# Capacity building in Bhola

*IDENTIFYING APPROACHES AND EXPERIENCES OF IMPLEMENTERS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN THE WATERSHED PROGRAMME BANGLADESH*

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# 1) Introduction

In 2016 the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, IRC, Simavi, Wetlands International and Akvo jointly launched the 'Watershed-Empowering Citizens' programme. This five-year partnership serves to strengthen capacity of CSOs to advocate and lobby in the interrelated fields of Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) to ensure equity and social inclusion, as well as sustainable usage of water resources. Watershed is implemented in six countries, one of which is Bangladesh. The present report centres around the implementation of the programme in the Bhola district, which is the main focus area of the Watershed Bangladesh work package.

As the Watershed programme is coming to an end, it is high time to reflect on its achievements and outcomes, learn from the approaches on the ground, and identify best practices. Yet, while Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) activities were an integral part of the programme in Bangladesh, capturing in detail the approaches of the implementing partners, as well as the experiences of the target groups in Bhola, has proven very difficult. Therefore, Simavi, as the leading organisation for Watershed Bangladesh, has commissioned The Broker to carry out a 'knowledge gathering project', the results of which can be read in this report. In essence, the purpose of this project was to bring to light the experiences of the people involved in Watershed Bangladesh and identify the processes and approaches that led to the achieved outcomes and positive change that has been observed.

In the chapter that follows, Watershed Bangladesh as well as the role of the various partners in this programme are described in more detail. Additionally, the approach The Broker has taken to realise this project is explained, and a final section addresses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this endeavour. The next chapter, chapter 3, forms the heart of this report. This chapter will focus on the stories and experiences of the people in Bhola who have worked on and benefited from the Watershed programme. It consists of three sections: The first discusses the power dynamics and partnership between the various partners in the Watershed Bangladesh work package; the second considers in detail the process of setting up and building the capacity of a local CSO in Bhola; and the third section pays special attention to the inclusion and capacity building of marginalised groups and communities. The fourth and final chapter summarises and synthesises key learnings. An effort has been made to present these in a clear and concise manner, covering 1) obstacles and challenges; 2) approaches that worked particularly well; and finally, 3) the sustainability of impact and the future after Watershed Bangladesh has come to an end.

## 2) Getting to the stories of Watershed programme Bangladesh

### 2.1 The Watershed programme

'Watershed-Empowering Citizens' is a five-year partnership (2016 - 2020) of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, IRC, Simavi, Wetlands International and Akvo. The programme, the primary aim of which is to build capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs), is being implemented in six countries: Its most intensive interventions are taking place in Uganda and Kenya, and in Mali, Ghana, India and Bangladesh a more limited set of context-specific and strategic interventions is undertaken.

The main aim of the Watershed programme is to strengthen capacity of CSOs to advocate and lobby in the interrelated fields of Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) to ensure equity and social inclusion, as well as sustainable usage of water resources. Capacity building of CSOs in the Watershed programme focusses on evidence-based lobbying and advocacy on WASH and IWRM issues. By making the voices of citizens –and especially of the most marginalised– heard and strengthening governance and accountability, Watershed seeks to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goal for universal access to water and sanitation services and water security (SDG 6).

For the Bangladesh work-package, Simavi contracted three local partners from Bangladesh: WaterAid Bangladesh (WAB), Development Organisation of Rural Poor (DORP) and Gender and Water Alliance-Bangladesh (GWA-B) to implement the project activities in Bangladesh (see box 1 for more detailed descriptions of the organisations).[1] Here, the aim is to enhance the ability of CSOs including DORP, the Water Management Citizen Committee as well as national level WASH networks to influence local government institutions such as the Local Government Division (LGD), Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) and Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) for sustainable WASH services. Throughout the programme there is a strong focus on social inclusion to address the needs of marginalised groups such as the river nomads in Bhola.

In Bangladesh, the Watershed programme is implemented mainly in the area of Bhola, a hard to reach coastal district in south-central Bangladesh at the heart of the Ganges delta. It was formally launched in Dhaka on 28 March 2017. All the consortium partners (IRC, Simavi, Wetlands International and Akvo) are contributing to the programme in Bangladesh. Their roles are divided as follows:
- Simavi is managing the overall administration, programme- and financial management of the three in-country partners in Bangladesh. Additionally, Simavi provides technical advice on capacity strengthening of organisations on lobby and advocacy, inclusion and demanding inclusive services.
- Akvo supports the local partners to use the data and stories related to WASH and IWRM for their evidence base for lobby and advocacy. They also support the partners to implement global Watershed PMEL requirements.
- IRC supports the partners to design, contextualise and execute WASH monitoring tools and approaches which are then used in lobby and advocacy (i.e. service level monitoring framework, sustainability checks, sanitation assessment, supply and demand assessment, etc.).
- Wetlands International provides support to strengthen capacity of partners on interlinkages between WASH and IWRM.

Simavi did not have an office in-country, WaterAid Bangladesh, a long-standing partner, was asked to take the lead role for the Bangladesh work package. Additionally, WaterAid Bangladesh facilitates capacity building at national level. DORP was selected as the main implementation partner and the GWA is responsible for capacity building of DORP, with a particular focus on gender and inclusion issues. As the aim of the Watershed programme is capacity building for local CSOs to do lobby and advocacy for WASH, DORP selected and formed two Community Civil Societies (CSOs) namely the NGO Network-NN and the Water Management Citizen Committee (WMCC). These local CSOs will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

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[1] Later in the programme (2019) IRC contributed to Simavi's contract with DORP to scale up activities to the Ragmati districts. Wetlands also contracted DORP to implement additional WASH/IWRM activities.

## 2.2 The Broker's approach

As Simavi has indicated, capturing in detail the approaches of the implementing partners in Bangladesh as well as the experiences of the target groups in Bhola has proven very difficult. In essence, the purpose of this project is to bring to light the experiences of the people involved in the above described Watershed programme and identify the processes and approaches that led to the achieved outcomes and positive change that has been observed. To achieve this overarching goal, the present project seeks answer four main questions:

- What approaches and practices were implemented on the ground to achieve the documented programme outcomes?
- How have people on the ground (both implementers as well as community members) experienced the implementation and impact of the Watershed programme in Bangladesh?
- How have the partners experienced the collaboration within the Watershed consortium?
- What lessons can be drawn from the approaches, practices and experiences for future programmes and collaborations?

To answer these questions and bring to light the experiences of the people involved, The Broker has taken the following approach: First, an exploratory interview was conducted representatives of Simavi to sharpen the goals and focus of the project. Thereafter, a brief desk study was conducted, distilling relevant information from project documentation provided by Simavi. This documentation consisted of a variety of files, including annual reports by the different implementing partners, outcome harvesting results, training reports and preliminary lessons learned. Based on the acquired information, a first draft outline for the report was drawn up. More importantly, questions were formulated for the interviews conducted by The Broker.[2] Unfortunately, on-site research became impossible due to COVID-19 pandemic which meant that interviews were limited to online

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[2] For the full list of interview questions used in the first interview round see Annex A.

conversations with the representatives of the various implementing partners (see section 2.3). Luckily however, it was possible to also interview one local community member.

All interviews were recorded (naturally, with permission and for the purpose of this project only) and the relevant information was included into a first draft report. Additionally, follow-up questions were formulated for four of the interviewees who were questioned for a second time. After this second round of interviews was included into the report, a first draft was sent to Sara Ahrari, as key contact for The Broker at Simavi. She provided her feedback and gathered comments from partners in Bangladesh. With this feedback, The Broker then reworked the report, eventually leading to the project you now have before you.

## 2.3 Interviews in times of COVID-19

Like all other countries in the world, Bangladesh was also hit by the worldwide pandemic of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The virus was confirmed to have spread to Bangladesh in March 2020. Since then, the disease has spread over the whole nation, with cases confirmed in all districts by May 6th. Following the example of many other nations, the government of Bangladesh declared a lockdown for the whole country from 23 March and implemented various measures to contain the virus. People are asked to stay at home from 10 pm until 5 am and outside these hours only leave their homes if there is an urgent need. There are ongoing restrictions of movement between districts. Given this situation, the present research project could not be carried out as initially envisioned. The idea was that a Bangladeshi researcher or research team, coordinator by The Broker, would travel to Bhola and conduct interviews with implementing partners as well as community members. Due to travel restrictions however, all interviews had to be carried out online from the Netherlands. These limitations resulted in a less ambitious project in which the representatives of the implementing partners in Bangladesh as well as representatives from the consortium partner organisation Simavi were the key informants.

It is undeniable that these practical limitations have grave consequences for the outcomes of this project. As the main objective is to bring to the surface local approaches of and experiences with the implementation of the Watershed programme, gathering input from the people 'on the ground' can be seen as indispensable. Thanks to the current digital possibilities, however, it was still possible to talk to representatives of all implementing parties. Multiple long and in-depth interviews were held with the following informants: Mohammed Zobair Hasan, Chief Research Evaluation and Monitoring at DORP; Partha S. Kuntal, Programme coordinator at DORP; Ranjan Kumar Ghose, Advocacy Officer at WaterAid Bangladesh; Joke Muylwijk, Executive Director at GWA; Runia Mowla, Programme Specialist-Gender and Agriculture at GWA; and Sara Ahrari, Programme Manager at Simavi.[3] In an additional feedback interview Danny Joyce, Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Advisor at Simavi, gave his input for reworking the first draft of the report. Finally, thanks to the help of and thanks to the translations of Sabiha Siddique (Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Officer at Simavi), one representative of the Bede community in Bhola was also interviewed: Kohinoor Begum, whose story will be discussed in much detail in Box 3.[4] The fact that conversations with these informants, let alone with community members in Bhola, could not be had face to face has impacted the comprehensiveness of this research. However, the detailed stories and experiences shared by the informants have most definitely provided a good insight in the practices on the ground in Bhola. Through the online conversations, supplemented with written documentation on the Watershed programme in Bangladesh provided by Simavi, a better understanding of the approaches of DORP, WaterAid Bangladesh and the GWA can be had. From the experiences informants shared, challenges can be identified, lessons can be drawn, and inspiring stories can be distilled that will contribute to future projects and partnerships.

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[3] For the purpose of writing this report, all interviews were recorded, and key-points were summarised in separate documents. Please contact the author, Yannicke Goris, for access to these data.
[4] For the full, translated interview with Kohinoor Begum, see Annex B.

# 3) Beyond the surface

This chapter will focus predominantly on the stories and experiences of the people in Bhola who have worked on and benefited from the Watershed programme. This first section, however, will first focus on a 'higher level' – that is, on the organisational level of the Watershed Bangladesh consortium. As the collaboration between the various partners and the decision making in this consortium form the backdrop to the implementation level, it is important to shed some light at these dynamics first. Thereafter, in section 3.2, focus will move to implementation, starting with the process of setting up a local CSO in Bhola. Section 3.3, the final section of this chapter, will pay special attention to the inclusion of marginalised people and communities. As this chapter forms the heart of this report and contains the most vital information and stories, each section will start with an 'At a glance' textbox, which will briefly highlight the main take-aways of the section.

## 3.1 Power dynamics and partner relationships

> **Section at a glance**
> - Power dynamics inevitably affect relationships between the consortium- and implementing partners.
> - Consistent support and building durable relationships was, at times, hampered by quick turnover of staff.
> - The interplay between power dynamics, confidence and culture forms an important barrier in effective communication and collaboration.
> - Western style of reporting and dialogue does not necessarily match with Bangladeshi conventions, which can make open and equal communication and mutual understanding difficult.
> - Different roles and priorities of partners can result in discussion and disagreement. Practice shows that this does not have to be a problem: finding compromise can actually work to the benefit of the project. The sensitive topic of gender inclusion proved case in point.

### *Simavi and the implementing partners*
As explained in section 2.1, Simavi operates as the contracting partner of WaterAid Bangladesh, DORP and the GWA. In this capacity Simavi is largely in charge of budget allocation and coordination, which means that a certain power dynamic is at play: Simavi is, in its relationship with WaterAid Bangladesh and DORP, the main powerholder. That said, explicit effort has been made to put WaterAid Bangladesh and DORP in the lead of decisions with regards to determining what needs to happen in programme implementation in Bangladesh. Simavi led the process of developing a Theory of Change (ToC) together with the partners and the partners have been free to propose activities to achieve the objectives of the ToC, which are then discussed in an open dialogue. During the interviews it became clear that the absence of an in-country office of Simavi –as well as, although to a lesser extent, of the other Dutch consortium partners– did have an impact on implementation level. At times consistency of support was not entirely efficient, especially because of the personnel changes. This meant that knowledge and familiarity with the local context had to be built again and local implementing partners had to interact and forge new relationships with new people on a regular basis.

### *Dialogue with other consortium partners*
In addition to Simavi and the implementing partners, various other parties in the Watershed consortium have a say in the design and implementation of the programme. In the working relationship with these partners, equal and open collaboration was not always easy. Ideas proposed by Dutch consortium partners, for instance, did not always fit with local needs. And while the implementing partners in Bangladesh were actively encouraged by, among others, Simavi and Watershed management, to be vocal and transparent about their concerns and wishes, they did not always succeed in doing so. Analysis of the various interviews suggests that an interplay between power dynamics, confidence and culture forms an important barrier here. Making known ones wishes directly

and explicitly does not necessarily fit with conventions of communication in Bangladesh, let alone expressing disagreement with partners that are regarded as being in a more powerful position.

Additionally, the 'Western' (in this case Dutch) mode of communication differs significantly from that in Bangladesh. The directness and so-called SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely) way of reporting and dialogue that is seen as ideal and conventional in the western context does not match with cultural conventions in Bangladesh, which has made open and equal communication and mutual understanding difficult on some occasions. Thus, the fact that WaterAid and DORP are not always effectively leading the programme cannot be attributed only due to the inability or unwillingness of other partners to let them lead. There is also the inevitable issue of power that comes with holding the purse strings as well as the dimension of culture and confidence: Implementing partners should not only be *given* the opportunity to take the lead, they should also make use of the opportunity and *take* the lead, demanding initiative, speaking up. This is a process that demands work and self-reflection of all parties involved.

### *In- country partner engagement*

The key implementing partners in Bangladesh are WaterAid Bangladesh, DORP and the GWA, the latter playing a mostly supportive role on gender and social inclusion to build capacity of the other organisations on these topics. Although all partners speak highly of each other and recognise their complementarity, the in-country collaboration between the three organisations is interesting to briefly consider. The interviews suggested that this collaboration was not always easy, mostly because of the different roles and priorities of the organisations. The GWA was subcontracted by Simavi to build capacity and understanding of DORP, as well as the local CSOs on gender and social inclusion in relation to WASH. From the interviews it could be derived, however, that the GWA put in much more time and effort in the programme than was expected and, consequently, paid for. This meant that, on the part of WaterAid Bangladesh and DORP, the GWA's involvement may have come across as too hands-on; and on the part of the GWA there was, at times, a sense that their work was not sufficiently recognised.

It could be argued that discussions, compromise, and difference in priorities between partners can actually work to the benefit of the project. One situation exemplifies perfectly that differences of vision and working style resulted in an outcome that contributed to the objectives of the Watershed programme. In the early stages of the Watershed programme representatives of DORP and the GWA visited the local government authority together. The GWA spokesperson asked directly why there was no woman representative in the government body. Posing this question in such an early phase of the project, when relationships of trust had not been formed, was not the tactic DORP had opted for: as the main implementing organisation DORP prioritised building a solid collaborative foundation first. The GWA, by contrast, argued that addressing the sensitive matter of gender inclusion should be put front and centre in the programme, challenging conservative local conventions that hamper in inclusive development and lobby and advocacy from the very beginning. There was, in other words, some disagreement about the timing of the GWA's intervention as well as the prioritisation of gender issues. As Zobair Hasan put it, however, this disagreement was not necessarily a disadvantage but only natural in collaboration between different partners. It paved the way for frank discussions between the three implementing bodies about how best to incorporate the gender and inclusion dimension in the programme. Eventually, alignment between DORP, WaterAid Bangladesh and the GWA –a process that was sometimes marked by disagreements on tactics and timing– resulted in a balanced approach towards gender and inclusion issues.

## 3.2 Establishing and supporting a local CSO

**Section at a glance**

- In Bhola DORP set up a local CSO, the Water Management Citizen Committee (WMCC) which serves to ensure that excluded and marginalised communities are included in decision making processes and gain the confidence to stand up for their rights. Setting up the WMCC was a step by step process.
- Recruitment:
  - For recruitment of members DORP could build on a previously established network across Bhola.
  - These contacts suggested possible members and provided entry points to marginalised communities.
  - Special focus on gender inclusion in member-recruitment was adopted after coaching by the GWA.
- Capacity building:
  - Focus on knowledge and capacity development, consisting mostly of training and coaching sessions on topics including rights and responsibilities related to WASH and IWRM.
  - DORP also provided coaching on relations with duty bearers, including workshops on the structure of the local authorities; and how to approach them effectively and appropriately.
- Building connections with local authorities and duty bearers
  - Included facilitating meetings between local authorities and local community members.
  - Prior to such meetings DORP has trained the members of the WMCC in approaching the duty bearers and service providers.
  - The approach of 'dancing with the system' has proven most effective in furthering the interests of local communities among duty bearers.
  - Achievement of major importance is the entering of WMCC members in the standing WASH committee of the government, which means that the WMCC is now better equipped to influence decisions and secures sustainability of impact of the Watershed programme.
- Tools
  - Budget tracking approaches are important to hold duty bearers accountable and raise awareness among local communities of their rights and stimulate participation.
  - The media are also used as a tool to raise awareness among people. Additionally, media function as a mechanism to hold authorities accountable and stimulate transparency.
- In addition to the WMCC, the local NGO Network was set up, which connects local organisations, and serves to help them work together, share knowledge and speak with one united voice.

One of the key tasks and accomplishments of DORP in Bhola has been the establishment of a local structure that can represent and voice the WASH and IWRM concerns of local communities and especially of the most vulnerable people. To that end, DORP has facilitated the establishment of a small Civil Society Organisation (CSO) named the Water Management Citizen Committee (WMCC), which now has a total of 36 members. These members come from different strata of the community, including people from the most vulnerable or marginalised groups –such as nomadic people, slumdwellers, transgenders, fishermen–, people with power positions at district level, as well as people from the 'middle' – such as teachers and journalists. The goal of the WMCC is to represent all members of local communities in Bhola and provide a platform by means of which they can voice and lobby for more inclusive WASH services. The aim is to ensure that especially those people who are not usually taken into account in decision making processes gain the power and confidence to demand that their concerns are heard and rights are met. This section describes the process of setting up this CSO, the support of the WMCC in practice, its communication with the duty bearers and the involvement of the most marginalised. As the inclusion of the most marginalised is a prime focus of the Watershed programme in Bangladesh, this particular issue will be dealt with in more detail in section 3.3.

The WMCC was formed in 2017. While the annual reports of the consortium partners did include some descriptions of this process, a comprehensive account of their approaches and experiences was lacking (a gap that was, in part, attributed to the reporting format that did not allow for detailed storytelling). Through the various interviews a somewhat more detailed story can be told:

*The start: Recruiting WMCC members*

In Bhola DORP did not have to 'start from scratch'. The organisation has been present in the area for multiple years and has established a network of partners and contacts across various communities. When DORP began the process of setting up the CSO, these contacts –including, for instance, the guardian of an educational programme DORP had previously been involved with– were the first DORP employees reached out to. They were consulted about who they thought could participate in a committee on WASH issues for WMCC and would be willing to contribute to their societies. After this initial consultation, NGOs active in the area and previous partners of DORP, were asked to identify some additional community members they thought would be interested in participating. "It was all very informal", Partha Kuntal explained. "We built on the network we already had to recruit the first members for our committee."

Once a list of possible members for the committee was formulated, 10 of them were approached, 5 of whom expressed their interest and were willing to do something for their communities. In a sort of 'snow-ball method' these 5 people then recommended others, including a teacher, a journalist, a social worker and many more. Importantly, in this second step of identifying potential members for the WMCC, particular attention was paid to the inclusion of marginalised communities. The initial informants also suggested possible entry points into marginalised groups and communities– sometimes direct contacts within the groups, sometimes contacts within organisations or local authorities that could, in turn, put DORP in touch with the most marginalised groups. These marginalised groups were approached by representatives of DORP as well as by the primary WMCC members– i.e. those who joined the WMCC at the very beginning. Thanks to these discussions and by investing in really connecting with the people on the ground, DORP succeeded in building up a committee of approximately 25 people in 2 months' time. (For more details on how these meaningful connections with marginalised communities were established, see section 3.3.)

One year later, in early 2018, a second phase in building up the WMCC commenced. After being coached by the GWA on gender and inclusion, DORP became more aware of the importance (and lack) of inclusion in the existing WMCC. The membership was expanded to 31 people, including 4 new female members. The following year, in 2019, the WMCC amounted to 36 members, including 14 women. In the end, the committee was highly diverse aiming to represent all groups in the community and leave no one behind.

*Building capacity: WMCC in practice*

Bringing local community members together in one committee around the issue of WASH was quite the undertaking. The second and equally challenging step was to support them in effectively working together and lobbying for their needs and interests. This building capacity of the WMCC and, by extension, the local communities, consists of several steps. First, in the initial years DORP invested heavily in knowledge and capacity development. The organisation provided training and coaching sessions on a variety of topics, including rights, responsibilities and practices related to WASH and IWRM; (relations with) the government system; and techniques to communicate needs and demands.

For knowledge building on rights and responsibilities, DORP not only provided training verbally, but also shared national government documentation with local people. Even if they did not understand at first, that was not regarded as a problem. By exposing the committee members to such documents –discussing and revisiting them on multiple occasions and incorporating them in various training sessions– they had the opportunity to examine them and gradually become familiar with their contents. These documents mostly dealt with people's rights to WASH, IWRM and participation in decision-making processes. As it was thought of utmost importance that the members of the WMCC truly understood their rights and those of the communities they represented, DORP opted for this 'staggered approach'. Time was taken to gradually build the vital knowledge step by step, so as to ensure true and lasting understanding. Other knowledge centred sessions focused on hygiene practices, which often took the form a role-play, also including members of the wider community.

Second, and parallel to the knowledge centred sessions, DORP provided coaching on relations with duty bearers. For example, DORP organised a workshop for the members of the WMCC to brief them about the structure of the local government; how it works, who the representatives are, who the chairperson is, and how to approach them effectively and appropriately. The people in the villages did not know which person or body is responsible for the repair and maintenance of the water and sanitation facilities, both Partha Kuntal and Zobair Hasan noted. "And if they don't know to whom they should go, they will never be able to demand their rights or have influence," Hasan added. This knowledge was also strengthened by practical experience. DORP divided the WMCC in different subgroups with which they attended different meetings at the subdistrict level. This hands-on training builds practical experience and ensures that, even after the project, when DORP is not there to provide guidance and co-attend meetings, WMCC members are experienced enough to carry on their participation at district level on their own.

*Building relations and collaborating with duty bearers*
A third and related component of DORP's work to build the capacity of the WMCC is the (facilitation of) building connections with local authorities and duty bearers. This part of DORP's approach is vital, because without such connections, lobbying and advocacy and meaningfully influencing decision making is quite impossible. To establish the connections and ensure that the WMCC and local communities became familiar with the relevant government bodies (and vice versa), DORP initiated a variety of activities. Among those was the facilitation of a meeting with the department of public engineering. Local communities were invited to join and meet up with the representatives of the department and discuss how they can better support the people. In addition, DORP encouraged the WMCC to lobby for setting up more meetings with local authorities in the future, specifically in the vicinity of local communities. This way, local people have the opportunity to actually meet and talk to the service providers themselves, without having to go long distances or being away from their income-generating activities for too long.

Furthermore, DORP has trained the members of the WMCC in approaching the duty bearers and service providers. While this can be done in a very direct or confrontational manner, one can also opt for, as DORP representatives call it, 'dancing with the system' – that is, working within the existing channel and framework and have influence within the system. From the various interviews it became clear that, despite continuous efforts, service providers are still not always ready to respond and are not keen to be held accountable by the community. Yet, they have to abide by government rules and regulations, which is why, when DORP trains the WMCC members to engage with the service providers, they are advised to take such regulations as a starting point for lobbying. According to Zobair Hasan, this approach has proven to work.

Important in building relationships between duty bearers and the local community is the public commitment made by the higher government that the needs and demands of marginalised communities should be taken into account. The idea is that district-level service providers adhere to this commitment, but this is not well-communicated nor carried out in practice. And that is exactly where DORP comes in, acting as both a catalyst and bridge. One example makes clear what this means in practice: An important duty bearer at district level is the Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE), responsible for water supply and sanitation. However, the work of the DPHE is not very open to the community. The jobs carried out by employees at the department are so-called 'white collar jobs', the effects and contents of which do not reach the poorest of the poor. Signalling this gap, DORP has initiated multiple petitions, demanding from the service provider to allocate more money and time to WASH for the most vulnerable. Because of this pressure as well as the lobbying of the WMCC, this has now improved.

A very important and more recent step in the relationship with local authorities is the entering of WMCC members in the standing WASH committee of the government. Most community members in Bhola were not aware that the WASH and IWRM committees were open to their input and active participation. DORP informed the CSO members of this entry point and opportunity. After having built

up confidence through DORP's coaching –through experiencing and participating in constructive discussions within the WMCC– and practicing dialogue in several meetings with duty bearers and service providers, several WMCC members pushed to become member of the standing committee. By 'dancing with the system' –and actually becoming member of a government structure– the WMCC is now better equipped to influence decisions. Importantly, this inclusion in government structures also secures sustainability of impact of the Watershed programme. Members of the WMCC have built and are still fortifying their own relations with local government representatives and service providers. When the Watershed programme comes to an end, these relationships will continue. Moreover, as Ranjan Kumar Ghose underlined, some members of the WMCC even started taking part in national level discussions. An important example in this regard is the CSO's participation in the national consultation on the revision of Pro-Poor Strategy for Water Supply and Sanitation.

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*Box 2. Budget tracking*

One of the methods DORP is using to include community members in decision-making processes and, at the same time, hold duty bearers accountable, is so-called budget tracking. During his interview, Partha Kurtal explained this approach in more detail. Budget tracking has 4 approaches: 1) budget monitoring by means of specific tools to collect information; 2) campaign and promotion, which consisted, for instance, of awareness raising in remote communities through loudspeaker campaigns, banners and signboards; 3) service monitoring, during which questions are asked like: How is the WASH budget spent? Who is providing the services and is the service up to standard?; and 4) lobby and advocacy, which started by ensuring that people know which authorities or institutions they can communicate their demands to.

For this budget tracking approach to be effective, DORP needed the participation of both local communities and of the service providers. However, Partha Kurtal pointed out that "service providers are not keen on opening their budgets." As they are obliged by law to do so, DORP has found that, in the end, local service providers were quite cooperative. "Although they would not open up their books by their own accord, they do agree because it is the right of the people."

Initially, getting the local communities and even the members of the WMCC to actively participate in budget tracking posed somewhat of a challenge. Lack of confidence and respect for authorities seemed to play a role here. "Just as was the case with other forms of lobby and advocacy, the members of the WMCC are somewhat apprehensive to actively seek insight into the budget information", Partha Kurtal explains. "However, the government has made a commitment to allow participation from people from all social strata. After we made the members of the WMCC aware of this commitment, it was easier for them to get engaged. [...] They now realised 'we have the right to information' and 'we have the right to participate and comment'."

In addition to a lack of knowledge of rights and duties, thorough understanding of budgeting, of budget allocation for WASH, and of budget tracking approaches was also absent. However, Kurtal noted "although the local communities may not be knowledgeable on budget tracking approaches, they do generally know what budget is." DORP built on this foundation to coach the members of the WMCC on budget tracking. "Only the most marginalised, without any education, did not have [...] the basic understanding of budget allocation." To ensure that they could catch up and be included in the process, they were coached separately. "Ensuring that local communities have insight into how and to what priority areas budgets are allocated is very important", Partha Kurtal concludes. "It is very relevant and helps them in lobby and advocacy and keeping duty bearers accountable."

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A final and joint approach of DORP and WaterAid Bangladesh to bridge the gap between local communities and authorities is the use of television and other media. Representatives of both organisations would, for example, participate in a broadcasted talk show, where they would enter into discussion with relevant policy makers. Zobair Hasan, appearing on TV as the representative of DORP, would speak on behalf of the local communities in Bhola. Recently, talking about the effects of COVID19, this was also the case. Hasan stressed the importance of washing hands and argued that the government should allocate more funds to hygiene in poor areas. By engaging with policy makers in such a public forum, DORP and WaterAid Bangladesh show to the viewers that policy makers are open to dialogue and asking them critical questions is possible, acceptable, and necessary. The media, in this way, serves as a tool to raise awareness among people. Additionally, and no less important, media –

and especially TV performances in which policy makers are invited– function as a mechanism to hold authorities accountable and ensure that they are transparent.

*The NGO Network*

At the beginning, in 2017, the idea was for DORP to set up the WMCC, a citizens committee which would provide individuals a platform. Yet, jointly, implementing partners WaterAid Bangladesh and DORP also recognised that several NGOs already existed in the area that would benefit from and would be stronger through coordinated collaboration. To that end, in addition to the WMCC, DORP has set up the NGO Network, which seeks to connect registered organisations –i.e. recognised by the local government authorities– and help them work together and speak with one united voice. Although many of these organisations already know the local authorities and know how to influence them, together they have greater impact. Within the framework of the NGO Network, local organisations can exchange their knowledge, experiences and learn from one another. DORP has brought the local NGOs together to join in multiple coaching sessions on various subjects, so that they all have the same knowledge foundation. Some NGOs may have more knowledge or experience on particular issues – like gender equality– and in these coaching sessions DORP encourages them to share this with their peers as well.

## 3.3 Building capacity of the most marginalised

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**Section at a glance**

- Getting marginalised communities involved in the WMCC was a major challenge for several reasons:
  - marginalised people in rural areas are often, and at first, interested in the cash or material benefits a project can deliver, which was not the aim of the Watershed programme.
  - participation in the WMCC costs time and, hence, income; something these people cannot spare.
  - marginalised people often lack the confidence
- Getting the most marginalised on board relied on building trust by: 1) constant and direct communication with local communities; 2) showing impact of DORP and communicating the achievements of the WMCC; and 3) building on the positive reputation DORP had already built among local communities.
- Raising awareness among poor communities about their rights and the responsibilities of local government bodies regarding WASH and IWRM services was another key element to get people involved.
- The story of Kohinoor Begum shows how inclusion and participation result in a real and meaningful transformation of marginalised people. Key elements are: 1) being recognised and respected as a (wo)man of a marginalised community; 2) being actively encouraged to speak up in contexts one is normally excluded from; 3) experiencing that needs and demands of the marginalised community are not only heard but also actively addressed; 4) experiencing recognition as a valuable person in one's own community.
- Coaching and training were a vital component in the programme to build capacity, also among the most marginalised and least educated. Training sessions were repeated on various occasions, so that all members, also newer members, would be informed and knowledge was secured.
- To build confidence of the most marginalised, knowledge focused sessions start with identifying and valuing the knowledge they already possess. Thereafter, this knowledge base is supplemented with additional information.
- Representatives of the GWA trained employees of DORP on women empowerment and gender inclusion, which they could internalise and repeat over time for the WMCC and local communities.
- Inclusion of excluded and stigmatised groups like transgenders demands a careful approach. Facilitating dialogue and raising awareness of overlapping interests was the main task for DORP.

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From the very beginning, the WMCC was set up to represent the interest of all communities in Bhola, especially of those who are usually less behind. Therefore, getting the most marginalised involved in the committee was a prime focus of the implementing partners. This was a challenge, however, because of various reasons. For one thing, the marginalised people in rural areas are often, and at first, interested in the cash or material benefits a project can deliver. In addition, participation in any activity that costs time, in effect also costs income. If benefits of a programme are not immediately clear, why then, would people who are already barely getting by make an investment. Finally, there is an obstacle of confidence. Rural, often uneducated people have no knowledge of issues like government structures, lobby and advocacy, IWRM, WASH, budgeting, and so on. Unsurprisingly, joining a meeting in which these issues are talked about is quite daunting.

*Getting the most marginalised on board*
To convince people to join an initiative that is only just starting up is hard enough in itself; but to convince people who are barely able to make a living with the time and resources available to them, is even more difficult. Yet, this was exactly the task DORP-employees were facing when they sought to get representatives of the most marginalised communities engaged in the WMCC. This demands patience, cultural sensitivity and perseverance on the part of DORP, as well as trust in DORP's intentions and abilities among the local communities DORP approached. This trust was built in three ways: 1) Constant and direct communication with the local communities; 2) Showing impact of DORP and communicating the achievements of the WMCC, so that local people see that they *can* voice their concerns and are respected, which builds hope and trust; 3) Finally, because of its longstanding presence in the Bhola region, DORP had already built a positive reputation among local communities.

"We are already known for delivering impact", Partha Kuntal explained. "Over the years we have already built some trust among the communities."

How the gradual process of convincing marginalised people to join the WMCC works is exemplified by the story of Kohinoor Begum in box 3. What becomes clear is that one important question and obstacle for local community members to participate in the WMCC is the fact that they would miss out on their daily income. They have to consider what benefit they would get out of their participation. To convince them to join in, representatives of DORP, WaterAid Bangladesh and the GWA, went to great lengths to raise awareness among poor communities about their rights and the responsibilities of local government bodies regarding WASH and IWRM services. If the local communities do not speak up about their needs and concerns, and hold these local institutions accountable, then the necessary services will not be delivered. As Zobair Hasan explained, "we often point out that local communities often say that 'the government is not listening to us'. Then we tell them that through the WMCC at least there is a channel to reach the local government more directly. Through this CSO [we explain to them] it is possible to say to the local government 'according to the budget you are supposed to deliver a certain service, but you are not'. Only by organising ourselves will we be able to effectively hold the local government accountable. When we repeat this message often enough, local communities start to see that their participation is a way to help themselves."

> ### Box 3. A story of inclusion and transformation
>
> One of the most inspiring stories of impact and transformation of the Watershed Bangladesh programme, is the story of Kohinoor Begum, member of the Displaced fisherfolk living in Bhola, known as the Bede community. Although Kohinoor is featured in a short article and accompanying video produced by Watershed, how exactly the implementing partners convinced her and her community to join the WMCC and supported her in becoming the powerful and vocal member of the WMCC she is today, is not explained. Based on an interview with Kohinoor herself as well as on the interviews with the representatives of DORP, Kohinoor's story can be shared in more detail.
>
> "After we formed the WMCC we searched for representatives of communities that were left behind", Partha Kuntal explained. "Visiting the area of Bhola, our colleagues and contacts on the ground came to know that 20 families were living on boats nearby the canals." This community, known as the Bede community, is among the most vulnerable and poor communities in Bhola, and in Bangladesh at large. The community has no access to WASH facilities and hygiene is lacking. As they have no land, as this is taking away by the rising water, and usually no national identity. Because of this statelessness, they are left out of any official census and are not included in any gatherings or meetings organised by bodies with official standing. DORP representatives travelled to the area where the Bede community was living and organised a public gathering where information was shared about the WMCC and its purpose. "We asked them to join", said Partha Kuntal, "but the first response was negative". The members of the Bede community were convinced that they would not be accepted by the other WMCC members, that they did not have any knowledge, and that they would certainly be laughed at. At this moment, the DORP representatives did not push but left their contact details and asked the attending community members to think about their proposal, hoping that at least one representative of the community would join.
>
> After 3 weeks new contact was established. The community members had discussed among themselves and seemed open to the idea of joining the WMCC, but they were not sure who would be able to participate. Joining the WMCC would mean being away from activities like fishing or other work that provides vital income. One week later a member of the WMCC together with DORP representatives went back to the community to explain in more detail how the involvement in the WMCC works. They explained that involvement does not take all day –participation in the WMCC includes attending meetings of approximately 2 hours every so often. They also explained that by participating in the WMCC the Bede would have access to structures they did not have access to before and would not soon have because of their lack of ID.

Finally, the DORP representatives emphasized that, if they would be willing to come and have a look at a meeting of the WMCC, they would not be bound to anything. "We told them that we hoped that they would join, so we could learn from them but also support them. We stressed that we would be better equipped to support them if they would express their needs directly in the WMCC."

Finally, after many hours of conversation, the members of the Bede community agreed that they would send a representative to the next WMCC meeting. "We had no idea yet who would join, but for the next coaching session, indeed, someone from the Bede community showed up." The community had sent Kohinoor Begum, one of the few community members who was able to free up some time. Kohinoor herself felt very shy and apprehensive. "Initially, I took my husband", Kohinoor remembers. It was only later that she became an official member of the WMCC. "She told us that although her community asked her to join, she felt very insecure and did not think she could speak in front of people." In fact, during the first coaching session, when people had acknowledged her presence and encouraged her to speak, Kohinoor only felt comfortable enough to share her name. She joined some meetings and listened, undoubtedly and important step, but she did not actively participate. "First few meetings I talked very little", Kohinoor confirms, "but I started speaking more over time." To begin speaking up, sharing her doubts with the people from DORP and the WMCC was an important beginning. "Then we talked to her separately", said Partha Kuntal. "[We told her:] 'You do not need to feel shy. They are your brothers and sisters. They are more like you than you might think and they also encouraged you to speak up, so perhaps you should give it a try'." The safe and encouraging atmosphere was of great help for Kohinoor. "No one made me feel excluded", she explains. "Instead, DORP staff, the chairman and the committee members supported me and listened to what I had to say."



Kohinoor Begum
CSO member
*Water Management Citizen Committee (WMCC)*

It may have taken some time to build Kohinoor's confidence, but the change in her is remarkable. An important reason for her transformation, as Kohinoor herself explains, is being recognised and respected as a woman of a marginalised community. And not just for Kohinoor herself: "There are other women participating [in the WMCC], from the fishing Shambaadi communities who are treated with the same respect. We are being treated as full members of society, as one." Additionally, her transformation was further spurred by the fact that Kohinoor felt she and her community were really seen: "Everyone said 'these people are from boats and they do not have any services, so let us prioritise them first." When first she joined the WMCC, the Bede community did not have a tube well (a manually operated well that can lift water from about 30 metres beneath the ground) or a toilet. Kohinoor raised the issue in the committee and was assisted by DORP to formulate the necessary written documentation. "My demand was accepted", said Kohinoor, "and now we have a tube well for our community people through the help of WMCC and DORP." Of course, the construction of the well is of great importance in itself, but it also resulted in the recognition of Kohinoor in her own community: "Everyone in my […] community praised my work. They said: 'it's been many years and no one could influence the chairman [of the local government] to get us a water point [but] Kohinoor could do it.' So, I was very happy when it happened."

*Coaching and training*

As explained in section 3.2, members of the WMCC received various training and coaching sessions by DORP as well as by other partners, including the GWA, WaterAid Bangladesh, Wetlands, the IRC, and AKVO. During the training provided by DORP –which was most of the sessions– the session would be held in Bangla, so that all members of the WMCC could understand. However, when other partners came to coach the WMCC directly, language proved a challenge. For the purpose of inclusion –that is, ensure that all members of the WMCC could understand what was being said– these sessions took place with a translator. While this made them time-consuming, they were nonetheless effective. Moreover, people from DORP, having received the training by their partners as well, would repeat the training sessions –or at least, the messages conveyed in this sessions– on various occasions for the WMCC, so that all members, also newer members, would be informed and knowledge was secured.

Importantly, the training and coaching sessions do not only involve 'sending' knowledge on the part of the organisation that gives the training. The organisations each have different modes of working, but a participatory component –i.e. actively engaging all members of the WMCC– is always part of the training. One session could, for instance, focus on gender discrimination issues. The marginalised women present at the training know from experience what gender discrimination means to them. In a session that deals with this issue, they are explicitly invited to participate in the discussion and share these experiences– something they had not previously been given the platform for. Marginalised people are also engaged and included in other ways. As Ranjan Kumar Ghose explained for instance, training sessions often include a lot of 'asking questions' on the part of the trainer. "With IRC I facilitated a session on monitoring on WASH service delivery", said Kumar Ghose. "We started by asking a lot of questions about what the community members already know. We use this knowledge as a basis to build upon." Thus, rather than bombarding members of the WMCC with only new information, their knowledge is first brought to the surface and recognised as valuable. Thus, they become aware of the knowledge they already possess, their confidence is built. Thereafter, this knowledge base is supplemented with additional information. As Ranjan Kumar Ghose notes "Maybe they do not know or use the right jargon, but in practice it often turns out that, together, local community members already have a lot of knowledge."

This method of identifying and recognising existing knowledge is key to tackle the major obstacle of 'lack of confidence' that prevents many marginalised people from actively participating in meetings and discussions. These groups have not been listened to or taken seriously for so long, that they themselves have also become convinced of their inability to make meaningful contributions. Another method, as explained in more detail in box 3, is actively inviting people to speak out. "First, we get people to join the meetings and let them listen", Ranjan Kumar Ghose explains. "Then, after a few times, we ask them 'Why are you only listening?' and invite them to speak up." To help the less vocal members to speak up, they are told –multiple times if need be– that it is okay not to know some things, that there is no such thing as saying the wrong thing, and it is okay to ask questions. In short, DORP, WaterAid Bangladesh and other organisations who facilitate discussions or training sessions, actively and deliberately invest in confidence building. "In this way we are not only showing the people who are quiet 'you have value and your input is important'; we are showing all other members inclusion in practice, encouraging them to do the same." The chairperson of the WMCC, a very talkative and well-respected man, proves that this approach has worked. See box 4 for more details.

As the Watershed programme is focusing on the rather abstract issues of capacity building and lobby and advocacy, DORP struggled to make the training session accessible and comprehensible to the local community members. Even if the participants would speak English, the subject matter was difficult to explain. To ensure that participants would understand the conveyed messages, not forget them, and internalise the acquired skills and knowledge, the organisation dealt with the same topics and skills again and again. Importantly, after multiple sessions of simply explaining, DORP realised this approach was not working. "Then we started to work with practical examples. We invited the local government duty bearers so that they could explain their jobs to the excluded groups. This helped a lot to make clear some key concepts: what is a duty bearer? what is a right holder? who should we approach?" Once practical examples were included, DORP employees saw that understanding grew.

"It takes repetition, examples and slow building up of experience to really make people understand what lobby and advocacy is and why it is so important."

*A special word on women and gender inclusion*

In Bangladesh, and especially in rural areas like Bhola, women are still among the most marginalised members of the population. Their inclusion, and gender equality in general, is one of the key focus points of the Watershed programme. "In our country women are usually responsible for household management", Zobair Hasan explained. "This means that, when it comes to participation, they are not recognised or welcomed by local authorities." Through their training sessions and supported by the GWA, DORP and WaterAid Bangladesh have tried to make changes in this system. Through our process we also change the system.

While from the start of the implementation phase, inclusion of the marginalised communities was among the key priorities for DORP, women inclusion and empowerment were lagging behind. Both Simavi and the GWA played an important role in ensuring more attention for meaningful gender inclusion. "They made us aware", Zobair Hasan noted, "that presence of women in the WMCC is not enough." Women cannot be said to fully participate if they do not speak up. "Especially the GWA emphasized that we should make greater efforts to actively engage the women." After multiple conversations with and training by the GWA, DORP recognised that the WMCC would be stronger in its lobby efforts by meaningfully including women. "To help and advise DORP, the GWA went to the field to collect information on women inclusion, on how the gender system works in Bhola", Hasan remembered. Representatives of the GWA then educated employees of DORP on women empowerment and gender inclusion. Their role was to build this part of DORP's capacity, knowledge and skills.

Evidence suggests that not only the WMCC, but also local government bodies are becoming more open to women and the idea of women inclusion. One female member of the WMCC, for example, had never had access to local authorities. They did not invite women, let alone marginalised women from the nomadic community, to participate in any discussion. However, when she became a member of the WMCC she gradually gained more confidence to speak up and learned whom to approach for WASH issues. As a member of the WMCC she was also present at gatherings, facilitated by DORP, where local authorities and the WMCC met. Thus, in this meeting, this marginalised woman was effectively brought together with the local authorities. In their exchange during the meeting, both parties recognised that communication is possible. By promoting women inclusion and participation in such meetings, women are enabled to voice their concerns and experience they are allowed to speak up; and local authorities, in turn, come to know that the local, marginalised women have valuable contributions to make.

Although inclusion and empowerment of women was key priority in the gender agenda of the Watershed programme, gender inclusion in general is important too. In the Bhola region transgenders form a particularly marginalised group who are very excluded and stigmatised. To include this group in the WMCC was a dual challenge. On one hand, the transgender community was initially not willing to participate, afraid that they would not be accepted. On the other hand, the members of the WMCC were reluctant to open up to the transgender representatives. In the first two years of the WMCC, consequently, the transgenders were not included. It took some time to prepare all parties for this step and DORP made great efforts to change the situation. "We opened the discussion and sought to convince both parties [the transgender community and the WMCC] of the importance of this inclusion", Zobair Hasan explained, "and of our overlapping interests." DORP argued for open communication and sought to convince the transgenders and the members of the WMCC to talk to one another so as to better understand each other's needs. "We started this process with 1-to-1 discussions and then, when some level of trust was built, we invited representatives of the transgender community to join a meeting of the WMCC. Now, one of them has become a member and the transgender community's needs can be represented in the WMCC."

# 4) Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter summarises and synthesises the key learnings of the foregoing chapter. Additionally, some additional examples and key take-aways from the interviewees, that had no logical place in chapter 3 are included. The first section will focus on obstacles and challenges encountered in the implementation and approaches of the Watershed programme in Bangladesh. The second section will shed light on those approaches that were seen as particularly effective. Finally, the third section will briefly discuss the matter of sustainability of impact and the future after the Watershed programme has come to an end.

## 4.1 Obstacles and challenges

- **Consistent support and building durable relationships** between different organisations active in the Watershed Bangladesh work package was, at times, hampered by a quick turnover of staff.
- **The interplay between power dynamics, confidence and culture** formed an important barrier in effective communication and collaboration.
- **Cultural conventions** may prevent implementing partners in Bangladesh to take a leading role and argue their points effectively within the consortium.
- **Western style of reporting and dialogue** does not necessarily match with Bangladeshi conventions, which can make open and equal communication and mutual understanding difficult.
- **Convincing marginalised communities to participate** in the WMCC was a challenge for several reasons including:
  - marginalised people in rural areas are often, and at first, interested in the cash or material benefits a project can deliver, which was not the aim of the Watershed programme.
  - participation in the WMCC costs time and, hence, income; something they cannot afford.
  - marginalised people often lack the confidence to participate, convinced that they do not have sufficient knowledge or skills and/or will be laughed at.
- **Integration of all the different stakeholders is difficult**. The people who are providing services in the rural areas carry out their activities in line with the plan and policy of government. There is, however, no ministry dedicated specifically to WASH services, which means that plans and policies are fragmented. This results in a lack of clarity on who to approach, what to expect and what exactly to lobby for.
- **Language also proved a challenged** on multiple occasions. Not simply language in the literal sense, but also in terms of (political) jargon. It took the implementing partners some time to become aware of this hurdle.
- **Capacity building and lobbying and advocacy are abstract concepts**, which meant that initially the implementing partners struggled to make the training session accessible and comprehensible to local community members.
- **There is no exit-strategy in place with DORP**. Questions that have not been addressed thus far are: When would we be happy with leaving the area? What support is still needed to work towards and facilitate an exit of our and, especially, DORP's assistance while not jeopardizing made progress?
- **There is no plan for scaling-up.** What would be the criteria or the timeframe to move towards upscaling of our approach?

## 4.2 What worked

- **The process of identifying the most marginalised in the region** was a particularly successful element of this programme. Rather than deciding beforehand who the most marginalised were, DORP went into the field to determine what people are in practice excluded from WASH services. Their findings were then used to target those people who most needed. This approach proved highly successful as it showed that who the most marginalised are, is highly context-specific and

cannot be determined without local study. It has most certainly contributed to better results in terms of local participation.

- **Lowering the threshold for marginalised communities** to join the WMCC was successfully achieved in various ways:
  - **Group meetings were organised in their area**, so local community members did not need to travel, saving time and effort;
  - When visiting local communities for 'recruitment' **DORP brought along members of the WMCC**, who were also often representing a marginalised community;
  - Members were asked to join a meeting and just listen, **without any strings attached**
  - DORP employees approached communities with **great patience and cultural sensitivity**; they avoided pushing but reached out to communities several times over a longer period of time.
- **Impact builds trusts, which leads to more participation**. When representatives of the local community became engaged in the WMCC, after six months they saw that the local government started to respond. Once impact became visible, a snow-ball effect occurred. At the beginning the WMCC had only 15 members, but more people joined once they witnessed the committee's impact. Now people are asking to join without active recruitment.
- **Successfully setting up an *inclusive* local CSO work thanks to various factors and approaches**:
  - **Using pre-established local networks:** For recruitment of members of the WMCC DORP could build on a previously established network across Bhola. Contacts suggested possible members and provided entry points to marginalised communities.
  - **Special focus on gender inclusion** in member-recruitment was adopted. Not only does this make the CSO more inclusive, it also yields stronger organisations that better represent the interests of local communities.
  - **Context-sensitive and patient approach to inclusion of excluded and stigmatised groups**, like transgender communities. Their inclusion succeeded because of facilitation of dialogue and building mutual trust and understanding over time.

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*Box 4. A success story of inclusion*

"This may not be the most impressive story in terms of a transformation from 'excluded and shy' to 'included and participating', but for me this story of transformation is most inspiring." Zobair Hasan refers to the story of the chairperson of the WMCC. This 83-year old man has been representing his community in the WMCC from the very beginning. He is respected by a wide variety of people, from various communities and social strata. In the first months of the WMCC, this senior citizen took a leading position in the first discussions and lobby and advocacy activities. "Thanks to his involvement, a lot of obstacles have been removed. And he never failed to show up." According to Hasan, over the last 4 years, the WMCC's chairperson has attended every meeting, even in the rainy seasons. "He would travel on his motorcycle to all the office and a lot of representatives of excluded communities have gained confidence because of this man. Once they found that this elderly person, whom they respect and whose spirit is a true example, is also involved in the WMCC, they began to trust that their rights and concerns might be adequately defended by the committee."

At first however, the chairperson was one of the few who spoke, and spoke a lot. Other participants remained mostly quiet and listened. Through the encouragement and, at times strong interference, of representatives of DORP, WaterAid and the GWA, the chairperson has gone through a real transformation. Following the example of the trainers and recognising, because of the coaching sessions, that equal participation improves the position of the WMCC, he now actively points to others in the committee. "He is now asking 'So, mister fisherman, or so, Kohinoor… do you have something to say as well?'"

- **Capacity building of the local CSO was divided in various components**:
  - **Focus on knowledge and capacity development**, consisting mostly of training and coaching sessions on topics including rights and responsibilities related to WASH and IWRM.
  - **Coaching on relations with duty bearers**, including workshops on the structure of the local authorities; and how to approach them effectively and appropriately.
- **Building connections with local authorities and duty bearers** improves impact, efficiency and sustainability of the local CSO. This can be achieved by:
  - **Facilitating meetings** between local authorities and local community members.
  - **Training members of the local CSO** on how to approach duty bearers and service providers.
  - **Dancing with the system** has proven most effective in furthering the interests of local communities among duty bearers.
- **Helpful tools for (local) CSOs to build capacity in an inclusive fashion** and influence duty bearers and hold them accountable include:
  - **Budget tracking approaches** to hold duty bearers accountable and raise awareness among local communities of their rights and stimulate participation.
  - **Media appearances** (like participating in talk-shows) to raise awareness among people and, at the same time, hold authorities accountable and stimulate transparency.
  - **Coaching and training sessions** that are repeated on various occasions, so that all members, also newer and/or less educated members, are informed and knowledge is secured
  - **Knowledge focused sessions that build on knowledge already present among local communities.** This builds confidence and fosters sustainable impact. The already present knowledge base can be supplemented with additional information.
- **Building relationships of trust with marginalised communities and groups** is vital to include them in local decision-making processes in a meaningful way (i.e. not just presence but active participation). This was achieved by:
  - **Constant and direct communication with local communities**;
  - **Showcasing positive impact** and achievements to the communities;
  - **Building on previously established positive reputation**;
  - **Raising awareness among poor communities** about their rights and the responsibilities, showing that someone cares about their position and exclusion
- **Achieving inclusion and participation marginalised people** can yield meaningful transformation. For local community members this consists of various key elements:
  - **Being recognised and respected** as a (wo)man of a marginalised community;
  - **Being actively encouraged to speak up** in contexts one is normally excluded from;
  - **Experiencing that needs and demands of the marginalised community are not only heard but also actively addressed**;
  - Experiencing recognition as a valuable person in one's own community.

## 4.3 Sustainability of impact and the way forward

The Watershed programme in Bangladesh is soon coming to an end. There are some clear signs that the Watershed programme in Bangladesh will have a lasting impact but lessons for future programmes can also be drawn from the experiences shared by the interviewees. Key take-aways and questions to consider include:

- **The transformation in confidence and mindset is likely to be sustainable.** The transformation that is now visible in various community members and communities at large in Bhola is expected to last. People like Kohinoor Begum will continue their work and will not return to their timid and shy self.
- **Strategies for upscaling and exit-strategies are lacking**. This is cause for worry as the end of the programme is approaching.
- **Critically assessing the aspect of culture and communication is key for future programmes,** both in Bangladesh and, more generally, for programmes where so-called 'Northern' and 'Southern' organisations will be collaborating as equal partners. In the Watershed programme in Bangladesh

it became clear that, when it comes to communication, conventions in Bangladesh are very different from those in the West (in this case the Netherlands). This tension warrants reflection on the part of all consortium partners. The so-called SMART way of reporting and talking that is conventional in the western context does not match with cultural conventions in Bangladesh. If the intention is to work as equal partners and put the implementing parties in the lead as much as possible, one could question whether it is a logical step to impose the western way of reporting and collaborating on all parties involved in the project. Western partners should question whether it should be their mission to 'change' the way of communicating and reporting of non-Western partners. If the idea is to reduce inequalities, then a middle ground should be sought rather than imposing the model of one of the parties.

- **Members of the WMCC are now integrated in government structures.** This is an achievement of major importance. By entering the standing WASH committee of the government, the WMCC is now better equipped to influence decisions 'from the inside' and build lasting relationships with government representatives that are not dependent on the Watershed programme. This secures sustainability of impact.

## Annex

### A) Interview questions Interview round 1.

*Note: The following interview questions were prepared for Partha S. Kuntal, representative of DORP. Questions for other interviewees were similar but adjusted to their respective positions and roles. Additionally, interviewees were given much freedom in leading the conversation or focusing on those topics they found particularly interesting/important. Some questions were therefore not addressed, while in the conversation others were added and answered.*

1) Could you begin by briefly describing me your role in DORP?
2) How did DORP become involved in the Watershed programme?
3) The main aim of "Watershed-Empowering Citizens" is to strengthen the capacity of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to advocate and lobby for more inclusive and equitable IWRM and WASH. Could you describe what the specific role of DORP is in achieving these broad goals?
4) DORP is carrying out a number of activities in Bhola. We will look more closely at those activities later on, but for now I'd like to focus on the process that has resulted in the design of these activities. Could you describe this process to me? (e.g. who is involved? who decides? is the local community consulted? are the most marginalised included in the design process etc.)
5) When you reflect on the design- and decision-making process of activities; have things changed over the years that you've been working on the Watershed programme? Has the process been amended? Did more people become involved? And, if so, what led to this change? (new insights, more people interested etc.)
6) Do you think people in Bhola, the communities you are targeting, feel involved in the design- and decision-making process underpinning the Watershed programme?
   - if yes: what has DORP done to ensure their involvement/engagement?
   - if not: what is lacking? how could such involvement/engagement be achieved in future?
   - do you think the most marginalised members of the community feel equally involved?
7) The goal of this project is focused on capacity building, empowerment, lobby and advocacy. What are the most important activities DORP is carrying out to achieve those goals?
8) How many people are actually carrying out the programme activities on the ground for DORP? And are they paid employees, volunteers or both?
9) Could you describe to me a typical day for one of the DORP employees? What do they do?
10) When it comes to capacity building, trust and accountability are of course key. How do DORP employees/volunteers realise this trust among community members? How do they establish relationships?
11) In your own view, what activities have most impact? These do not necessarily have to be activities that have the most impact according to outcome harvesting. Some impacts cannot be measured or are less explicit.
12) Through outcome harvesting a lot has become clear about what programme components are effective. However, it has proven more difficult to determine what community members in Bhola have experienced as most helpful. From your experience and interactions with the people, can you tell me what they feel has been most helpful? Or have they given voice to any criticism?
13) What story stuck with you most from the project? Is there a particular event, person or activity you find particularly inspiring?
14) Looking back at the process of this project, what do you think were the most important challenges to make progress and impact?
15) Do you have any additional comments or recommendations? Thinks I've forgotten to ask? Recommendations for others to approach?

1) Can you describe in detail how you came to be a member of the Water Management Citizen Committee (WMCC)?

*I was not aware about WMCC before. Then Tarun da from DORP visited our place, introduced use with the committee, and make phone calls before the meeting. This is how I joined, became a member and started attending WMCC meetings. Initially, I used to take my husband and later he also became a member of the committee. First few meetings, I talked very less and started speaking more over time. No one made me feel excluded instead DORP staff, Chairman and committee members supported me and listened to what I had to say. Also, everyone said that these people are from boats who do not have services, so let us prioritise them first.*

2) Representatives of DORP told us how you have transformed from the moment you started at the WMCC to the woman you are now: from very shy and not daring to speak up, to a vocal member of the committee.
- Do you also see this transformation in yourself?
- What do you think happened to realise this change? Are there particular things DORP or your fellow WMCC members did or said that helped?

*Over time, my demands are being recognised and my respect both in committee and surroundings have increased. There are other women participation from fishing, shambaadi communities who also get similar respect as mine. We are being treated as part of society, as one. I used to be upset that we had to drink dirty river water. My children, husband and I used to suffer from diarrhoea, vomiting/nausea or stomach problem. We went to doctors, took medicines and same thing would occur in every 3 months or so.*
*Later, when we received a tube well from Chairman after submitting a petition in WMCC meetings through the help of DORP. As we can use safe water from tube well both for drinking and cooking, we have less stomach related diseases.*
*Besides, it is more comforting to collect water with other women together in the community. Previously, we sometimes could collect safe water from tube well near Mosque, which is far, men would be around, and women had to wait in queue to get the water. Now it is much easier and nice that we have our own tube well. This is how our lives have transformed.*

3) What, for you, is the most important added value of DORP and the WMCC? Are they making a difference to you and your community? If so, in what way?

*When I raised the demand of a tube well and toilet, the Chairman asked for a written application. DORP helped us in writing it, I signed and submitted from the WMCC. My demand was accepted and now we have a tube well for our community people through the help of WMCC and DORP.*

4) What has been the most important or valuable moment in your time as a member of the WMCC?

*The most significant moment in my time as WMCC member was when my demand was accepted, and we received the tube well from the Chairman. Everyone in my floating community (landless) and community people living in land praised my work. They said "it's been many years and no one could influence the chairman to get us a water point near embankment. Kohinoor could do it." So, I*

*was very happy when it happened. We are about to get a toilet also from chairman, but due to corona, it got delayed. However, I am happy that around 50-60 families near embankment can freely use this tube well water along with our community that includes 50 families.*

5) Finally, if there is one piece of advice you could give to the people of DORP about their work and approaches what would it be? How do you think they could have even more positive impact for you and your community?

*There is no advice or suggestion from my side. We do not have land, so we demand if DORP could provide us with land, house, education for children and we could live in plane land.*