences. The community participation creates a sense of ownership among the community people over the programme success as it covers all aspects from decision-making to cost-sharing by the respective community. As a result the programme success finally sustains as the achievement of the respective community.

I would like to take opportunity to express my sincere thanks to our valued facilitator for taking the troubles for conducting the study, which made this publication possible. I express gratitude to my colleagues who contributed a lot in all respect for publishing this Book.

I believe, the potential readers will find this Book interesting and useful.

Joseph Halder  
December 2002

## A Silent Social Awakening

### **Natuapara is no Utopia:**

Natuapara could easily have passed as any non-descript village in Bangladesh as it is wrapped in the same kind of pristine silence and slow rhythm of life that could be found in any rural setting. Such deceiving is the anonymity of the place that everything – ranging from the trivial to the monumental – occurs here without much hue and cry. Even social revolutions unfold in this village in relative silence.

Naturally one may wonder what makes this small village in Jessore district, comprising of only 278 families, so special. Is it its people from various religious faiths living in enviable communal harmony? Is it their lifestyle or their survival habits and practices that make the village unique? Is it the innovative minds and enterprising quality of the masses? Actually, it is a unique combination and synergy of all these, which have brought about a silent social awakening, that has set Natuapara far apart from most other villages in the country. A little over two years ago, a sudden awareness about safe drinking water, hygienic sanitation habits and renewed interests on general health, hygiene and cleanliness had created the need for a social change in Natuapara. This need, which soon graduated into a silent social movement, has now left the entire village and its people metamorphosed for good.

In fact, Natuapara is a solid example of how an entire community could be geared towards social development in an inspiring manner through the right kind of awareness, motivation, institutional guidance and support mechanisms. A sea-change has taken place in the overall water supply, sanitation and hygiene status of the village as well as in the mindset of the villagers between the time when the NGO Forum for Drinking Water Supply & Sanitation – the country's apex networking body of NGOs and CBOs involved in implementing the WatSan programme – intervened with its Community-managed WatSan Programme in January 2000 and when the programme was officially wrapped up in Natuapara in December 2001.

According to statistics, at the time of NGO Forum's baseline survey, which was carried out prior to intervening in the village with water and sanitation programmes to assess the local problems and needs, there were only 20 water-seal latrines in a village that consisted of 278 households. But when the Forum was done with the programme in December 2001, the sanitary latrine coverage rose to 224 households. As far as safe drinking water is concerned, none of the tube-wells in the village had been tested for arsenic presence. But on completion of the programme, 10 Arsenic-iron Removal Plants and 1 Rain-water Harvesting System had been commissioned and the tube-wells had been tested for arsenic and marked with red and green colours for the convenience of the users.

In a bid to bolster the WatSan programme, the NGO Forum continued its implementation with the active participation of partner NGOs, community-based organisations, private sector actors and the community people. For facilitating the community-managed approach effectively, the NGO Forum emphasised on providing training courses to the staff of partner NGOs to enhance their programme implementation skills. The private sector and the community people were also provided with training, communication materials and other supports, which resulted in quality services. The partner NGOs facilitated the Community-managed WatSan Programme through

which the demand-responsive WatSan supports were ensured, and the operation and maintenance of those facilities were confirmed with the establishment of community ownership over the WatSan set-ups.

### **The Community-managed WatSan Programme:**

Under NGO Forum's community approach, a certain number of villages are taken under consideration with a view to ensuring 100% WatSan coverage in the selected areas within an intervention period of 2 years. The unsatisfactory water and sanitation coverage in Bangladesh is directly linked to affordable technology. So far only water-seal and home-made pit latrines have by and large been promoted for sanitation purposes. But the NGO Forum has been running the VSCs through partner NGOs and private latrine producers to increase low-cost hygienic latrine coverage in rural areas. In providing variety of water and sanitation technologies to the grassroots people with the facilitation of the partner NGOs, the receptibility of and the effect on the community people are assessed very keenly by the Forum. Site selection, installation, covering cost-sharing, maintenance etc. are performed with the active participation of the community people, who are both stakeholders and beneficiaries of the programme.

The NGO Forum follows certain criteria in selecting villages. For being selected, the village has to be 'unserved' or 'under-served', which means that the hygiene practice level of the village should by no means be above 10% to 15% and the latrine coverage in the village should be less than 25%. As far as water availability and its use is concerned, those villages get priority attention where there is excessive presence of arsenic, iron and salinity in drinking water.

Since 1997, the NGO Forum selected villages having 600 households for intervention. But it was noticed at the field level that it was a near-impossible task to provide 100% safe water and sanitary latrine coverage to such a vast target group. So, it was decided in consultation with partner NGOs that the Forum would select a village with around 300 families for a 2-year intervention period. It was also unanimously agreed that the target set for achievement could only be realised within that timeframe. Although arsenic poisoning of drinking water was first detected in 1993, the arsenic reality during that time was not as enormous as it is today. With the pervasiveness of the arsenic problem, the NGO Forum identified arsenic contamination as a huge hurdle to availability of safe drinking water and intensified its activities at the community level to ensure arsenic-free safe drinking water since 2000. These include providing alternative sources of safe drinking water and building awareness on arsenic poisoning of drinking water at the community level.

Barinagar Shamaj Kallyan Shangstha (BSKS) is a longtime partner of NGO Forum. "In our working experience with the BSKS, we have noticed that they have displayed immense skills and efficiency in implementing the WatSan programmes. Therefore, their selection was made on the basis of professional excellence they have displayed at the field levels", says Md. Awlad Hossain, Senior Regional Officer of the NGO Forum's Jessore Regional Office. Besides, it has worked as a partner of NGO Forum in implementing WatSan programmes in the villages of Baniali, Natuapara and now working in Laukhali village. "We have taken into active consideration the efficiency and past experience of BSKS before selecting it as a partner NGO," confirms Hossain.

NGO Forum now operates on the Community-managed WatSan Programme approach. Previously, the Forum used to work in several villages with one partner NGO. Such approach in

fact yielded little results in terms of sustainability of WatSan and hygiene habits and practices. It used to function in a scattered way through various partner NGOs. There has been a significant change in the approach and working mechanisms of NGO Forum since the year 2000. It was from that time that it decided to serve one single village through a selected partner NGO for a period of 2 years. Through working at the field level, this approach was found to be most fruitful and timely. Since 2000, it has been following the same approach in 14 Regions all across the country. “It is my personal conviction that all the working regions of NGO Forum has benefited in a similar way from the present approach,” says Awlad Hossain without a shred of doubt.

The BSKS director Suraiya Khanum backs him up in his claim about better chances of sustainability under the new approach. She says: “Our interventions in Natuapara have yielded better results compared to that of Baniali. Because in the latter case, we had to function in a scattered way due to time and other constraints. But in Natuapara, we could implement the project in a much coordinated way by assessing the actual needs of the villagers through a baseline survey and deciding on the inputs needed to combat the problems in an organised manner.” Besides, more time has allowed better dissemination of awareness and know-how among the people, enabling them to help each other out in times of programme-related needs. Obviously, that has made the job of follow-up and monitoring all the more easier. The village development committee (VDC), motivation by the local religious leaders, school orientation etc. are still helping a lot to sustain the good results and retain the level of coverage achieved even after the programme is done and over with, she says.

Natuapara was, in fact, selected in consultation with the BSKS. After selecting the village, excessive amount of arsenic and iron was identified in the tube-well water, which posed constant threats to the health of the villagers. Besides, the status of general health and hygiene was at their lowest ebb. Water- and excreta-borne diseases regularly threatened the lives of the villagers, while the latter’s awareness on issues like safe drinking water, hygienic sanitation habits, general health and hygiene was next to nothing, field observations reveal.

### **VDC – the Key to Holistic Development:**

For involving the entire community into the development initiatives and making coordinated efforts in attacking these mounting problems, the villagers formed a Village Development Committee (VDC) in consultation with the BSKS for ensuring sustainable rural development with special focus on WatSan activities. The VDC in Natuapara was formed initially with 15 members. But later, with the inclusion of two more members, it became a 17-member team. The VDC members, among others, comprise of two local *imams* (Islamic religious leaders), one village doctor, one serving Union Parishad (UP) member, one former UP member, a teacher and a couple of female members. This was a working group that represented a cross section of villagers ranging from rural opinion-leaders to commoners. But the basic criteria through which the VDC members have been selected was by their proven ability and genuine interests in dedicating themselves to welfare-oriented activities. The posts, too, were distributed according to ones willingness, dedication and time given to the activities. But broadly speaking, those who could give the most time were given the most important posts, inform VDC members. Meanwhile, when the implementation of the WatSan programme began, the entire village was divided into small working segments or clusters enabling a small group of VDC members to take the responsibility of a particular locality or neighbourhood. The VDC member(s) in charge of a particular cluster (neighbourhood) chose 7 volunteers to assist him/her to fulfill the target set for that particular cluster.

The issues that needed to be addressed was then discussed with the VDC members, and upon reviewing the situation, the VDC got in touch with BSKS in doing the needful for ensuring supply of arsenic- and iron-free drinking water and stepping up sanitation coverage. Later, through a review and planning meeting, NGO Forum and BSKS officials etched out a detailed blueprint for addressing the problems faced by the villagers. As a part of the hardware support, the NGO Forum had provided 10 AIRPs on an 80:20 cost-sharing basis during the 2-year intervention period. Besides, it has also installed 1 Rain-water Harvesting System. Earlier, the BSKS was supported by the NGO Forum in setting up a VSC, which provided sanitary latrines to the villagers and helped raise the sanitary latrine coverage in the village radically.

BSKS supervisor Baizid Hossain informs that the VSC is a non-profit venture. The villagers get the latrines at cost price from the VSC. “We produce the latrines through funds provided by the NGO Forum. However, there is also other private latrine producers, who could probably beat our price by a narrow margin by using some cheap raw materials. But we, at the VSC, hardly compromise the quality. We do not tell the people where to buy the services from. We leave it up to them to decide on that. Our ultimate target is to increase hygienic sanitary latrine coverage, not to sell latrines,” he categorically points out. As a part of the relocation strategy of the VSC in or nearest to the community presently being served so that the transportation cost of carrying the latrines could be minimised and the people could avail the service at a cheaper price, the BSKS has shifted the VSC to Laukhali village, which is adjacent to Natuapara, because at present the BSKS is implementing the WatSan programme there.

As in any development initiative, the prime target of development in Natuapara also was the human resources. If the masses are not effectively integrated, brought into the development equation and made to participate, then the development gain is usually very hard to sustain. The formation of VDC under the new approach and mobilising the entire village through it has really worked wonders in integrating the people into the programme and giving it a more sustainable character, claims Awlad Hossain of NGO Forum.

The NGO Forum had officially wrapped up its activities in Natuapara in December 2001. But the VDC has now taken full control to ensure that the achievement gained through the two-year intervention is not only sustained but improved. It does so by regular follow-up and monitoring activities and creating more need through continuous awareness and mobilisation activities. In fact, the VDC has now taken upon its own shoulders the responsibility of the overall improvement and betterment of the village which goes beyond ensuring water and sanitation coverage only.

Ex-Union Parishad (UP) and present VDC member Shafiar Rahman sums up its importance in no unequivocal terms: “The VDC has united the entire villagers under a single platform in accomplishing some social or community development tasks. We fear that if this Committee ceases to exist, the existing inspiration and enthusiasm will erode very fast and the follow-up and monitoring of the social, general health and hygiene scenario will suffer a serious jolt. Therefore, we will keep this VDC alive with or without the help of NGO Forum.”

### **Catalyzing the Community Mobilized:**

To generate awareness and mobilise the community people, the NGO Forum undertook many promotional activities, which were implemented at the field level through the BSKS. These

activities included Formation of VDC, Orientation of VDC, holding of a Review Meeting every month, mobilising the general masses through holding Courtyard Meeting and Community Meetings for the women and men respectively of the village. Software Services were provided to mobilise awareness among the villagers through posters, rallies and mikes. As religious leaders play a crucial role in moulding the sentiment of the people in a predominantly religious rural society, it also used the services of the Imams in the social mobilisation campaign. Besides as children of today are the custodians of their future environment, School WatSan Programmes were also offered to enlighten the younger generation on healthy water and sanitation practices. The NGO Forum also trained the VDC members on leadership, management and local resource mobilisation. Besides, it has also imparted training to the BSKS staff and officials working with the programme on arsenic awareness and mitigation, conduction of promotional activities and orientation on community-managed activities. It is basically through these means that the NGO Forum has provided hardware and software mixed support to the VDC and the PNGOs. Recalling the support from the NGO Forum, BSKS supervisor Baizid Hossain, says: “Actually, it was originally through the NGO Forum that even we learnt to conduct this motivational programme. We advanced in light of the instructions and training given to us by the Forum.”

Baizid elaborates, saying that the entire exercise of implementing the Community-managed WatSan Programme was simply a process of sharing of knowledge and experience in several phases. “What we learnt from the NGO Forum, we taught the VDC members and through the VDC members, this knowledge or wisdom filtered down to the grassroots level. Later, during follow-up and monitoring, we ironed out the faults in the working system,” says Baizid Hossain pointing out the general working methods. He also recalls the time when he literally locked one of the VDC members inside a room to teach him the methods and the nitty-gritty of conducting a Courtyard Meeting. After giving him the required orientation and training, the VDC member was put on trial run several times. Initially, of course, he made a few mistakes and was gripped by nervousness. But after a few trial runs, he became very confident. Later, through him, others also learnt the art of conducting Courtyard Meeting and Community Meetings. This was basically the pattern of work.

As for effective community integration in the awareness, motivation and WatSan implementation drives, the BSKS implemented the programme with the active help of the VDC. Meanwhile, an attempt has been made to reach the villagers through two programmes – one being the Courtyard Meeting for the women, the other being the Community Meeting comprising the male members of the village. It has been designed to create a proper ‘information combination’ among the male and female members of the community in a bid to close the information gap as effectively as possible through dialogue and conversation to raise the level of awareness and creation of need.

The Courtyard Meeting of the women takes place between once and thrice a month with some 20 to 30 participants for a duration of 1-hour. Generally, such meetings are held at least once a month, but if the situation demands, more meetings are conducted. If the women feel that they are lagging behind in any respect as far as safe water, sanitary latrine use and general hygiene issues are concerned, they convene the additional meetings to carry out effective monitoring, follow-up and take necessary interventions. The participating women of the village refuse to accept the notion that they congregate for idle time-pass. Says Kananbala Biswas, “We congregate here to discuss and find out ways to lead a hygienic life and also to find out remedies from recurrently occurring diseases. It’s not that we do not also discuss other issues in this meeting. But those too are somehow or the other related to the core issues of personal hygiene and healthy water and sanitation practices. We also recall our past habits, take stocks of our

present hygiene status and chart out possible future course of actions to improve the situation further.” Asked if this meeting has been imposed on them from the VDC, Mayarani Majumder insists: “It’s not that they don’t tell us. Obviously, there were requests from them initially. But if we did not feel the interest and the necessity, we wouldn’t have organised this meeting no matter how great the insistence was.” Adds Kananbala Biswas saying that had they not been benefited in any way, they wouldn’t have wasted their time on this, especially since all of them have many things to do at home.

### ***Burying Bad Bygone Habits***

*Unlike many aged people who tend to live out life as practiced over the years, China Bala, an illiterate octogenarian of Natuapara, has embraced new water and sanitation habits with an open mind. Although she does not attend the periodic Courtyard Meetings conducted by the women of the village, she is thoroughly convinced that they hold the meetings with a strong sense of purpose. She rules out the slightest possibility that the women of the village gather round the courtyards for idle time-pass or gossiping.*

*Refusing to be cynical, she says: “Though I don’t attend these meetings, I believe they talk good sense.” Being asked why she should allow a few young people to change her long-practiced way of life, she expresses her strong conviction saying, “I don’t mind. Because they are talking no-nonsense”. Then, she goes on to declare that she only drinks water from the local Arsenic-iron Removal Plant. “I don’t like the taste of water from other sources,” she bluntly argues.*

*Asked if she felt bad previously when she drank water from sources like tube-wells and ponds, she candidly answers: “Not that much because I was used to that water at the time.” But the old lady smilingly admits that in those days, stomach ailments were very frequent. However, it’s not that stomach problems do not occur now at all. But the frequency has definitely come down, she adds.*

*Though China Bala feels that the women in her community is doing a great job through creating awareness regarding safe water, sanitation and hygiene practices, she believes that unless their words were backed up by actions and positive changes, no one would have paid heed to their words, herself included.*

*She, however, held her age and failing health condition responsible for not attending the courtyard meetings. The happily transformed China Bala concludes with an almost philosophical utterance: “I’m an old woman. They are young. So, they should sort out their problems while there is still time.”*

Besides, this is also a forum from where the gained knowledge and wisdom is filtered down to the family level, says Monoara Begum. “We apply the knowledge gained from here in our daily lives and give our children necessary tips on safe drinking water, hygienic sanitary practices and personal hygiene. Most of the times, the children listen and follow the advice. Initially, they showed a tendency not to comply, but now they do as they are told. This has happened due to constant bombardment of the same messages day after day. Besides, we do not only limit our activities to telling them, but we make sure that they follow the lessons they have been taught,” she explains. She also insists that their male counterparts in the family do not see their involvement as a time-wasting process. “Everyone pays heed to any proposition that is sane. Our husbands are not without intellects. So, naturally they listen to the good advises. The male members of our families give us encouragement in this kind of work as they too understand that the entire exercise is for a noble cause,” she says confirming that there is no chauvinistic resistance to their participation.

The Community Meeting is also a separate platform for men of Natuapara where they can speak their minds on such issues. “We were hardly aware of the public health and environmental threats on account of unsafe drinking water, unhygienic sanitation and unhealthy living conditions. Since we were in the dark about the adverse impact of these things, we hardly felt the need for any collective intervention,” says Md. Fazlul Haque. Adds Motiar Rahman: “The VDC made us aware about the need for a collective community intervention to arrest the fast deteriorating water, sanitation and general hygiene status of the village. Through this meeting, we could assess our needs, monitor the development and decide on the required interventions.”

Justifying their participation in the Community Meeting when they could have learnt the needful from their female counterparts who participate in the Courtyard Meeting, they argue that it is one thing to hear about something from someone, but it is quite another to be present in the meeting in person. But they do share the gained knowledge with their female counterparts because through such internal exchanges any confusion regarding the gained knowledge is usually filtered through. As regards their attitude towards female participation in the programme, Motiar Rahman says: “Barring a few expected exceptions, the male members of this village have generally seen the participation of the women from a positive angle from the very beginning. We acknowledge the fact that such enormous social problems cannot be tackled in isolation. Besides, in the matters of water use and personal hygiene, women have traditionally been the trendsetters at the family levels. A few people who did not like the idea of women coming out of their houses earlier on, now take quite an indulgent view towards their participation as they are seeing for themselves the positive impacts of such activities.”

However, speaking of water, sanitation, general health and hygiene situation prevailing in Natuapara prior to introduction of the Community-managed WatSan Programme, all stakeholders, the allies and the community groups harped the same tune and recalled the past as if it was some nightmare that is best forgotten.

### **Reaching the Safe WatSan Habit:**

The condition of the roads was very poor and filthy. The general health of people was also alarming with most villagers suffering from acute and sometimes life-threatening stomach problems triggered by water- and excreta-borne diseases. This was mainly caused by unhygienic living conditions, recalls Baizid Hossain of BSKS. Describing the sanitary habits of the masses, Monoara Begum adds that very few households in the village had sanitary latrines two years ago. Most people responded to nature’s call out in the open, at roadsides and in family backyards. People did not even bother to cover the drinking water when it remained outside. So diseases like diarrhoea and cholera were random. Recalls Anima Biswas with horror, how her entire family comprising of some 50 to 60 people fell victim to blood dysentery some 11 to 12 years ago, as they all used untreated water from the ponds for cooking purposes at the time. Two – one child and another aged – members of this extended family even died due to the disease. “After this incident, we became extremely cautious about using untreated pond water, and for the last two years, we don’t use pond water at all for cooking purposes,” she confirms. Community doctor (quack to be precise) and VDC member Yusuf Ali, says before the formation of the VDC, the diarrhoea situation in Natuapara was so intense that a patient’s body sometimes refused to react positively to oral saline. The ORS alone failed to deliver desired results in the face of such widespread stomach ailments. So, there was an obvious necessity for mobilisation of mass awareness on the need for ensuring safe drinking water and sanitary latrines through the cooperation of NGO Forum to keep such regularly recurring diseases at bay. But now that people

have embraced a healthy way of life, the need for oral saline has become almost redundant, he informs.

VDC member Md. Shahjahan Alam also admits that incidents of stomach ailments like diarrhea, dysentery and stomachache were very common and widespread. At that time, it drained out Taka 500-700 for treating one diarrhoea patient. So, the VDC members started to mobilise awareness against the use of unsafe water and unhealthy sanitation practices. “It was also during this time that the NGO Forum Regional Officials trained 2 of our VDC members – president and treasurer – on how to set up low-cost hygienic latrines. In light of the training, we encouraged the villagers to set up single-slab hygienic latrines at their homesteads at a moderate cost between Taka 250 and Taka 320. We also gave them the hygiene message that if they set up hygienic latrines, they would all be spared of the often chronic and sometimes life-threatening stomach ailments. Through this, we tried to get the message across that by spending only Taka 320, they could not only remain safe from such illnesses but could also ensure the overall cleanliness and hygiene of the village,” he informs.

### ***Demand for Sanitary Services Soaring***

*These days Md. Shahjahan, the proprietor of M/s. Shahjahan Sanitary Works, has his hands full. A big turnaround of business fate has happened in the case of this private latrine producer from Barinagar Bazaar, Jessore in the last two-plus years.*

*Now a busy businessman by rural standards, Md. Shahjahan declares in contentment that he sells 20 sets of sanitary latrines on an average per month in addition to other sanitary accessories and building materials. However, things were not even near as bright for him in the initial days when he first founded the establishment some two years and seven months ago after working as an apprentice at a sanitary workshop in Jessore for quite sometime. “Sales has now increased at least four-fold. During the initial days, I used to sell not more than four to five sets of latrines per month, while in some months I could not sell a single set. But now, I sell at least 20 sets each month,” he says.*

*Md. Shahjahan attributes this sudden spur in sales to the newfound awareness of people on using sanitary latrines. Everyone seems to be very keen on using sanitary latrines these days, he says, adding, those who cannot afford to use too many rings, installs latrine with as few rings as possible. “Still, they want to use sanitary latrines. Besides, we also recommend to the rural people to install safe latrines as these are more cost-effective, durable and hygienic,” he adds.*

*Claiming to produce all kinds of latrines ranging from ‘kuttcha’ or earthen, concrete slab latrines to water-sealed ones, he adds that each ring costs between Taka 50 and Taka 60, while each slab costs between Taka 110 and Taka 150 depending on its quality. Such pricing of the products leave Md. Shajahan with a profit of Taka 100 to Taka 200 per latrine depending on the quality and the quantity of the materials used in production.*

*Md. Shahjahan’s main clientele comes from Natuapara, Bhagalpur and Shahbajpur. Asked why people from Natuapara still seek his services when most households in the village already have sanitary latrines, he cites numerous reasons. “Probably those who are still to come under sanitation coverage, avail my services. There are also some whose sanitary latrines are in a precarious condition and needs immediate replacement. Besides, a latrine was earlier shared between a few families. But now people are setting up sanitary latrines for individual household use,” he informs.*

*Apart from a few more private latrine producers operating in the nearby bazaars, Md. Shahjahan is the lone producer in this area, which is the closest to Natuapara. There might, however, be a few NGO-operated latrine producers but certainly no other individual producers, he proudly claims. He, however,*

*agrees that the latrines produced by the NGOs are qualitatively better than those of the private producers, because the NGOs usually use quality materials. But this has an impediment also, he argues, saying that use of over-priced materials naturally pushes up the price of their latrines.*

*Md. Shahjahan says he has come to this trade as he had the advantage of being an expert latrine producer, and therefore, knew the trade well for successfully running it. "I could not have entered any other business given the capital I have. Besides, there is a growing demand for sanitary latrines in the community," he says, terming it a necessity rather than a luxury given the current health and environment threats.*

*Reacting to what he plans to do when every house under his service area will come under sanitary latrine coverage and the demand for latrines will die out, he confesses with rare conviction: "Once everyone decides to install sanitary latrines, it will be ever better for me. I believe the demand for such services will never diminish, if not only increase with time."*

But such awareness did not dawn on them overnight. It took a lot of time and toil to motivate the people into acceptance of a new way of life before this awareness could flower into a social movement creating the need for a change. Tools like Tea-stall Sessions, Rallies, Mikings, Posters etc. were employed to trigger the general interest on safe drinking water, sanitary latrines, personal hygiene issues. But once these activities were undertaken, it gradually led to a general awareness that ultimately created the need for hardware support. Says VDC member Shafiar Rahman, "It was difficult to impress the villagers instantly as they initially resisted a new technology and a new way of life. But later on, when the same people were given some concrete examples of the adverse physical impact of arsenic and iron contaminated water or saw others recuperating from the water- and excreta-borne diseases by using safe drinking water and hygienic sanitation facilities, they realised its importance." This initial lack of awareness was mainly due to ignorance. Those who had attained some degree of education left the village for doing jobs elsewhere. No one really took serious notice about the well being of the village, argues Baizid Hossain of BSKS, adding that even those who were graduates, did not pay any heed to such matters. Most people took the advice emanating from radio and television as mere 'wise words', which need not be followed. Fortunately, this attitudinal constipation is largely absent now and people are increasingly feeling that it does not hurt to be aware.

"Still, there are a few skeptics. But they are very small in number to create any adverse impact on the developments achieved," Baizid argues. For instance, hearing the sermon on these matters by a local Imam after the Jumma prayers, very recently one man murmured that installing sanitary latrine was a luxury when people were struggling to fill their empty stomachs, says Baizid. Describing the resistance faced in implementing the WatSan programme, he recalls: "When we embarked on a particular mission to motivate people about the risks of drinking arsenic-contaminated water, an elderly person shouted out in anger. He complained that we were patronising him with false ideas when he and his forefathers have spent their lifetime drinking water from the tube-wells. Although we felt extremely hurt by his behaviour, it did not deter us from accomplishing our task. We finally installed the arsenic-free plant there. But only six months back, that very person approached me asking for setting up an AIRP at his homestead. Now, such once-nonbelievers-turned-believers are helping to promote our cause the most by narrating their personal experience to others."

This motivation was not needed only to bring the non-believers into the safe water and hygienic sanitation practice, motivation was required at the initial stages even for those who are now entrusted with the task of motivating others. Although the religious leaders' orientation and

school orientation programme yielded significant results in mass motivation and creating the need for hardware, the motivators too needed to be motivated to embark on the mission at one stage. Admits Vice-chairman of the VDC and a local Imam, Md. Osman Gani: “I too was not very well-informed about these things from the outset. It was through the NGO Forum and the BSKS that I came to know about the healthy water and sanitation practices and the required interventions. After I became convinced about the benefits of these interventions, I started to give detailed sermons on these issues after the Friday afternoon prayers in front of a large congregation of Muslim devotees coming to say their prayers at the local mosque.” Prior to that, he admits that he only spoke about these matters only as passing remarks. But due seriousness was attached to it only when a few people started believing and being convinced about its merits. “You see, it is never really possible do anything alone. It could only be possible when there are a number of people who stand by you and endorse your views. After receiving the ‘ultimate enlightenment’ from the Divine, our great prophet himself sought the cooperation of others to spread the message of Islam,” he says making a strong defense.

### ***Using Mosques to Mould Mass Mentality***

*Local Imams or religious leaders have traditionally been key opinion makers in predominantly religious societies, especially in rural communities. But few of them have probably taken up a mission to mobilise opinions and generate awareness among their target audience to wage a social crusade against unsafe and unhygienic ways of living. Imam MA Sattar is among that rare breed of people who has used the mosque as a launching pad for such a social movement in order to make a difference to the lives of the religious devotees.*

*He sermonises people after the Friday afternoon (Jumma) prayers about things like health and hygiene. After the formal prayers, he addresses the devotees on various issues for about 20 minutes, from which at least 5 to 10 minutes is spent on sermonising on issues like health, hygiene, safe water and sanitation practices. Elaborating the content of his sermons, the Imam says, “I tell the devotees that cleanliness and personal hygiene is a part of Islamic religious faith. This cleanliness code demands that ones body and clothes should always be kept clean. Without appearing entirely clean before Allah, one’s prayers and devotions will not be recorded and will go in vain entirely.”*

*Through such messages, he has tried relentlessly to trigger awareness among the religious people of the village not to defecate in the open and inspire them to install sanitary latrines at least with one slab and one ring so that both hygiene and purdah (privacy) could be ensured at the same time, which are two of the basic tenets of Islam.*

*Another reason for becoming involved in this motivational programme, he informs, was that he saw no point in keeping himself clean and thereby following the dictates of Islam, while his neighbours remained oblivious about its importance. “If my next-door neighbour remains unaware, he and his family will not only remain unclean and languish in an unhygienic state, but will also pollute his surroundings, which will ultimately have an adverse impact on my family’s health. Given the fact that dysentery is a highly contagious disease, it could have serious negative impacts by way of spreading the disease, the worst form of which could be manifest through blood dysentery,” Imam MA Sattar informs.*

*Besides, it is an almost foolish thing not to spend an affordable sum on installation of a sanitary latrine, than to spend Taka 500-600 on medicines for the family during a single month for serious stomach ailments, the enlightened preacher argues. Moreover, the travail does not end with the consumption of medicines only. Because, one has to remain confined to ones bed for a few days to recover from the illness, while one’s valuable working days go totally unproductive. “By pointing out these practical considerations to the religious devotees, we try our best to convert their traditional water and sanitation habits,” he says.*

*After receiving the needed training on awareness-building initiative from the NGO Forum, MA Sattar has so far been successful in convincing eight families to install sanitary latrines at their houses. In addition, he has been quite successful in persuading people not to defecate in the open as it goes against the religious norms of purdah or privacy.*

*Though his main area of activity is the local mosque where religious devotees congregate in large numbers, he also gives advises to people outside the mosque whenever he encounters them or find anyone to be deviating from healthy drinking water and sanitation practices. When reminded that it is clearly mentioned in the Holy Quran that cleanliness is a part of one's religious faith and asked that if he had known this all along, why did he wait so long to start his awareness drive, he candidly answers: "Frankly speaking, I knew about it. But I was not so impressed about launching a systematic campaign on the issue until I was personally motivated by the NGO Forum."*

About the school orientation, a teacher of BRAC School and a VDC member Rezaul Islam informs that students are given regular tips on healthy water and sanitation habits. Without failing, they are literally bombarded with dos and don'ts regarding safe drinking water and hygienic sanitary practices. Both primary and secondary students are regularly given practical instructions for about 10-15 minutes after the classes. "However, what's most rewarding is that the students do not intellectualise this knowledge only. Rather, they respond to such teachings by following those in their practical lives. For example, no student these days would drink water from unknown sources. They would only drink water either from the green-marked tube-wells or from the AIRPs. Besides, there is always discussion about these things everywhere in the village. So, there's absolutely no way that they can miss the information," he assures, recommending the need for setting up public latrines to enable children to permanently refrain from defecating out in the open in dire situations.

### ***Wise Heads over Young Shoulders***

*They are small and playful. They are just about to enter into their teens. But the general hype on health, water and sanitation awareness that have taken a stronghold in Natuapara have also touched their young lives as they are virtually bombarded with regular tips on these issues both at home and school. In the process, they have become wiser and are able to make informed choices about these.*

*Md. Abdus Salam and Md. Bachhu Miah are both Class-VI students of Abdul Gafur Memorial Secondary School in Natuapara. Stating that both of them use sanitary latrines at home, they confirm that they never drink water from unknown sources "as those are unclean and not safe for the human health." They admit that the elders at home and school told them that the water from unknown sources is unsafe. Both, however, vow that they 'always' abide by the instructions given to them by the teachers at school. They define 'unsafe' water as "any water that contains toxic elements." They claim that they know about the arsenic poisoning of tube-well water. "We should not drink water from the tube-wells, which have been found to have arsenic after carrying out tests," says Abdus Salam, adding that they can identify the contaminated wells by the red-marks painted on those.*

*As far as their sanitation practices are concerned, they inform that they wash their hands with soap thoroughly after using the toilets. Asked if they do it regularly, a visibly offended Bachhu Miah says: "We have made it a regular habit. So, we don't have to lie about it." He believes that all his friends also follow the same health tips". Both of them, however, admit that such awareness on water, sanitation and hygiene issues have left them in a good physical health and they have not suffered once from dysentery or any other stomach related ailments in the last six months.*

*Asked if they pass on these information and advices to those younger than them in the family and in the*

*community, Bachhu Miah proudly asserts: “We always tell them about the things we learn and try our best to make sure that they follow the advices”.*

*Meanwhile, Mosammat Rita Khatun and Mosammat Ayesha Khatun of the same class and the same school, almost echo their male counterparts when they say that for remaining in good health one should not respond to nature’s call in random places and should not drink arsenic contaminated water. Both the girls claim that they don’t drink water from random sources. They say they only drink water from the AIRPs and the green-marked tube-wells.*

*In trying to abridge about their sense of hygiene, they claim they enter the toilets putting on a pair of sandals and clean their hands with soap after coming out. “We do it without miss,” informs Ayesha Khatun. She hastens to add that if one goes to the latrine barefoot, ones stomach could become worm-infested and one could catch various intestinal diseases if one does not wash his/her hands properly after using toilets.*

*Both the girls say they have not suffered from any stomach-related ailments in the past six months. Asked if oral saline is always kept at their home, they say that it is bought as and when necessary from the shops. But the girls inform that the need for saline have diminished greatly as people hardly have dysentery or any other stomach ailments due to regular consumption of safe drinking water and leading hygienic lives.*

However, home also plays an important role in sustaining the commendable water and sanitation habits and lessons picked up from the schools. Admitting that the tiny-tots neither understand nor can they appreciate these things, another VDC member Mosammat Sakhina Khatun points out that they have made it a point to enlighten the relatively older ones who are passing through the childhood and adolescent phase. Now, they are much wiser as far as their personal hygiene and daily habits are concerned, she claims, adding that now they go to the latrines with their sandals on and wash their hands with soap or ash after visiting the latrine. They also hardly defecate in the open nowadays. As regards consumption of safe drinking water, they are much more cautious than before and everyone usually drinks arsenic-free water. They are also able to clearly identify the arsenic-free water sources from the arsenic-contaminated ones by the green and red markings on the tube-wells. All of them abide by the lessons they get from home and from their teachers at school. Most of the school-going youngsters carry bottles full of safe drinking water with them to the school, she assures. She firmly believes that they definitely will stick to these practices even when the present euphoria is gone. “This will happen for the simple reason that they have not only become aware about these things, but because these have become a daily habit for them and have become instilled in their routine existence,” she says with strong conviction.

In fact, the changes that have occurred in Natuapara due to these interventions are so massive that it shows all through the village. Before intervening with the WatSan project, one could hardly walk down the rural roads during the monsoon due to mud, filth and scattered wastes. Now the situation is just the reverse. Previously, bush and hedges surrounded every household. But now every household has cleaned those undesirable growths. It seems like a treat to the eyes to see the present clean environment, says Baizid Hossain of BSKS. Recalls Kananbala Biswas, “Previously we drank water from all possible sources. At the time, we did not know about the alarming arsenic and iron presence in water and that consumption of such water could be hazardous to health. Now we know about these things. So, we do not use those water any longer. The water we drank and used for cooking caused widespread stomach ailments in our locality. After we switched to safe drinking water, incidents of serious stomach ailments have drastically reduced.” Anima Biswas also adds that the children at the time used to defecate in the open especially along the roadsides. But nowadays, such incidents are a rarity.

### ***A New Lease of Life***

*Life was never an easy journey for Sunil Kumar Majumder. With chronic forms of stomach ailments following him like a curse, his life was a long-drawn battle with diseases. As the 47-year-old carpenter points out: “I suffered from chronic diseases of the digestive system like dysentery and diarrhoea almost throughout the year. Besides, I also had acute skin diseases during the winter seasons.”*

*However, he has left those dark days behind him now. “Ever since I started to drink arsenic-free water from the Arsenic-iron Removal Plant (AIRP), these two ailments have surprisingly left me,” says a rejuvenated Sunil Kumar Majumder.*

*Needless to mention, such recurrent ailments not only eroded Sunil’s health, but it created additional financial pressures on him. He always had to keep a good inventory of medicines and oral saline at home. “It used to drain a lot of money out of me. Two cypracin tablets used to cost me Taka 30. On an average, I had to spend at least Taka 150 to Taka 200 per month on medicines,” he recalls. “But ever since I started to consume water from the AIRP, it worked like magic on me, making the use of oral saline and other medicines redundant,” he confirms.*

*The change in his physical condition became apparent since the last two years as soon as the AIRP was installed in his neighbourhood in the last quarter of 2000 and he started to use the water for drinking and cooking purposes. Before that he, like other villagers, either used to boil the iron concentrated water pumped out of the tube-wells or purified the pond water with other cleansing agents prior to consuming.*

*But now that Sunil is cured of the previous illnesses, does he have to rely on medicines of any sort, any longer? To this, he admits: “Frankly speaking, I still keep oral saline at home. These days, the need for saline has, however, almost diminished. I have not suffered from dysentery even for once since the last quarter of 2000. But as I am a carpenter and often have to work for prolonged hours under the sun, I have resorted to oral saline on a few occasions in case of severe dehydration.” The use of water from the AIRP and the resultant emancipation of Sunil Kumar Majumder from chronic illnesses have not only left him in a state of physical bliss, but it has also enriched his standard of living in an odd and round about way.*

*It is true that because he did not have to spend on medicines any longer, his ability to spend on other things has increased. “Had it not been for my improved health, I could not have installed a sanitary latrine at my house incurring a cost of around Taka 1200. Besides, I have done some renovation to my existing house and can now afford the cost of education of my two daughters and a son,” he says pointing out the changing fortune of his life.*

*Sunil Kumar Majumder feels that like him, the overwhelming majority of the villagers are now extremely aware about health, hygiene, safe water and sanitation issues. More importantly, he claims, now people don’t only think about protecting their own health and environment, but they are concerned about protecting their entire neighbourhood, village and even other villages where their relatives or friends live. “I have installed a water filter at my father-in-law’s house, which is located outside this village,” informs the man who now feels that he could be of use to others and not the burden of others, which he was fast turning out to be just a couple of years back.*

Md. Rezaul Islam, a UP and VDC member, unwinds the story of a village elder, who had to buy medicines worth Taka 300-400 every month for his wife depleting his meagre resources as she suffered from chronic dysentery. She had to avoid eating many a delicious fruits fearing that those would upset her stomach. But now, she eats all those ‘once-prohibited’ fruits without any fear of loss of health or money (to buy medicines). Moreover, the money saved on medicines is now being ploughed into their family, which is also gradually raising their living standards. This

prompts BSKS director Suraiya Khanum to admit, “I feel proud to be a party to this endeavour of reaching these services to the doorsteps of the rural poor. Now, when I see that the once-chronic sufferers of serious stomach ailments are relieved of their illness, I understand that we have done the right thing to get ourselves involved in this entire process.”

Although a lot has been achieved through these awareness and motivational drives in water and sanitation fronts, the entire village is, however, yet to come under 100% safe water and sanitation coverage. VDC member Md. Shahjahan Alam admits that it would be an exaggeration to claim 100% sanitary latrine coverage though it is definitely close to 100%. He cites poverty as the main reason behind it. There are definitely a few who feel the necessity and are aware of the needs, but cannot obtain the services due to extreme financial limitations, he insists. Md. Rezaul Islam backs him up in this. “Although we are still continuing our awareness and motivational activities, the fact cannot be denied that there are some villagers who are hard core poor. For them, incurring a cost of even Taka 300 to obtain the services remain a luxury. Other than a few middle and lower-middle class people, most poor villagers defer the service citing reasons of financial crisis,” he adds, informing that for those still remaining unserved mainly due to poverty, it has been decided in principle to provide them with the necessary services by raising funds through the VDC. Meanwhile, Baizid Hossain of BSKS admits in all fairness that not all the people of the village have access to safe drinking water all the time. For instance, a person may be working on a farmland near which there are no safe drinking water reservoirs. Perhaps, due to compulsion, he may drink unsafe water for the time being, he argues insisting on greater access to safe drinking water.

### **Ahead of Sustainability of the Achievement:**

Services in safe drinking water are provided through an 80:20 cost-sharing system where the NGO Forum shoulders 80% of the cost of a water point and the remaining 20% cost is borne by the stakeholders and the beneficiaries. Informs Baizid, in installing an AIRP, the NGO Forum pays Taka 6,400 while the beneficiaries pay Taka 1,600. As for the maintenance of these plants, two written contracts are made – one with the NGO Forum and the other with the beneficiaries – and a copy of the document is supplied to the beneficiaries, which proclaims that the future maintenance and modification or replacement of parts will rest upon them. As for the responsibility of the BSKS, its staff visits the plant sites, looks after the operational sides, gives advises on their proper maintenance and utilisation. So, after the signing of the contract, the sole proprietors of the plants are the beneficiaries, Baizid explains. At the moment, there are 10 AIRPs in Natuapara. Ideally, these 10 AIRPs are shared between 100 families (10 families each). But actually, the user base is much higher than that. As for others, not all the tube-wells in the village are arsenic-affected. There are some 20 green-marked tube-wells, which are shared by the remaining families of the village, he informs.

#### ***Custodians of Community Assets***

*Like any other housewife in the Natuapara, Poly Rani Sarker has to take care of many household chores that range from cooking and cleaning to child-rearing. However, what sets her apart from others is that she has taken upon herself the responsibility of maintaining the Arsenic-iron Removal Plant (AIRP). Though she knew from the very beginning that she would not be personally benefited in any way by shouldering this regular responsibility, Poly Rani Sarker considers it a rare honour to do the job nonetheless. She finds happiness in serving people and considers it a pride as some 15 families in the particular neighbourhood selected her along with one Maya Rani Majumder to be the caretakers of the project.*

*The responsibilities of the duo include cleaning the AIRP every seven to 15 days and testing the water for arsenic and iron presence after regular intervals with the arsenic test-kit boxes provided by the NGO Forum. Sharing her experience, Poly Rani Sarker says they were initially trained on the maintenance aspects of the AIRP by NGO Forum and thereafter their works were monitored on and off by the officials to see if they were implementing the tasks properly or not.*

*Asked whom she usually consults if any major problem occurs while maintaining and operating the AIRP, which she cannot address or solve on her own, she says in case of any problem requiring heavy physical strength to sort out, the help of the male members of the community is usually sought. Besides, the caretakers have to keep an eye on when the tank becomes empty and needs refilling. But in most cases, informs Poly Rani, it does not become full empty because there is a standing rule that a user must refill the water him or herself after using it. For a pitcher-full used, a pitcher-full should be poured into the water tank. "We also monitor the rate of compliance among users", she informs.*

*However, she refuses to accept that her own household chores remain neglected and unattended for in the process. Poly Rani says: "It does not actually need hours of attention. We can look after it while performing our personal chores. It does not stand in conflict with our household responsibilities. For this reason, we never face any objections from the family members."*

*Reacting to whether or not she ever regrets having taken this responsibility on her shoulders as it brings no material benefits for her, she argues that though she's not being personally benefited through the job, but its impact at the collective level is immense. Besides, she asks: "When so many people are gaining from this project, who thinks about petty personal benefits." For Poly Rani Sarker and Maya Rani Majumder it really evokes an extremely good feeling to come to the help of so many people. That is why Poly Rani says she wants to continue this responsibility so long as people want her to carry out the responsibility. "I would to do it as long as I live if the people want me to", she says.*

*Apart from shouldering the task of safe-keeping the AIRP, Poly Rani regularly takes part in the Courtyard Meetings, which discuss issues relating to water, sanitation and general hygiene issues and attempts to address the problems through mutual consultations. She, however, does not believe that if, for some reason, the Courtyard Meetings are stopped henceforth, then the general health, hygiene and sanitation status would slide back for the worst. "Naturally, people would not want to go back to that unhealthy life again, especially since they are now more enlightened and aware than ever before on such issues of public health," she concludes on an optimistic note.*

But a lot of toil and a painstaking process of social mobilisation have also gone into it before people agreed to share the cost of such services. Baizid recalls that when the first 2 AIRPs were installed in the village, there were hardly any takers with a cost-sharing of 20% only. Rather, people objected to the scheme vehemently. After a lot of insistence, when 2 families installed the AIRPs and gradually became convinced about the benefits of drinking water from the same, they motivated others to follow suit. "Now, the demand for the AIRP has grown so vast that we could hardly supply enough," declares a happy Baizid.

It is true that a lot has been achieved in Natuapara in creating greater access to safe water and hygienic sanitation services both in terms of software and hardware supports. But the best thing that has probably come out of the community-managed WatSan programme is a strong sense of awareness and a general euphoria about matters of safe water, healthy sanitation, personal hygiene and cleanliness that has progressively stepped up coverage by creating an immense social need. Now the question is: can these gains be sustained?

Stating poverty as a nagging problem for the villagers, VDC member Md. Shahjahan Alam informs that the villagers are trying to address the problems of the hard core poor through the VDC and also through drawing the attention of the Union Parishad as the VDC president of Natuapara is a UP member. This way, some achievements have been made. Besides, some specific future development plans, like social forestry, rural electrification, roads development and environmental drives have been charted out, which the VDC hopes to implement. For this, he believes, there's a need for institutional support in one kind or another. "For example, we have to buy the arsenic test-kits from the NGO Forum on an 80:20 cost-sharing basis. While, NGO Forum provides the lion's share of the cost, we have to pay Tk 580 as our designated 20% share of the cost. But it will be difficult to avail these services any longer without any institution coming forward to share cost with us." However, the VDC members agree that institutional support will not always be forthcoming, and as long as that does not happen, they have to sustain on their own. "In case we are not extended cooperation, we will manage to survive on our own. We, the VDC members, will donate whatever amount possible to keep our activities going," says Shahjahan Alam. This concern, however, is also shared by the BSKS director Suraiya Khanum. "One of the prime reasons for us being institutionally involved in the WatSan project is because most of our rural poors are not in a condition to increase sanitation coverage solely on their own resources without any organisational back-up. We started mainly with the objective of helping them attain a high rate of sanitation coverage," she says, however, pointing out that a solid foundation has already been created for the people of the village to enable them to further build on that.

As for sustaining the present level of awareness and euphoria, another villager of Natuapara Md. Fazlul Haque insists that though they have become increasingly aware, they still need to know more. "There is no end to ones learning process. So, we still need to have and hold these meetings to bridge the knowledge-gaps. That people still need to know more about these issues is manifest through the increasing number of new faces joining these meetings every now and then," he says when asked if there was further necessity of holding community meetings when they have already attained a high degree of awareness on water, sanitation, hygiene and environmental issues. His comrade Motiar Rahman joins in a chorus with him, saying: "The necessity is of course there. It is necessary for two reasons mainly. One is that there is no end to knowledge, while the second is that we are yet to reap the full benefit of the programme. There are still a number of families in our village which haven't come under sanitary latrine and safe drinking water coverage. It still needs to be increased. We believe the present framework of community involvement should exist to consolidate the gains we have so far achieved."

Meanwhile, another villager, Md. Mokbul Hossain goes a step further saying that the WatSan programme should be extended beyond two years to ensure further development. "The more organisational support we get, the more developed we can become as we are still to be 100% self-sufficient in safe water and sanitary latrine coverage. Without institutional back up, the rural poor cannot afford to step up coverage through their own resources," he says. Opposing on this note, Suraiya Khanum of BSKS, however, adds: "I think it's enough. It would be unwise to extend the time any further because it would not be justified to function in one particular village to achieve 100% coverage, while other villages remain totally unserved. We have to bring a balance in this regard to be able serve other villages, which languish in hazardous conditions," she points out. She strongly argues that even if total coverage is not achieved within the 2-year timeframe, by that time, the villagers would have gathered enough experience, through which they could help others attain the required coverage.

Although the Community-managed WatSan Programme has been officially wrapped up in December 2001, the community members who are both its stakeholders and beneficiaries, have now taken upon their shoulders the task of taking the achievements to newer heights. This programme has, among other things, imbibed a strong sense of confidence about their own capabilities and a shared sense of social responsibility. But the biggest gain from this silent social revolution is perhaps the local pride. Says BSKS supervisor Baizid Hossain: “One thing I really feel proud about is that people, irrespective of age, now see me in a respectful way, as I have been a part and parcel of this silent but rapid social change.” Kananbala Biswas adds in elated confidence, “It is true that now we know many things that we previously did not know. It’s also true that now most of us know the basic tips of leading a healthy life. There’s no way we will allow this wisdom to erode.” Meanwhile, Motiar Rahman feels a rare sense of pride running through his being when people from other villages come not only to collect safe drinking water from his village, but also to share his knowledge. “They also ask us if such provisions could be made available in their village,” he says sharing the pride of his entire community.