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**SOUTH ASIA HYGIENE PRACTITIONERS' WORKSHOP**

**The Role of Imams and different Institution in Hygiene  
Promotion of BRAC WASH Programme**

*Dr. Babar Kabir, Sharmin Farhat Ubaid, Mahjabeen Ahmed,  
Mahidul Islam, Mizanur Rahman and Md. Hasan Ali Mia*

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*The BRAC WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) programme aims to reach 37 million people with hygiene education and promotion. This paper describes three community-based aspects of hygiene education. The first involves cooperation with Imams and the Masjid Council for Community Advancement, so that 12 Khutba (sermons) are delivered over time in the mosque on hygiene, sanitation and the position of women. The second strategy for provision of hygiene/sanitation education is school hygiene promotion including construction, school brigades (health clubs), training, school committees. The third strategy described in the paper promotes improved hygiene practices through folk media. This is carried out by the theatre groups in BRAC's own Social Development Department as well as local folk media groups in the areas where the WASH programme is active.*

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**Introduction**

To assist the Government of Bangladesh in achieving the MDG on water and sanitation, BRAC has started a WASH program, building on its long experience in providing water-sanitation services in the community. It is the largest integrated approach in Bangladesh that aims to deliver a package involving hygiene education and promotion, safe water facilities and sanitary latrines (BRAC 2008). The program aims to ensure access to sanitation services for 17.5 million people, hygiene education for 37.5 million people and safe water services for 8.5 million people in 150 sub-districts of Bangladesh. The goal of the program is to provide sustainable and integrated WASH services in the rural areas of 150 sub-districts, induce safe hygienic behavior to break the contamination cycle of unsanitary latrines, contaminated water, and unsafe hygienic behavior and ensure sustainability and scaling-up of WASH services. The WASH program has taken a holistic approach to attain its objective. The program has targeted people from households, different institutions, community, administration, corporate sectors and local government institutions along with media and communication for its success. The program is motivating and assisting the community to provide access to safe drinking water through installation of tube well and piped water supply along with providing loan support or grant support to the poor for construction of sanitary latrines. In order to reduce disproportionately high dropout rates among adolescent girls, the program along with the school authority is providing separate latrines for girls with water sources and dumping facilities for menstrual hygiene in secondary schools. Since, better water and sanitation infrastructures does not necessarily improve health, hygiene promotion activities plays an important role in promoting healthy behaviors. So, the BRAC WASH Programme has taken a number of approaches for hygiene promotion activities.

## **Background**

Good hygiene is an aid to good health, comfort and social interactions. It directly helps in disease prevention. Hardware by itself cannot improve very much, what a matter is the way it is used, and the ways in which it may promote changes in hygiene-related behavior.

A study in Bangladesh showed that the simple practice of hand washing with soap after defecation is sufficient to reduce the secondary attack rates<sup>1</sup> if dysentery within participating families by 85 percent (Khan 1982 / Ahmed et.al 2006) 12 hand washing interventions in 9 countries achieved a median reduction in diarrhea incidence of 35% (Hill et. al 2001/WASH Baseline Findings 2008), A recent review of the evidence found that 12 hand washing interventions in 9 countries achieved a median reduction in diarrhea incidence of 35% (Hill, Kirkwood and Edmond,2001). Realizing this, BRAC initiated a WASH Programme in a holistic approach, i.e. integrating safe water, sanitation and hygiene. The programme mainly focuses on breaking the contamination cycle by inducing behavioral change for individuals, households, and the entire community. Hygiene promotion is the backbone of the entire programme (BRAC, 2005). Programmes that do not ensure promotion of hygienic practices are usually not sustained. In this programme, both promotional and educational approaches are being used.

Hygiene promotion includes strategies that encourages or facilitate a process whereby community members assess, make considered choices, demand, effect, and sustain hygienic and healthy behaviors. To promote hygiene messages, BRAC WASH has developed strategies based on people's socio-economic and geo-hydrological condition, culture and existing practices.

The community is made up many different groups. For maximum efficiency and impact, audiences and unsafe practices have to be carefully targeted. Each group may need to be addressed separately. Primary target audiences are those people who are carrying out the risk practices e.g. children, mothers handling baby's faeces, adult men and male adolescents. Secondary target audiences are those who influence the primary audience and who are in their immediate society, e.g. fathers, mothers-in-law.

There is a third target audience which is very important: people who lead and shape opinion, e.g. schoolteachers, religious leaders, political leaders, traditional leaders, and elders. These people have a major influence on the credibility and hence on the success or failure of the programme (IRC 2005).

## **Objective**

The aim of the paper is to describe the role of imams (Leaders of the Muslim religious institutions) and other different institutions such as schools and local folk media in hygiene promotion within the context of the BRAC WASH Program.

## **Role of different Institutions in Hygiene Promotion**

### **Role of Imams in Hygiene Promotion**

Religion holds unique importance in people's lives and also plays a significant role in social and cultural life of individuals. Several studies showed that the involvement of religious leaders and faith organizations in health-related interventions improved the level of acceptance, participation and positive health outcomes within the faith communities. The success of health-related interventions correlates directly with the attitude and commitment of the religious leaders to the project. In a telephone survey to assess barriers and motivators to blood and cord blood donation in young African- American women, 17% of the participants would donate blood if encouraged by their religious leaders (Toni-Uebari et el 2009).

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<sup>1</sup> A measure of the frequency of new cases of a disease among the contacts of known cases (Babylon online translation).

Bangladesh has a Muslim majority and the character of the country is strongly marked by Islam. In rural areas, where the majority of the population resides, religious leaders or imams are considered as opinion makers. So BRAC-WASH decided to involve Muslim religious leaders or Imams in the hygiene promotion activities. The involvement is fostered in a structured way from the very beginning. The program has involved MACCA, (Masjid Council for Community Advancement) which is a faith-based development, humanitarian and campaigning organization working for human security, sustainable integrated development, peace and communal harmony. MACCA has a country wide interfaith network in Bangladesh with trained Imams and leaders and followers from different groups(MACCA website). .MACCA provided consultancy service to WASH and developed the **Khutba Guide** based on the verses of **Al-Quran** and **Al-Hadith**, developed a training curriculum and necessary reference material. It also conducted TOT for 3days on the Khutba Guide along with facilitation and communication skills for 200 imams. The venues of the training were the well-resourced BRAC Training And Resource Centers (TARC). These Imam trainers then delivered one-day orientation at the upazilla level. Twelve imams from twelve mosques from each union received orientation. A total of 18,000 union-level Imams are now delivering sermons (*khutba*) to their assigned mosques not only to provide hygiene messages but also to ensure men’s role in domestic chores to reduce women’s work burden. The mosques were selected according to the number of presence of the Muslims in the Jummah prayer (weekly prayer on Fridays). Mosques which usually accommodate more than two hundred Muslims in the Jummah prayer were selected for the orientation. The Khutba guide is divided into twelve chapters and each month the imam give preaches on that chapter. The chapters of the guide are shown below.

Sermon or Khutba 1: Using safe water for drinking and cooking.

Sermon or Khutba 2: Sources and preservation of safe water.

Sermon or Khutba 3: Not to defecate in open place and installation and use of sanitary latrine.

Sermon or Khutba 4: Use and maintenance of sanitary latrine in healthy way.

Sermon or K hutba 5: Children and sanitary latrine.

Sermon or Khutba 6: Women and family safety and dignity.

Sermon or Khutba 7: Importance and rule of hand washing with soap.

Sermon or Khutba 8: Personal hygiene, equal distribution of household chores among family members.

Sermon or Khutba 9: Covering food and not to have stale/decayed food.

Sermon or Khutba 10: Kitchen and family waste disposal in a designated place and keeping the environment clean.

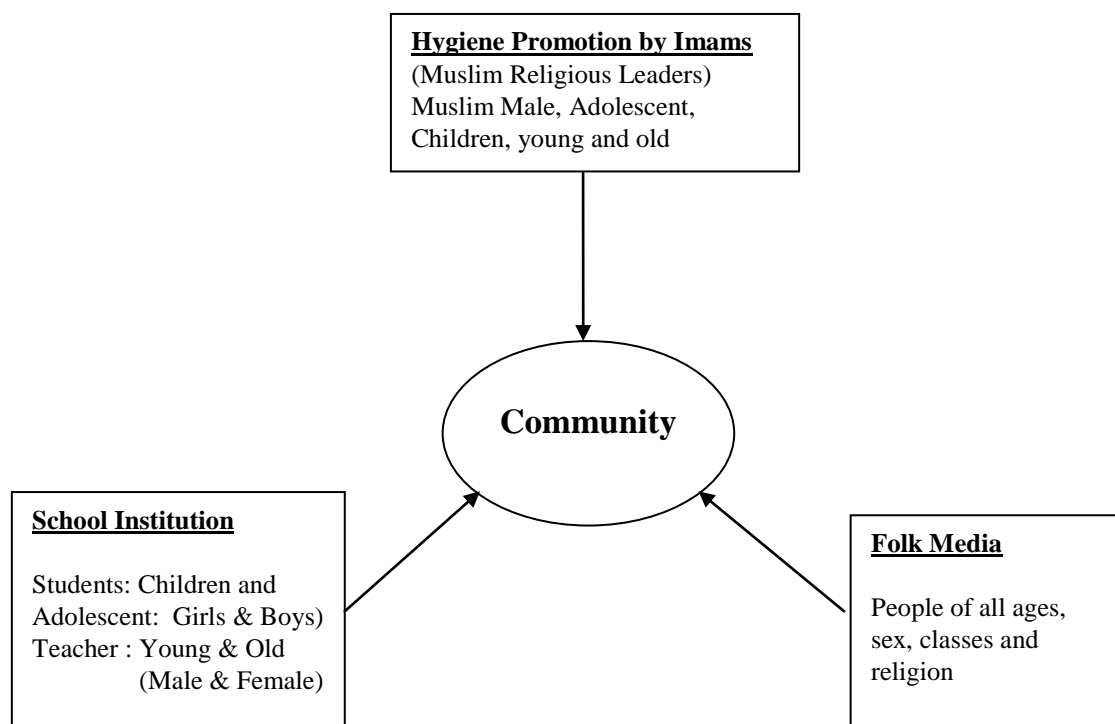
Sermon or Khutba 11: Teaching children about using latrines.

Sermon or Khutba 12: Helping women in their household chores and taking into account their views on family matters.

**Table : 1 Training and Forum on Khutba (up to October 2009)**

Activities	No. of Session	Male	Female
Religious Training on Khutba Guide Book	669	14978	-
Mosque Forum to disseminate Khutba on WASH	4331	350984	-

Considering the necessity of monitoring and follow up by a faith-based organization, WASH authorities hired the Masjid Council as a partner to implement another project titled: “Monitoring and Follow up Initiatives for Religious-institution based Component of BRAC-WASH Program”.



### **Role of schools in Hygiene Promotion**

Children are far more receptive to new ideas and are at an age when they can be influenced to cultivate the good habits of personal hygiene. Thus, the promotion of personal hygiene and environmental sanitation within the school can help children to adopt good habits from the formative years of their childhood. The school teacher is held in high esteem by the students and is respected not only within the school but in the community as well. The students can develop hygienic habits by emulating the teacher as a model. Also, the school teacher can influence parents and community members on issues related to sanitation (UNICEF, Tajikistan).

Bangladesh houses 82,218 primary schools that enrolled 16 million students, with a net enrolment rate of 90.8% in 2008. There are 18,770 secondary schools which enrolled 6.4million students in 2008. There are 9376 madrasas (religious schools) as well (BANBEIS, 2008). There is a school in almost every village of Bangladesh. A large number of families can be reached through the children if schools are involved in hygiene promotion.

To provide hygiene education among the school children, BRAC WASH has conducted hygiene education session in all schools (i.e from primary to secondary level). WASH staff designated as Program organizers have been disseminating hygiene messages with hand washing process demonstration in each school. In addition, teachers of the school were oriented before conducting the session with the students.

**Table : 2 Hygiene education Session conducted in different schools ( upto October 2009)**

<i>School Meeting/Hygiene Session</i>	<i>No of Session Conducted</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Secondary school meeting	21341	1632154	1808478	3440632
Government primary school meeting	16699	1393632	1590652	2984284
Non-government primary school meeting	13167	688527	746244	1434771
BRAC school meeting	72689	806291	1229617	2035908
Other School meeting	10875	202487	235375	437862
Madrasa meeting	3478	228207	249859	478066

**Table :3 School Teachers Orientation (upto October 2009)**

<i>Orientation of Different School Teachers</i>	<i>No of Session Conducted</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Orientation of Teacher (BRAC schools)	227	29	2176	2205
Orientation of Teacher (Primary schools)	38	335	145	480
Orientation of Teacher (Secondary schools)	1479	19883	5061	24944
Orientation of Teacher (Others)	774	8057	7836	15893

Before starting implementation of the WASH program, BRAC found that there was a high demand for separate latrines for girls and boys in secondary schools. Girl students were not attending classes during menstruation due to lack of menstrual hygiene facilities. All of the students are adolescents in secondary schools whereas this group is comparatively smaller in primary schools (standards one to five, usually ages from 5 to 9/10 on average). There were a series of discussions in selecting this target group. Based on the reality and practical need, BRAC decided to provide support to the secondary schools. Moreover, Government has a provision in primary schools and UNICEF has already provided support for latrine facilities. So, WASH along with the support from the school authority is constructing separate sanitary latrines with menstrual hygiene facilities in three secondary girls' schools or co-education secondary schools from each union.

To make the approach sustainable, WASH encourages the schools to conduct sessions on health and hygiene education through school teachers on a regular basis. For this purpose, teachers in BRAC WASH Upazilas receive orientation on WASH issues and methodology on teaching children. In addition, a training guide book, flipchart and posters have been developed to carry out the sessions smoothly. A training team has been formed to provide orientation to the school teachers. BRAC-WASH staff in Upazilas have developed session schedule (lesson plan) along with the teachers to assist them. The objective of the session is to provide hygiene knowledge to the student and encourage them to take their knowledge to their families and to the communities.

The subjects of the session are given below.

- Personal hygiene and environment
- Safe Water and sanitary latrine

Water-borne disease  
Skin disease & eye care  
Dental health  
Adolescent's health & nutrition with emphasis on menstrual hygiene

In addition to all these, School Brigades are being formed by the teachers and WASH personnel in each WASH school where construction of latrines have been completed. The brigade is a group of 24 students who are selected from Class Six to Class Nine. They are responsible for proper use and maintenance of latrines as well as the total cleanliness of the school premises. For better management and sustainability, a School WASH Committee is being formed in each school consisting of 14 members. The Head Master is the Chairperson and a female teacher is the member secretary of the committee. In addition to the representatives of the School Management Committee, guardians and students are selected as members of the committee to ensure equal representation at all level. The committee meets once or twice a month to review the activities including session and latrine use and maintenance. An Action Plan has been developed by the teachers for the effective implementation and follow-up of the activities. While the program realizes that WASH may not be able to cover all schools and latrine support may be in some way be inadequate, the rationale is to create a model, to generate demand and, most importantly, to build a relationship with the schools in the 150 Upazilas. Where there were no latrines in the past, now they have at least 2 per school.

WASH messages are also being delivered to both Govt. and BRAC non-formal primary school students through teachers orientation as part of hygiene promotion. School students are also involved in hygiene promotion through rallies, popular theaters, debate competitions, essay & art competition and celebration of special days such as "Hand Washing Day", "National Sanitation Month" etc..

### **Role of local folk media in Hygiene Promotion**

Folk media is an adornment of Bangladeshi cultural heritage. Every part of the country has its own distinctive features. The appeal of folk media is quite personal and at an intimate level because it has direct influence on people. As in the case of colloquial dialects the familiar format and content of mass media gives much clarity in communication. The folk media are so flexible that new themes can be accommodated in them. The familiarity, personal contact, common language, intelligibility, credibility and acceptance make the folk media universally acceptable among rural folks. It is also an inexpensive media where a message can be delivered effectively to a large number of people. Realizing this, the BRAC-WASH project has coupled with the popular theatre group of the BRAC Social Development Programme. "The performers of the group are recruited locally who are sensitive to indigenous heritage and socio-economic context of the region" (BRAC 2008). The theater groups incorporate messages about basic hygiene into their scripts and thus delivering messages into the community. The resulting storylines ranged from a funny sketch to serious dialogue. The plays are staged in the evenings, in the courtyards-drawing 250-400 people including women and children who are often deprived of such entertainment. The plays also provide a platform for contributory discussion. Three plays have been staged in each union in WASH areas. 4638 play have been staged up to October 2009 in 150 upazilas under BRAC WASH Program.

In addition to popular theater, WASH has also involved a local NGO which deals with a folk group of the famous duo named "Gambhira", very popular in the Northern part of Bangladesh. They have performed in 8 sub-districts in Northern Bangladesh and delivered hygiene promotion messages of WASH. The program has also involved local drama group of BRAC Adolescent development Program. The group members are adolescent boys and girls who perform in the school premises in the afternoon. They also incorporate messages about basic hygiene into their scripts and thus convey hygiene promotion messages into the community.

## Conclusion

Involvement of religious institution to promote hygiene messages for the respective community appears to be effective as they are influential in that community. A large number of young and adult come to social and religious institutions for pray education and training. Folk media is a useful way to ensure participation of the community people for message dissemination where people willingly come and join for a recreational purpose. In addition, there is no restriction in participation in terms of class, religion and age.

Field assessments show that teaching children the importance of hand washing and other good hygiene habits promotes increased knowledge and positive behavior change, especially when the schools are equipped with an adequate number of safe toilets or latrines and sufficient water for washing.

It is realized that gender issue which is very important to make WASH programme more effective, sustainable and equitable, can be properly addressed through hygiene promotion by the religious leaders, teachers and students. The **involvement of imams** for hygiene promotion has been very positive. Many like to be involved in social issues and help to advocate for appropriate WASH during the Friday prayers in mosques. Women in the community claim that this has helped to convince their husband to invest in latrines. Different needs of men, women and children, rich and poor, violence against women and cultural barriers to sanitation can be expressed by popular theatre show. Mass audiences enjoyed the theatre show which included relevant WASH information and hygiene messages. These highly popular folk-media events are meant to improve the sustainability of hygiene information, because the real life situation depicted on the stage easily influences people in an enter-educate manner. In addition, people are also influenced by the imams or religious leaders of Muslim community in changing gender role when it is explained based on the religious belief. There are also some reports that School Sanitation and Hygiene promotion has increased girl's attendance in school when teachers and school management committees are responsible for hygiene education session and changing students' safe hygienic practices with gender sensitive participation.

It is obvious that these three types of institution reach different groups in the community working to ensure sustainable hygiene behaviour among the community after the withdrawal of the programme.

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### Contact details

Name of Principal Author: Sharmin Farhat Ubaid  
Address: BRAC WASH Programme  
BRAC Center, 75, Mohakhali, Dhaka 1212

Email: sharmin.fu@brac.net

Name of Author: Mahjabeen Ahmed,  
Address: BRAC WASH Programme  
BRAC Center, 75, Mohakhali, Dhaka 1212

Email: mahjabeen.a@brac.net

Name of Author: Md. Mizanur Rahman,  
Address: BRAC WASH Programme  
BRAC Center, 75, Mohakhali, Dhaka 1212  
Email: mizanur.r@brac.net

Name of Author: Dr. Babar Kabir,  
Address: BRAC Disaster, Climate Change & Environment and Water, Sanitation & Hygiene Programme  
BRAC Center, 75, Mohakhali, Dhaka 1212  
Email: babar.k@brac.net

Name of Author: Mahidul Islam,  
Address: BRAC WASH Programme,  
BRAC Center, 75, Mohakhali, Dhaka 1212

Email: mahidul.i@brac.net

Name of Author: Md. Hasan Ali Miah  
Address: BRAC WASH Programme  
BRAC Center, 75, Mohakhali, Dhaka 1212  
Email: hasan.am@brac.net

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