

Rising above the waters

Better hygiene and sanitation in Bangladesh

- Uttaran NGO constructs 'step toilets' for 2,000 people in flood-prone areas
- Community volunteers monitor good hygiene practices in schools and villages
- Outbreaks of diarrhoea reduced in villages where data is collected



The rainy season in Satkhira – daily life becomes a struggle

The coastal region of south-west Bangladesh floods easily and water levels can remain high for months. Daily life becomes a struggle as paths disappear and floods damage freshwater ponds and shallow wells. Toilets become unusable and overflow, contaminating water sources with faeces. People are forced to buy drinking water or collect polluted water from rivers or ponds. Some even migrate because they cannot find safe water. It is no surprise that diarrhoeal disease puts many children's lives at risk.

In Satkhira district, a local NGO called Uttaran ('transition' in Bengali) is working to improve health by supporting more than 105,000 people in poor communities to improve their use of safe water and sanitation. The Dutch WASH Alliance¹ supports Uttaran with money from the Dutch government.

Since January 2011, Uttaran has been promoting the construction and use of sanitary toilets, safe water and better hygiene through a project that tells a story in its title - *Bringing tangible and sustainable changes in the WASH status in the Satkhira district*.

Uttaran constructs raised 'step toilets' in public places such as schools, market places and religious centres and encourages others to build their own. The raised toilet prevents floodwater entering the pit and the non-porous lining prevents faeces leaking out, protecting nearby water from becoming contaminated. So far Uttaran has constructed 10 step toilets and many families have built or repaired their own safe toilets – in this way more than 2,000 people have gained access to a hygienic toilet that will survive floods.

Uttaran has also constructed five deep (75 metre) wells bringing safe water to more than 2,500 people.

These new facilities are vital, but on their own not sufficient to ensure better health. Uttaran has been working with the community about the importance of drinking only safe water, and the value of using toilets consistently, and of keeping them clean and ensuring that water and soap for handwashing are always close by.

To track progress, community volunteers in five selected villages visit 60 neighbours each month to ask where they collect drinking water. They look at the condition of the toilet, check that all household members use it and ask about handwashing. At monthly village group meetings community members discuss their concerns and raise their own suggestions about improving water, sanitation and hygiene in the village.

¹ WASH is an acronym for water, sanitation and hygiene



Uttaran conducts weekly sessions on good hygiene behaviour in 20 schools in the Satkhira district. Students learn about washing hands after defecating and before eating and share what they have learnt with families and neighbours. Student volunteers interview 10 boys and girls in five selected schools each month to find out what they think about the toilets and the state of hygiene in their school.

The community and school volunteers share their findings so that Uttaran builds an up-to-date picture of access to safe water, clean toilets and hygiene practices in villages and schools. Their staff reflect on the findings to improve their programmes, asking: What are the problems? What is missing? What more can we do?



Above: Under construction in Satkhira - a twin-pit raised step toilet.

Below: The completed step toilet - raised to prevent flood water entering the pit.



Door-to-door monitoring by community volunteers



Action-Research for Learning

... is an initiative to improve the effectiveness of hygiene promotion and community empowerment by local partners in Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Ghana and Uganda. The Dutch WASH Alliance implemented the project with financial support from the Dutch government and supports Uttaran with action research. Uttaran is a long-term partner with Alliance member, Simavi.

Dutch WASH Alliance

The WASH Alliance International is a multi-national consortium of over 100 partners worldwide. We work together with local NGOs, governments and businesses to make sure everyone on this planet has sustainable access to water and sanitation.

Improving hygiene, access to sanitation and clean water

Action-research for learning is helping to improve hygiene behaviour in south-west Bangladesh. Community people are regularly updated on the benefits of safe water, of using a toilet and of practising good hygiene. Before the project none of the households in the selected villages had handwashing facilities near the toilet. Now most families have created a place to wash their hands with soap after using the toilet.

Many families have constructed or repaired toilets and far fewer people now defecate in the open. Information collected by the community volunteers shows that most toilets are in good condition and clear of faeces.

The number of families using clean drinking water is increasing. One resident of Bhabanipur village described how people have switched to collecting water from the deep well, although it is a little further away. "Through the visits and group discussions we realised we were getting diarrhoea and other diseases because we were using unsafe water from shallow wells for drinking."

Outbreaks of diarrhoea have reduced in all the villages where data is collected.

There are also environmental benefits as household rubbish is now disposed of at designated points.

Sustainable

Involving community members and students in collecting information has given Uttaran staff a better understanding of the effects of their work. Even after the end of *Action-research for learning*, community and

student volunteers will continue to collect information on hygiene, sanitation and water in their communities in Satkhira to help Uttaran sustain efforts to improve people's health.

More information

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Credits

This story has been produced (2015) for the Dutch WASH Alliance by Jeske Verhoeven of IRC in cooperation with Simavi and Uttaran. Action-Research for Learning is supported by the Dutch WASH Alliance in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Ghana. You can read about other successful projects supported by the Dutch WASH Alliance in Ghana, Uganda, and Ethiopia at www.washalliance.nl/learn-more/downloads.

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