

# *Being Beside the Hard-to-Reach*



**NGO FORUM**  
**FOR PUBLIC HEALTH**

## Being Beside the Hard-to-Reach

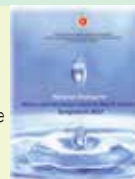
Water and sanitation coverage in Bangladesh has improved significantly over the years. But a huge number of people are still missing safe WaSH facilities not only because it's not there, but also because they simply can't get to it. These are pockets of areas that have received very little attention due to geophysical, socio-cultural and economic situation. The crisis is mainly rooted in poverty, power and inequality. It is, first and foremost, a crisis of governance, especially in the hard-to-reach areas, and thus governance becomes the key pillar to solve the problem. Considering the vulnerable WaSH situation of the hard-to-reach areas following the nation-wide advocacy campaign, 'Be Beside the Hard-to-Reach', the Government of Bangladesh has formulated and enacted a separate national strategy intended to ensure water and sanitation facilities for the hard-to-reach. Now is the time for its better implementation. Upholding its commitment to the disadvantaged people's right, NGO Forum for Public Health along with its partners has initiated serving the hard-to-reach. The development partners including Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) have rightly responded to support the unreached. This undaunted venture has resulted in addressing the hard-to-reach with safe WaSH facilities in an equitable manner.

### Hard-to-Reach

'Hard-to-reach' under NGO Forum's intervention firstly means difficult physical communication with the respective areas. Another option is population slipping from the development actions of both government and non-government organizations. These people have been living in accessible areas but could not be reached due to other factors including poverty, physical disability, cultural backwardness, social exclusion, environmental degradation, gender discrimination, climate vulnerability, etc. Indeed, the communication is given more emphasis in the context of Bangladesh as the hard-to-reach areas like *chars*, *haors*, exposed coastal areas, hills, flood and extreme drought zones are not easily accessible due to communication problem. At the same time, the proposition of slipped population is also higher in those areas in comparison to that of other plain land areas.

"**a**reas having poor water and sanitation coverage due to adverse hydro-geological condition, having poor and inadequate communication network, and frequent occurrence of natural calamities which in turn results in higher rate of child mortality and accelerates the vicious cycle of poverty, area referred as hard-to-reach areas and the people of those areas as well as people who do not have any fixed place for living, e.g. gypsies, sex workers, are called hard-to-reach people due to their social exclusion from adequate WatSan services".

*National Strategy for Water and Sanitation  
Hard to Reach Areas of Bangladesh 2012*



## Geophysically Unreached

The geophysical context of *char*, *haor*, exposed coastal zone, extreme drought areas, hills, etc are diverse and it is distinctive from location to location. Each of this area has distinct characteristics and livelihood pattern of the people. The zone-specific areas are extremely disadvantaged in terms of accessibilities. The economic opportunities are less due to physical environment and the poor people of these areas are the most vulnerable. In such a diverse socio-economic condition the hard-to-reach people of these areas have little service and facilities including water and sanitation, and hence suffer the most. The zone-specific characteristics and difficulties in communication of these hard-to-reach areas are standing as the key excuses for the duty bearers for poor service delivery including WaSH. The *char*, *haor*, hill, coastal region, flood and the drought-prone areas are distinctive by context, and water and sanitation facilities of the unreached people in these areas is vulnerable, demanding special attention in relation to their WaSH rights.

NGO Forum's intervention is covering the *char*, the *haor*, the exposed coastal area, the flood-prone area and the extreme drought zone as the hard-to-reach areas.



NGO Forum's programme has been under implementation focusing the geophysical and livelihood pattern of these hard-to-reach people since these areas are the most distinct and difficult in terms of communication and moderate civil amenities.

A woman in a purple sari is using a hand pump in a rural coastal area. The pump is mounted on a concrete base. In the background, there are some trees and a thatched-roof structure.

### WaSH Bridging Development in Char Kalatoli

**N**early 5,700 families living in the coastal Char Kalatoli village have to struggle with the fierce of nature. Being adjacent to the Meghna river Char Kalatoli is marked as a danger-zone under Manpura union of Manpura upazila in Bhola district. Speed boats and traditional engine boats are people's only way to communicate with the main land and Union Parishad. Fishing is the village people's main source of income. Apart from communication facilities the extreme remoteness of Char Kalatoli has hampered all possible ways of development including education, socio-cultural advancement, and health. There is no school, health services and recreational facilities in the village. These fishermen communities are deprived of receiving any government safety-net services. Altogether, the village people are trapped in extreme poor living conditions and socio-cultural- religious backwardness. NGO Forum along with its local partner DUS came forward to promote safe WaSH in the village. A DTW of 190 ft depth has been promoted for 40 clustered families living at the remotest corner of the island Char Kalatoli in collaboration with the local UP. This is the only source of drinking water for the entire village engulfed with salty water. Based on the VDC's attachment to the Manupura Union Parishad centering the WaSH intervention is helping drawing government service-providers' attention towards this geographically isolated and ignored village under the Union.



For the promotion of sustainable Public Health situation in these hard-to-reach areas in adaptation to various vulnerabilities, the programme intervention is upholding a special commitment to ensure the disadvantaged people's rights to safe water supply, environmental sanitation and hygiene practices.



**Water is  
Their Only Asset**

**T**he lone Deep-set Pump at the middle of the Santal Para is standing as a symbol of unity. It takes almost an hour's walk to reach the Para located in Barishalla village of Nezampur union, Nachole in Chapai Nawabganj amidst paddy fields all around. The only way to the Para is to walk through the muddy, slippery aisle of the paddy field. Their only hope for children's primary education - a BRAC School has been stopped due to the difficult communication. only 10 to 12 children go to a 1.5-km distant high school since the toddlers cannot walk through the aisle. Earlier women of the Santal community had to walk all through this way to collect water from the pipeline supply of government's BMDA project. But for them the way is too arduous; as not only is the route very long but the entire aisle of the paddy field offers danger. Shanmoni Soren, a woman folk describes their isolated states that the Pump has come as a blessing for the socially excluded Santals. In Paolina Sku's words, "All we have is this little land on which our house is standing. It is a khash land. We do not own it. But this Dep-set Pump that has ensured water for us throughout the year is our own. It is our only asset as registered with the local UP." **05**

Operationalizing and taking the government policy, strategy and programme on the ground, NGO Forum's programme intervention is following community-managed approach involving representatives of all walks under the leadership of the Union Parishad.

### ***Collaboration Brought Change in Remote Char***

**W**e are sensitized regarding our responsibilities. Collaboration between the UP, VDC and the community people has been established. Allocations for the marginalized inhabitants are given in accordance to the UP's limited capacity. We encourage community people to understand their demand and place that to us", says Shahidur Rahman, UP Member, Chilmari union, Chilmari, Kurigram. The union is a geophysically vulnerable remote char aroused in Bramhaputra river. Collaboration between the UP and the hardcore poor has made the people aware regarding their right to WatSan. The WatSan Fair organized in partnership among the UP, NGO Forum & MJSKS in the union has spread safe WaSH awareness among the deprived community while building collaborative relationship with the upazila administration. The people are now willing to overcome the grim realities despite geophysical barriers. But budget of the UP is very limited. Mohammad Angur Miah, UP Member & Chairman, Sanitation, Water Supply and Sewage Standing Committee says, "The WatSan committees are conducting regular activities but for overall improvement more allocation is needed. We are contributing as much as possible." Under UPs supervision, Karai Barishal Secondary School has received hygienic latrine facilities from local NGO MJSKS and NGO Forum.



NGO Forum is catalyzing its partner NGOs to intimately involve the LGIs to take lead in promoting the WaSH interventions at the unreached community. The LGIs are also collaborating with other local bodies & catalysts i.e. UWC, UDMC, WWC, VDC, indigenous groups including school teachers, students, religious leaders and cultural groups; private sector operators, CBOs and NGOs for promoting improved hygiene behaviour for all sections of the community people, poor & excluded people in particular in the hard-to-reach community.

### *Vesalia People are Free from A Long Endured Superstition*

**S**uperstitions run strong in the Vesalia village community. It was believed wearing sandals while going to latrines causes burning in the feet, jaundice, etc. None of the village women and only 20% of men wore sandals in latrines. An elderly man of the village mentions, "We never wore sandals in latrines. My feet burn. People say it gives headaches too." Extensive awareness and promotional programmes conducted by SDO, a local partner of NGO Forum today has changed the scenario. At least 80% of the women and all men are found to be wearing sandals while using a latrine. The Vesalia village in Islampur union under Damudya upazila of Shariatpur is a habitat of 106 families. There is no road communication to the low-lying flood-prone village which is only 12 kms away from the upazila town of Damudya. The village people have to cross at least four bamboo-made pools to reach their village. Difficult communication has impacted the socio-cultural and economic state of the village. There are no primary or secondary schools in the entire Islampur union as for which literacy rate is extremely low and poverty remains high in the region. For attaining education, people have to walk miles to the nearby unions. Forming VDCs engaging the village people was the first step towards developing awareness that also played a major part in bringing desired change in this underdeveloped village.





Economic imperative of water and sanitation is important in higher WaSH coverage and practices. About 17% population

## Economically Poor

of the country are hardcore poor who maintains livelihood hand to mouth. The economic status in hard-to-reach areas is more critical than that of other areas. The poor people cannot afford sanitation facilities and water technologies due to economic crisis. Another dimension of hard-to-reach areas is scarcity of land for installation of WatSan technologies. The people live on small piece of land of their own or others' land. In such cases, despite having willingness, people cannot ensure safe water and sanitation for themselves. As the poor people are unable to have access to welfare related services and facilities due to financial crisis, it is the scenario that the poor are not participating in water and sanitation programme, and in turn remaining out of safe WaSH coverage being treated as hard-to-reach by the duty bearers.

NGO Forum's programme intervention concentrates on the consideration that the diseases impose malnutrition, morbidity, child mortality, loss of productive pursuits, working capacity and daily income of the working people, increased medical expenses which eventually leads people towards vicious poverty circle. Considering the importance of safe WaSH for the sake of Public Health promotion, the programme intervention is promoting WaSH facilities with a view to contributing to the poverty alleviation strive.

**T**he Eco-san Latrine has changed the farmer views in Jhinaipukur village of Nezampur union under Nachole, Chapai Nawabganj. Mujibor Rahman, who received the support first from ASSEDO with approval from the UP shares his smiles, "At first I hesitated with the thought of using urine as fertilizer. I secretly proceeded with this; I didn't even discuss with my family. But when the result turned out to be marvelous other farmers insisted me what I had used. I apologized to all and revealed the secret." The farmers got amazed! Mujibor

### An Eco-friendly Look Towards Livelihood

had an increase of 200 kgs paddy production and increased his cultivation land from 5 bigha to 7 bigha. The result inspired the whole village consisting of 22 farmer families to go forward with the Eco-san produced fertilizer. "Our village is now chemical fertilizer-free. We are having more production and there are no insects and pests in the village. The use of pesticide has also reduced a lot", says a cheery Mujibor. The women folks are also encouraged with insect-free environment as Msst. Monjila says, "At first I felt it a trouble using the Latrine. But now I got used to it and it has done a great favour in maintaining a clean household-surrounding and environment. We have less diarrhoeal occurrences now. We are growing green and healthy vegetables at our surroundings. We do not have to buy vegetables any more. We are now looking forward to a better livelihood."



Through the promotional activities and context-specific hardware supports to the communities, the programme intervention is directly supporting the reduction of water and vector-borne diseases which is eventually contributing to reducing the threats to malnutrition, morbidity, mortality, loss of productive pursuits, etc.

### *They are Free from Water Poverty*

**B**asanti Mandal, 65 has managed to save some money to buy fishing net. Widow Basanti along with her two daughters and a son live in Kalikabari village of Chadpai union, Mongla, Bagerhat. Adding to their miseries is the return of her elder daughter Anumati Mandal whose husband went to India after just 12 days of their marriage and never came back. Basanti and their children earn their day to day living by day labouring, working in other people's house and fishing. This poorest family had to spend Tk 600 per month and a huge time for collecting 30 litres' of water compromising with the time for day labouring or fishing. Basanti says, "In this locality nobody is meager than us. The whole water collection process was a big mental pressure and financial burden for me as a family head". Being familiar with the miserable condition of the family, the ward. Anilesh Mandal, President of the VDC came Kalikabari VDC came of the VDC says, "The intrusion including Sidr and Aila. We requested the UP Chairman to under the programme implement- set up a RWHS ed by SEBA at Basanti's residence. Now the family is free of worrying about drinking water. It has released some of their distress."





Focus has put to include the poor households and disadvantaged communities into the WaSH coverage. This is ensured through a high level of motivation and sensitization of the service providers. As for the poor beneficiaries making them realize that safe WaSH is their rights, motivating and mobilizing them under the platform of VDC has been a big task to draw the results produced so far. Communities' involvement in making social maps, Community Action Plans (CAPs) under VDCs has helped in the mobilization process.

### Complementing Beauty's Dream

***"My dream, my three children will lead a standard life. For that we are carrying their study cost despite extreme poverty. But even few days ago, missing school due to diarrhoea was very common for them. My vegetable vendor husband could not go to work for the same reason. Now the situation has changed,"** says Beauty Akter, living at the brink of the Jamuna in flood-prone Anulia village of Shibalaya in Manikganj. Beauty, whose parents gave her early marriage, knew that drinking safe water reduces diseases. She used to drink Tubewell water at her father's house in Rajbari. But in high arsenic and iron contaminated Anulia village, she had to spend a big portion of time collecting water and remain worried regarding her children's health. When NGO Forum's partner SEDA started WaSH promotional activities, she proactively started to work with VDC becoming a member of the Hygiene Group. The VDC was inspired by her awareness and a strong willingness to educate her children despite poverty. She was listed for a RWHS. After receiving the RWHS, Beauty is free from the tension of collecting safe water. She says, "Now I have extra time to take care of my children and they are in good health to continue their study smoothly".*

Through the process of open budgeting the UPs are upholding their commitment in improving governance in their UP activities as they are taking ADP and LGSP allocations into consideration as raised by the VDCs. The participation of UPs has depicted an optimistic state at promoting pro-poor WaSH at the union level.



### GO-NGO Effort Targeting Poor's Benefit

**A** 3-day WatSan & Environment Fair organized at the Upazila Parishad premises with a coordinated effort under the leadership of the upazila administration prompted enthusiastic efforts by the Upazila Parishad in achieving 100% sanitation coverage in the upazila. "The Fair is still a memorable event to all of us. It made a bridge between the community and the local administration. The administration and LGIs became sensitized about their accountability while the community got aware about WaSH in an entertainment mood", says Md. Tawhidul Islam, Chairman, Atwari Upazila Parishad, Panchagarh. The Upazila Chairman acknowledged different advocacy and promotional initiatives of NGO Forum's local partner CRD as he mentioned the contribution of the Fair. The Atwari Upazila Parishad and local stakeholders bore 45% percent cost of the total 110,000 taka expenditure of the Fair. The spirit of the Fair has successfully sensitized the local administration & LGIs forwards a movement for 100% sanitation. Intently, the Atwari Upazila Parishad has completed a household survey in each UP. Md. Siraj, UP Chairman of Toria UP under Atwari upazila mentions, "Both the NGO (through VDC) and UPs had conducted household surveys. The survey findings were then cross-checked at the UNO office under UNO's supervision. Through GO-NGO collaboration we shall make this movement a success". According to the household survey findings all the hardcore poor families that do not have sanitation facilities are getting sanitation facilities from LGSP, ADP, UP budget, and NGO projects. "We are trying our best to achieve 100% sanitation in Atwari upazila, and this is our first priority is to support the poorest as part of good governance," Tawhidul Islam expresses his firm commitment.



Regarding creating poor & disadvantaged people's access to improved facilities, water & sanitation materials have been provided in partnership with WaSH the sensitized UPs considering the hardcore poor lists developed by the VDCs. Setting-up the Village Sanitation Centres through private sector operators and linking the communities with the services of the existing private entrepreneurs, the programme intervention is contributing to raise significant sanitation coverage. The poorest beneficiaries are also receiving WatSan services from the respective unions. This also has ensured a participatory local planning process contributing in developing the pro-poor service delivery by the LGIs.

## Owning A VSC – Winning the Poverty

**P**oor mason Md. Shamsul Alam living in Nezampur Bazar area of Nezampur union under Nachole, Chapai Nawabganj now runs his business across the union and beyond. Starting with a minimal investment of Tk. 10,000 his capital now stands at Tk. 150,000 owning two centres. Alam's business as a private VSC owner began with manufacturing ring-slabs but did not stop there. Through his business, he developed business relationship with other organizations. The tripartite partnership among NGO Forum, ASSEDO and Md. Shamsul Alam under the guidance of Nezampur UP has helped the VSC come up with inventive ideas and expand the business in new areas. His business has flourished getting Tk. 30,000 and training services from NGO Form.

Shamsul Alam is now producing and selling 'Bandhu Chula' – an increasingly popular environment-friendly stove, a self-initiated 3-layer reservoir

(RWHS), various kinds of pipe, ventilator, cemented home decors, etc. The Nezampur UP has placed their orders to Alam for sanitation materials utilizing their LGSP allocation. Alam's VSC is also playing an enthusiastic role in promoting sanitation in the area as he says, "There are quite a number of families who have been made buying latrine sets with water-seal while purchasing the Bandhu Chula."







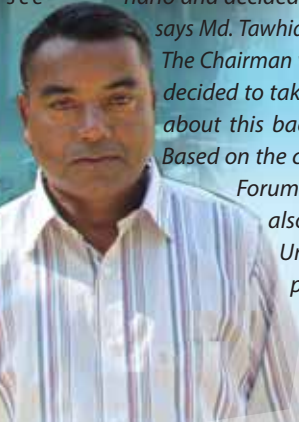
## Socially Excluded

The community composition, poverty, ethnicity, religious and natural environment, geophysical traits and bureaucratic mentality of the administration & duty bearers determine many of the groups and people excluded in reaching services including water and sanitation facilities. The people of different hard-to-reach areas are used to traditional hygiene practices. These appear to be the part of their culture. As the WaSH practices are different in communities and areas, the notion of hygiene and cleanliness differs from person to person, locality to locality, by religion and groups. The culture, tradition, habit and behavioural practice of different religious and indigenous groups also determine their role in participation in development programmes as generally they are treated as excluded segments missing all their rights.

Being included in the VDCs as direct members, the poor & excluded population are organized mainly through the CAP development process. In this regard, the poor & vulnerable people from target communities have been mobilized in association with the VDCs through various community level activities under NGO Forum's programme.



### Including the Excluded



***"Baro Balia Christian Para is an intact area which is a cause for their being behind the screen. The community was unaware about healthy life and used to do traditional hygiene practices having no idea about safe water and hygienic sanitation. I go there willingly reviewing the practical scenario and decided to take programme which will contribute to their healthy living",*** says Md. Tawhidul Islam, UP Chairman, Alowa Khowa union, Atwari of Panchagarh. ***The Chairman visited the Para enthusiastically, discussed with the community and decided to take initiative to ensure WaSH promotion there. "I first got informed about this backward religious minority group through a VDC working there. Based on the community demand we allocated a DSP with the support of NGO Forum and its local partner CRD," The Chairman discloses himself. He also mentions that a hardcore poor list has been prepared by the Union Parishad which would be cross-checked with the hardcore poor list submitted by the Christian Para VDC. The hardcore poor families will get latrines following the list. "Therefore, the community participation is a priority issue here", he mentions. "I am trying to ensure my social accountability to the deprived community as a mandate of Union Parishad," says the committed UP Chairman.***

The VDC formation, capacity development & functioning as a local institution have strengthened the governance mechanism at the local level addressing the poor excluded people's voices in the community demands.

At the ward and union levels the WWCs, UWCs and UDMCs are playing their roles and responsibilities in relation to WaSH promotion. The capacitated UPs, PNGOs and CBOs are involved to make the water supply & sanitation options demand-driven and participatory. Better coordination with UPs has been ensured through the involvement of the VDC members in the UP Standing Committee on Sanitation, Water Supply & Sewage.

### Attaining to A Frightened Community

*"The devastating Padma destroyed our home pushing us to be shifted here from Doulatpur two generations ago. Here, we have limited sources of income like day labouring and fishing. Social safety-net services are for the mainland people, we are never given access to any of those", says Subodh Chandra, 42, a member of the excluded Bagdi community living in Goaria village of Teota union, Shibhalaya of Manikganj. They were unaware regarding their rights including WatSan and were always in fear of been persecuted by the mainstream people. They never went to the local community or UP with any demand. Considering their vulnerability local NGO SEDA came forward to sensitize them regarding their rights and dignity. Some of the inhabitants became members of the VDC. A Dug-well has been installed in collaboration with the UP to remove their water problem. It has a significant contribution in their life. Earlier they collected water from the Padma river which was a painful task as they were not allowed to collect water from any of the mainstream households. Receiving a technology has contributed to raise self-confidence also. Chitto Chandra Sarkar, a Bagdi VDC member says, "The initiative has given us courage to utter social rights and services from UP. We are now aware that we are also entitled for enjoying social services like other people. So, we are trying to establish relationship with the UP officials and the civil society to remove our seclusion."*





With approval of the UP-led WatSan Steering Committee the promotion of water points and sanitation facilities has been ensured under NGO Forum's programme especially for the excluded people in line with the National Pro-poor Strategy on Water & Sanitation.

### *They Earned an Asset*

***"T***he Deep-set Pump is our only asset and we are not scared to lose it as we have its legal document of ownership. We also have contributed in cost-sharing. Now we do not need to go anywhere for collecting safe water where we always felt ourselves helpless and neglected," says Tularam Das, VDC Chairman and Caretaker of the technology, living in a far-flung border land known as 'Christian Para' in Alowa Khowa union, Atwari of Panchagarh. All of the 35 households are hardcore poor in this drought-affected community. They had left their previous place and started living here after the liberation with no legal papers. Illiteracy exists in the community remarkably. "Due to poor road communication it is very hard for me to go to the college," says Rinku Das, the only graduate student in the community. As a religious minority group they are treated as excluded group depriving all their rights; no assistance have reached to them from any GO-NGO intervention. "Even there were no safe water and sanitation facilities. We collected water from neighboring village and felt neglected always", Anna Das points to their past. CRD, partner of NGO Forum first took actions to get them rid of the curse of social exclusion. They made the community aware of their rights and how to raise their demand to the UP. The process has ensured their access to safe water by installing the 190 ft. deep DSP and placing their demands to UP for free latrine sets.





*They are Now Included*

Alongside vertical and horizontal networking, relevant stakeholders are also sensitized through rooted advocacy in favour of equitable WaSH promotion. This process is ensuring governance in implementing programmes as harmonious relationship is being maintained among the LGIs, WaSH service agencies and facilitating bodies, VDCs, relevant government agencies, NGOs, mass media, local opinion leaders and so on in favour of the excluded segments of the society.

**N**egligence and fear of eviction is a part of their lives of 16 Santal families living in Barishalla village of Nezampur, Nachole in Chapai Nawabganj. For them, the intervention of NGO Forum and ASSEDO does not remain within endowing with merely safe water supply and sanitation options; it has given them social protection as they felt relieved after coming into touch with the Nezampur UP through the VDC. Chunku Hajda, an elderly of the community mentions, “This is a khash land; the local elites known as ‘diyara’ claim this land to be theirs. They do not allow us to build houses. We live here without legal papers. But now, the Chairman has asked us to stay here. We feel safe as UP is cooperating us. The Chairman has also told us to send our children to school”. Md. Saidur Rahman, Chair of the Sanitation, Water Supply and Sewage Standing Committee of Nezampur UP mentions that water crisis of the indigenous Santal community was one of agenda of their regular meetings. According to him, “We have the list of Adivasis and submitted it to the UP. The Union Committee then approved allocation for the Santals”. The 16 families have started sending their children to schools.

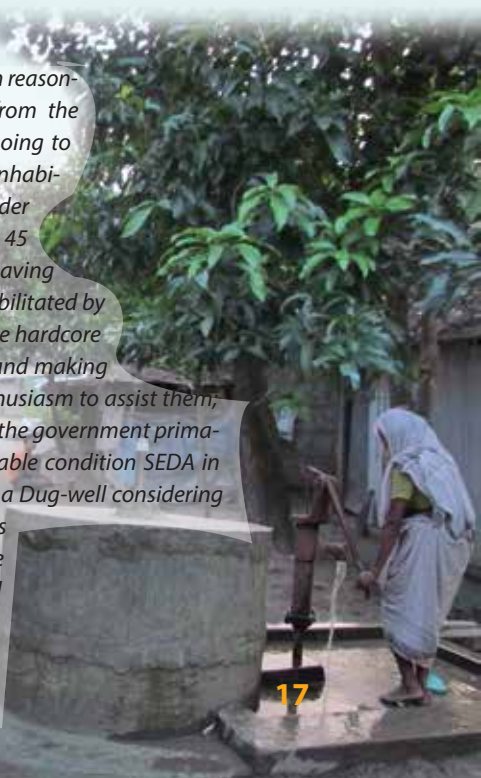




As a result the UPs are also addressing the socially excluded population's WaSH rights utilizing the allocation of ADP and other block grants like LGSP. These progresses are likely to converge towards increasing their access to safe water and improved sanitation facilities.

### Water Brings Dignity to the Isolated Community

*"We are getting pure drinking water from a Dug-well in reasonable distance. We no more have to hear ill words from the neighboring community people. They did not like us going to their houses for collecting water", says young Subodh, inhabitant of Shibram Bari colony in Utholi union under Shibhalaya upazila of Manikganj district. There are 45 families living here with deprivation who came here leaving their previous village due to river erosion and were rehabilitated by a noble initiative of an international organization. These hardcore poor are earning their living by fishing, day labouring and making handicrafts. Mainstream people have never shown enthusiasm to assist them, even their children are not allowed to take admission in the government primary school despite being voters. Considering their miserable condition SEDA in partnership with NGO Forum & local UP has promoted a Dug-well considering the arsenic contamination in groundwater in this flood-prone area. Kallani Rani, a woman folk says "The technology has saved us from frequent diarrhoea and fears of arsenicosis. We are also raising fund and saving it in a penny bank (money box) for its maintenance. We are also communicating with the local UP for getting social services."*



## Environmentally Disadvantaged

Environmental hazard poses a threat to the surrounding natural environment and

adversely affects people's health. The interaction between human health and the environmental hazards has been proven to significantly impact on access to safe water, sanitation facilities and human health, directly by exposing people to harmful agents or indirectly by disrupting life-sustaining ecosystems and liable for assembling many areas as hard-to-reach. Environmental hazard is also posing risks to human health & hygiene of hard-to-reach areas' people and thus is emerging as a serious concern in Bangladesh where development efforts are impeded increasing mortality and morbidity. These environmental hazards are the obstacles to development efforts in WaSH sector, especially in the context of hard-to-reach areas of Bangladesh.

The central focus of NGO Forum's intervention is addressing the health affects in relation to environmental hazards.

### Breaking Tradition in Technology Promotion

*The Eco-san Latrine has initiated new perspectives and ideas against the conventional sanitation where human excreta are dealt as waste, not as a wealth. NGO Forum's partner ASSEDO is promoting the Eco-san Latrine as a successful alternative option for the severely drought-affected regions. Poor farmer communities in Jhinaipukur village of Nezampur union, Nachole, of Chapai Nawabganj are encouraged with the simple and cost-effective way of creating compost from sludge. Nutrients obtained in the form of compost and urine is recycled by using them in agriculture resulting in better production of crops. This has confiscated the initial fear of community people rejecting the alternative option. Msst. Morjina, a women folk in Jhenaipukur village mentions, "We do not have to pour water. We put ash on the excreta and it dries up. There is no odor or insects in the toilet". According to farmer Md. Azahar Ali, "In this drought-prone area, Eco-san Latrine is emerging as a new idea towards protecting environment breaking the traditional perspective towards sludge being used as fertilizer. Eco-san will sustain our life. This has brought relief and profit. We will look after it ourselves."*







### Leading from the Front

In particular, it addresses hazards such as deterioration in water quality as a result of arsenic contamination, increase in iron & manganese, water pollution, etc that have direct and adverse effect on Public Health.

**D**evelopment commenced in Narayan Teota village. The people of this flood-prone village in Shibalaya union, Shibalaya of Manikganj have got a new half-km road connected from the river Jamuna ghat to the main road; have huge number of trees planted through UP's tree plantation service; improved overall environment including water & sanitation situation; and developed an intensive relation with the UP. An enthusiastic Kutubuddin has contributed largely to these achievements. Being selected as the President of Narayan Teota VDC he initiated to re-excavate a 40-year old Dug-well and made concrete platform of four Tubewells. Then he led to construct a road supported by the UP which is being used by five thousand people in average everyday. In his words, "The installation of the new Dug-well has gave me an idea of how to re-excavate the abandoned Dug-well and I waited no longer. As for the road, we VDC members had to even argue with the UP Member to ensure our right." Kutubuddin was rewarded very soon to be selected as member of the Sanitation, Water Supply and Sewage Standing Committee of UP for showing good performance as VDC President. He is now attending the Sanitation, Water Supply & Sewage Standing Committee's meeting and disseminating ideas on WaSH, open budget, social audit, and social communication among the villagers. Abdul Majid, UP Member of Teota union and Chair of Sanitation, Water Supply and Sewage Committee of UP anticipated "The efforts of the villagers to change their misery situation fascinated the UP. All credit goes to Kutubuddin. UP officials are ready to enhance all sorts of assistance to the villagers."

Water quality surveillance, introduction to community-level Water Safety Plan, low-cost field kit for water testing, etc remain a main part of the water quality management programme under this intervention. Household waste management, improving surrounding natural environment, etc following the PHAST approach are an integral part of the intervention's safe hygiene practices.

## A VDC That Stopped Open Defecation

The Notunpara village located in a remote haor of Purbo Birgaon union, Dakshin Sunamganj of Sunamganj is now free from open defecation and bad smell of human manure. The change has been occurred after Rajanigandha VDC established by NGO Forum's partner ERA in 2012 started sensitizing the marginalized fisherman community on necessity of safe WaSH practices. Because of their dedicated initiatives with limited resources, open defecation has totally stopped in the remote village. Shikha Suttrodhar, Union Extension Worker of ERA, engaged in that hard-to-reach village says, "No one gets dirty with human manure while walking in the village path anymore. Mix-up of sewage with flood-water has reduced. Environment has become healthier with dropping rate of diseases." Besides, six households have constructed hygienic latrines with raised platform in collaboration with VDC through cost-sharing. People now dump domestic waste in holes. Surrounding environment has become pollution-free. Diseases have reduced. Other families now want to own hygienic latrines. But they are too poor to pay. Akol Rani Das, Member, Rajanigandha VDC comments, "Names of the poor families are sent to the UP for allocation through prioritization considering UP's limited resources. We are also working hard to generate own resources for WaSH promotion."







These are priority agenda in the Community Action Plan (CAP) implemented by the VDCs. Besides, the local allies play a key role in the various motivational activities carried out at the local level centering these issues. Technological modifications are also sought pursuing the sustainability of safe WatSan options in the pretext of increasing water pollutants. The promotional activities engaging both the community people and local allies are creating a strong ground in mobilizing households in protecting and preserving surrounding environment. The School WatSan Programme, WatSan & Environment Fair, cultural events, dissemination of different BCC materials, etc are different motivating factors at the community level for raising awareness on environmental hygiene. At the grassroots the VDCs play a crucial role in overall environment conservation.

**Clean Environment**  
**Increased Student Enrollment**

**D**ropout and absence of students has reduced at Shatgaon Jibdara School located in Kamrupdolong union of haor-based Dakshin Sunamganj upazila under Sunamganj. Previously students had to cross khals full of waste and a highway with unhygienic latrines at both sides. Farid Ahmed, President, Kamrupdolong VDC and former UP Chairman says, "We have cleaned the khals and convinced the UP constructing a dam. This has stopped discharge of domestic wastes. We also have destroyed the unhygienic latrines besides the road. Now the school environment is pollution free." Sanitation facilities of the school were also very unhygienic. Noman Ahmed, teacher of the school says, "Unhygienic sanitation facilities with common toilet for boys and girls were making the girls reluctant to attend the school crossing such a long distance. Diarrhoea contamination was also high among the students. Now we have a 2-chambered Latrine with water and soap facilities as NGO Forum's local partner ERA came forward to provide the support. Girl students now have separate arrangement for menstrual hygiene maintenance. School enrollment especially of the girl students has visibly increased." The sensitized students are now convincing their parents for household hygienic latrine installation while to maintain clean environment.



## People with Disabilities

Access to safe water and sanitation facilities is a basic right of all people, including people with disabilities, the denial of which can have serious implications on their well-being. Article 28 in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) focuses on the right of persons with disabilities "to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families; this includes State Parties duty to ensure equal access to clean water services". But the physically challenged people in Bangladesh are mostly deprived of any sort of social services and certainly face difficulties to get access to safe WaSH facilities. Social and physical isolation combined with economic hardship make the situation worse turning the people with disabilities as hard-to- reach, and especially women and girls of respective families are mainly the sufferers to cope with this situation.

Through its intervention NGO Forum puts special attention to ensure the access of people living with disabilities in hardcore poor families considering the high level of vulnerabilities faced by them due to environmental obstacles rather than their own impairments. Consequences on health, dignity, social and familial exclusion are considered while designing intervention in addressing the physically challenged.

**No More Waiting**

**"All of a sudden my life stopped. I couldn't move; lost all hopes to live",** Mohammad Fazel, 40, a father of four, paralyzed from beneath the waist from a horrid accident while he was at work as a construction labourer

8-year back expresses his grief. He lives with his family in Jhenaipukur village of Nezampur union under Nachole, Chapai Nawabganj. Being handicapped in a hardcore poor family has brought forth hardships for him in all possible ways. "There is hardly anyone to share my pain and emotion. This is increasing my isolation and fears", Mohammad Fazel states his living status.

NGO Forum's partner ASSEDO's attempts in collaboration with Nezampur UP to make life easy and dignified for him through providing a disable-friendly latrine. The latrine has brought some relief in his everyday struggle to healthy living and deal with the pain of isolation. "This is very good, I no more have to call and wait for my wife to help me. The latrine has given me free will and a huge relief for my family", Mohammad Fazel expresses his feeling.

The intervention also includes gender aspect centering the notion that improved WaSH facilities for the physically challenged also benefit those who provide that support in the family, usually women and girls by reducing their work-load. Inclusion of the people with disabilities in village level institutions and development work is the foremost priority. This allows identifying their special needs, obstacles, required actions to ensure their easy access to water, sanitation and health facilities. Physically challenged people's inclusion in the VDCs also brings up the community's responsibilities in responding to their special needs. The whole intervention is centered in giving these isolated persons a life with dignity. Not only does the technological modifications of WatSan technologies ease their life but also bring them in active role playing for the community and increase their participation.

### *The Person with Disabilities Earned His Demand*

*"In 1979, an accident left me crippled and dependent on others. However, I didn't give up fight to come back to a normal life. I tried to involve myself in any development of my own community", says Abu Bakar Siddiq, a person with disability and Secretary of Mothurapara VDC in Mothurapara village in Karnibari union, Sariakandi, Bogra. Living in a high arsenic-prone Mothurapara village, he is always trying to aware people about healthy living. But being a person with disability he was dependant on his wife who has hearing impairment for regular work like bathing, going to toilet and so on which restricted his free mobility. Being demanded by the arsenic-victim community, NGO Forum's partner GBS has installed an AIRP at Abu Bakar Siddiq's household premises based on the approval by the respective UP. The ownership of this technology through legal document has been handed over to altogether seven families in the community. "Life was miserable to me and not dignified as I was dependant on my wife. But now I can do my routine work myself as the operation system of the AIRP has made me confident to do so. Now I am a self-reliant person as others," says Abu Bakar Siddiq.*



In NGO Forum's programme intervention, the people with disabilities of the hardcore poor families are identified and listed by the VDCs. The lists are put forward to the respective UPs also through which alternative technologies are provided with a higher priority. Regarding the alternative technologies, the intervention designed and brought necessary modifications for disability-friendly WatSan technologies taking the different types of impairments into account. Most convenient part of the household is considered as technology's installation point. Socio-psychological counseling is also provided to the family members regarding their necessary support in ensuring the physically challenged person's easy access to the facility provided; the operation and maintenance of the alternative technology, etc.

### *Sheuli is Not Scared Any More*

*"My daughter used to tumble down each time she went to the toilet. She could not go on her own. Her father and I used to live in a constant fear and pain to see her getting hurt everyday. Now she is capable of using the chair-latrine all by herself," says Sheuli's mother. Sheuli, 22, was born with impaired feet and hands. She lives with her parents in the Groenbandh village, a char land of Jamuna river encircled by a dam in Karnibari union, Sariakandi, Bogra. Her education in BRAC School stopped at an early age as she could not write with her fingers. Gradually as she grew, Sheuli has been engulfed with isolation when her only sister got married to the nearby Para within the village. She says with tears, "I am totally alone. I have no friends. Even the crutch cannot help reach her house". The disable-friendly latrine provided to Sheuli by NGO Forum's partner GBS has brought some relief in her distressed life. Sheuli mentions about it, "I do not have to call mother for help. Now I can go all by myself without fearing to fall down. The Latrine is within our premises. The VDC members and GBS have taken care of the path even; so now I can move easily."*





## Women in Vulnerability

Traditionally, women mainly get involved in household chores.

The women having education and family supports take part in actions outside the household. But mainly the rural women are still in traditional actions. Nowadays, participation of women in development activities has been gradually increasing due to supportive policies of government and non- government organizations and their practices.

The women are

living on subsistence level involving themselves in income generating activities. However, still it is not adequately supported and well-accepted by the society. The status is remaining in a much more dire situation leaving the women as

hard-to-reach. Due to lack of acceptance of the

women's rights to the society and the service providers, the participation of women in

development activities

including

the water supply

and

sanitation programme

is

comparatively

lesser than

that of the satisfactory

level.



Realizing the truth that women along with their children are the disadvantaged group in our society in traditional roles and responsibilities, NGO Forum's programme intervention is focusing on participation and involvement of women as mainstream beneficiary in programme planning and implementation.

### *Geeta Got Access to UP*

**G**eeta Halder, 55, President of Keyabunia VDC formed & facilitated by NGO Forum's Partner SEBA has many introductions. She is the lone teacher of the only school, set-up by Pradeepan for 175 families living in Keyabunia village of Chila union, Mongla of Bagerhat. She is a self-less social worker- teaching the women of her climate victim community to write, bringing children to schools, and so on. Today, Geeta has a new introduction- she is representing her vulnerable village to the UP. The UP member has started coming to monitor work in their village and responding to the demands placed by the Keyabunia VDC. The reward is encouraging; in Geeta's words, "We (VDC members) have done 4 to 5 arbitrations along with the UP member, mostly on familial affairs. I have good communication with UP now. We have got 17 latrine sets for our community." Personally, Geeta is widowed, living with her daughter and grandchild. Geeta says, "In our village poverty is overwhelming. Most men and women are day labourers while a markable number of families are living on Sundarbans. It takes fishing and chopping wood in the great strength to lead such a disadvantaged community towards empowerment. But our community people love me, they are with me. Our initiatives will carry on just like we carried on Pradeepan School even after the authority phased it out."



The women are projecting their voice contributing to decision-making. The active participation of the women group in different domains of the programme implementation is subsequently also opening the door for their job opportunity showing their skills and expertise on way to contribute to WaSH promotion at their community.

### Securing Poor Women's Health & Economy

*It is the only source of drinking water for the entire West Chila village and nearby villages in Chila union, Mongla of Bagerhat. But the pond got severely affected by the Aila. The women of Kolabari Para belonging to hardcore poor families working hard to collect water after Aila. They risked their health and earning. Nibha Roy and Laxmi Roy are two hardcore poor day labourers of the locality who are paid Tk. 200 per day. Nibha Roy recollects, "The biggest struggle Aila created for us was to collect sweet water for drinking". Laxmi Roy, the only earning member of the family, adds, "I had to give up work till afternoon in order to collect a 20-litre container of water from distant Bania Shanta village crossing the Pashur river. For this I missed half of my daily wage at least 4 to 5 times a month; moreover it cost me 30 taka for a container of water. I could only bring one container at a time as I do not have large containers." The Pond Sand Filter installed within a primary school campus reexcavating the Aila-affected pond in Kolabari para of West Chila village has secured poor women's lives. NGO Forum's partner SEBA in collaboration with Chila union has installed the PSF. Based on the community demand this venture has made the villagers, especially the expecting mothers, school children and elderly women risk-free to collect safe water from the PSF.*



Thus the plights of women and adolescent girls are getting reduced, their lifestyle is being changed attributing them with leadership qualities and technical skills for involvement in income generating venture as well as providing them preferences for getting safe WaSH facilities. Active involvement of women in the VDCs is ensuring their participation in programme intervention.

### *A Courageous Lady Leads Her Community*

**B**rinde Maitra is very popular among her native folks. She practices homeopathy and runs her own chamber since 2001 in Kainmari village of Chandpai union under Mongla upazila of Bagerhat where a hundred households reside. Her journey as a VDC President has enabled her to carry out development work for the community, something that she had always wanted to and enjoyed doing. But she had to show the courage to stand against her elder brother-in-law as both their names came up as nominees for VDC president by the community. Brinde remembers, "I wanted to step down. My brother-in-law was in front of me. How can I being a bride stand as my brother-in-law's competitor? So, I wanted him to be selected as the elderly and respected person. But my community did not allow me any other option." Brinde is now working as a member in several Committees including UP's Conflict Resolving Committee, Ansar-VDP's village-level development committee, etc.

Brinde along with her VDC members representing 100 families of 3 paras have been successful in stopping households throwing waste into adjacent canals. They have even approached the UNO office trying to do something against the powerful shrimp farm owners. Brinde says, "The villagers voted for me as its President. It is an honor for me. Many days I skip chamber and join VDC work. People come up to me and ask me to uphold their demands in the VDC."

Being part of the VDCs the women have already been involved in significant development activities such as, raising communities' WaSH demand through application to the UP, identifying women-headed poor households and ensuring that they get more priority for WatSan allocation, etc. During planning for the installation of the water options the gender issue is highlighted and gender-friendly WaSH promotion is prioritized in the participatory planning sessions. The intervention is ensuring women's involvement in every decision-making process especially for technology site selection, caretaker selection, community's contribution, etc. Women's increased participation is leading to improved WaSH practices at household level. This in turn is empowering them to a great extent.

### Only Rain Drop to Drink

*"There are ponds, canals around our home but we could not drink a single drop of water from these sources. Salinity has destroyed the worth of water. Our women had to fetch water twice a day. We walked 7 kms to fetch one jar of water very early in the morning and again before sunset. This is very costly and painful for us. But this water was not enough for us to fulfill our physical demand. Now the advantage of RWHS has freed us from the restriction of drinking less water". This was the expression of Anamika Mandal, a pregnant woman in Kalikabari village of Chandpai union, Mongla of Bagerhat which is affected by heavy saline intrusion being a climate hazard area; climatic disasters such as Sidr, Aila have made the ponds and canals dysfunctional of containing drinking water. Local shrimp farms have further deteriorated the condition. Due to the environmental challenges conventional technologies failed to supply sweet water to the inhabitants of the area. A community-based RWHS of 10,000 litres capacity has been set up in Ajay Biswas's house as the most suitable place of collecting water for the six hardcore poor families. It was set up in a reasonable*

*height so that the tidal water cannot submerge the technology in disaster period. Uttam Halder, one of the beneficiaries of the technology says, "Earlier we brought water from 7 kms away spending 20 taka/day which was very stinging for us. But the RWHS has produced hope among us removing the trouble of water. Our women need not go to collect water from far place any more."*



## Climate Vulnerability

Bangladesh is now exposed to adverse impacts of climate change due to its geophysical location, hydrological influence by erratic monsoon rainfall and changes in regional water-flow patterns, etc. Most parts of the country face too much water in monsoon and many parts of it face too little water in dry season. This situation is further aggravated in the warmer climate resulting in severe droughts and increasing floods while the people especially in the exposed coastal areas are being turned as hard-to-reach. The geographical structure of Bangladesh coast has made it vulnerable to recurrent cyclones caused by climate change. The affect of storm surge is penetrating deeper into the landmass and causing significant casualties and destroying all infrastructure including water supply and sanitation facilities. The impact of climate change has also been visible in other zones while thousands of disadvantaged people are becoming hard-to-reach in terms of WaSH facilities. The safe water sources are getting out of order. Sanitation system is collapsing. Thousands of people are becoming refugees of their rights losing facilities including safe WaSH.





NGO Forum's intervention has tried to understand the local impacts of climate change on water, sanitation and human health as well as identify the associated risk and social vulnerability in the respective hard-to-reach zones.



### Setting the Latrine Before Building the House

**T**he poor farmer Abdul Gofur and his family have moved from Bramhaputra river erosion stricken char to a comparatively new char located in Houria village of Nayarhat union, Chilmari, of Kurigram. The climate refugee family has brought the portable possessions including the Plastic Latrine that they have been using for more than a year. They have installed it in a raised platform and started using it before constructing their new home. In Gofur's statement, "To us, a hygienic latrine is as important as having a residence. We have pulled the latrine, cleaned it and safely brought it here. It was not possible if it was concrete-made." Like Gofur's family, Msst. Mabia, another climate refugee taken shelter in the same village has also brought her Plastic Latrine while migrating. She says, "I cannot think of a day without using it. Many of my neighbours now know that health, hygiene and environment related problems could be reduced through use of hygienic latrine as the community people are getting aware of this attending in various promotional activities facilitated by local MJSKS. But migrating from one char to another is a common scenario of the locality. For this reason, they are willing to buy plastic latrine as it is cheap, hygienic, easy to carry and install."

Better understanding on the actual needs, current coping & adaptation mechanism of the local communities is contributing in demonstrating and promoting climate-resilient WatSan technologies for the victim communities.

### Utilizing Indigenous Knowledge

***T**he design of my improved latrine is indigenous knowledge-based. It will cope with the hazardous environment as it will remain high above the tidal water without getting affected," Anil Krishna, a conscious man of the coastal village Kalikabari in Chandpai union, Mongla, Bagerhat expresses his firm aspiration. The area is one of the most climate vulnerable areas of Bangladesh. Water logging is another big concern due to shrimp farming, and as the area gets inundated under saline water after natural disaster causing massive suffering and destroying WatSan facilities. Anil is motivated by the social mobilization programmes of SEBA, a partner organization of NGO Forum. He learnt the way to set up an improved latrine with raised platform to secure safe defecation as well as stop the mixing of human excreta with tidal water. For that he used indigenous knowledge to measure highest flood-level of the whole area due to tidal and storm surge. Anil comments, "It is expected that it can be used for four years at a stretch then it could be reformed for further using. I believe other people will follow this replica in our locality"*



This is creating the scope to develop sustainable water supply and sanitation options appropriate to local physical, social and cultural context to ensure safe drinking water security, better sanitation and hygiene & health security of the vulnerable communities.

The programme intervention is demonstrating a good number of demand-responsive, context-specific and affordable water supply and sanitation options combating the challenges of climate change.

**A Comprehensive Effort  
for Clustered Benefit**

*“Our dream fulfilled as we have drinking water at our door-step while groundwater is declining far from our reach”, Marjina Begum expresses her emotion as she has got the pipeline water supply facilities just at the gate of her house. This Deep-tubewell with submergible Pump-based pipeline water supply has appeared as a feasible option while a 7,200 ft. long pipeline water supply with 11,000-litre tank capacity has been installed for a poor cluster habitat consisting of 1,025 population, men-420, women-605 under 151 households. The service is provided in Golabari village in Kasba union, Nachole, Chapai Nawabganj. The Kasba Union Parishad has borne an amount of Taka 50,000 as duty bearer responding to the community's demand besides project contribution of Taka 1,500,000. The motivated community's contribution stands at Taka 85,000. The pipeline water supply is a cost-effective alternative option to the expensive and multiple boring in the severe drought-affected Kasba union if individual water technologies were to be installed. “Due to single boring, the pipeline water system is also more environment-friendly saving the water aquifer from getting contaminated. This is how we are trying to save our scarce underground resource having a joint venture with NGO Forum and its partner ASSEDO”, Abdul Kader, the UP Chairman says with satisfaction.*







While rendering hardware supports to the community, it is laying special emphasis on the poor victims of the respective climate-vulnerable areas. Technological innovation in adaptation to climate change hazards and in terms of the feasibility of hard-to-reach areas' geophysical characteristics is contributing to sustain the WaSH promotion in the programme areas.

### *Paving Their Way Ahead*

*The Bay of Bengal is only a 4-hour engine boat ride from Jaymoni Paschim Para of Chila union, Mongla, Bagerhat. It is the end point of community living against the Sundarbans. Fight against cyclonic events is regular for the community people most of who came from other river-eroded areas for earning from fishing, collecting honey from the Sundarbans or chopping wood. NGO Forum's partner SEBA has made joint collaboration with the DPHE local authority and constructed a Floating Latrine addressing their vulnerability and emergency situation during and after any cyclone or tidal surge. The process has brought the community together. A 60-year old Arun Dorji, President of Jaymoni VDC is leading the way. He along with his other VDC members have organized both the experienced and youth persons forming two separate working bodies – a 40-member Disaster Management Committee and another 25-member Volunteer Group. In Arun Dorji's words, "We are now more organized. We have made our own committees. We have the capacity; we at least need to utilize it". Presently the ignited community people are demanding the UP to construct a cyclone shelter.*



The user group is sharing a part of total installation cost of a water point following the 'ability to pay analysis'. The ownership of the WatSan options is being transferred to the respective community. The communities themselves are maintaining WatSan technologies efficiently. The knowledge- base gained by the community is leading towards sustainability of the respective technologies.

### *Secured-system for Sustaining the Water Point*

*The 6-member Water Point Management Committee is enthusiastic about running the Community-based Rain-water Harvesting System in a sustaining manner as the option has relieved them of their tensions of collecting safe drinking water. The 6-member are from six different households of the water point user group residing in highly saline-prone Brahman Math village in Chandpai union, Mongla of Bagerhat where crisis for sweet water is massive. In 2013, NGO Forum's partner SEBA in collaboration with Chandpai UP has installed a 10,000 -litre-capacity CBRWHS. Md. Rabiul Islam, a committee member mentions, "We have fixed certain rules based on mutual understanding. We have made a regulation on a 100-taka stamp note on which the rules have been undersigned by all the committee members. This has made it official". Md. Sohrab Mollah, the elderly member of the Committee adds, "Our Ward Member has signed in it as our Witness and we shall preserve a copy of the stamp note at the UP office and SEBA. In this way, there will not be any disputes centering the usage of the water point as well as its overall management for saving it from the brunt of natural disaster"*



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