

RAINWATER CHANGES THE ROLE OF WATER IN BANGLADESHI WOMEN'S LIFE

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A few months before, Khodeza Begum could not think about getting free time. Most of her time was wasted for routine water collection in a far-flung area. She had to walk miles, as there was hardly safe water sources nearby. For her, a miracle happened after the installation of Rain-water Harvest plant in her courtyard.

It makes safe water supply easier than before and lessens the burden of Khodeza's daily work. Thanks to the NGO Forum for Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation, an apex body of NGOs working in WatSan sector, who introduced the Rain-water Harvest System (RWHS) in Kalabaria, a village situated in the southern part of Bangladesh.

After the installation, Khadiza's traditional responsibilities shifted towards safe water preservation, quality maintenance and ensuring proper use in her day-to-day activities. She is now more aware of rainwater recycling method, its preservation as well as checking its misuse. Khodeza free time makes many of these productive works possible. Now as one of the one-third members of Village Development Committee VDC, she carries water responsibilities with more efficiency.

Khodeza came to know about the RWHS after her husband attended a community meeting and become member of VDC, both the outcome of the NGO Forum's community managed programme, started in Kalabaria in 2000. The baseline survey of the apex body found the village, situated at the foothill of Chandranath hill of Sitakunda upazila of Chittagong district, with a poor safe water supply and sanitation, the major social indicators of human development. Water-borne diseases were very common in that area.

Bangladesh, with a 114 million population, is threatened in generally unsafe drinking water supply after the widespread detection of arsenic contamination. Arsenic causes a severe health hazard and slowing the ongoing development work in the WatSan sector.

On the contrary, government revised the national policy for safe water supply and sanitation reviewing this trend and the nature of problems in the sector several times. The country observes the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade the government of Bangladesh as well as more than 50 NGOs are involvement in

WatSan sector.

After two years programme, the NGO Forum finds hundred percent success in ensuring safe water supply and sanitation which is the result of participatory method of its community-managed programme. The Forum with the help of two other NGOs -- Society for Health Extension and Development, SHED and Young Power in Social Action YPSA -- enrich their programmes through motivational initiative like involving VDC, community members, professionals, local governments, religious leaders as well as youths.

In the VCD, one-third women participation also helps water management and its distribution become more manageable. During different community meetings, they identify the problem of water as well as disseminate the innovative approaches in rainwater harvest, preservation and multiple uses among other members. After two-years, NGO Forum finds also success in areas like health, good governance and micro-credit programmes.

The NGO Forum claims that for the association of local potential persons like union parishad chairman, local government bodies as well as local young clubs have brought big success for the programme. They constantly watch the quality of rainwater, identify the water problems and try to find solutions within their capacity. Women also played their due roles during courtyard meetings, organized in each and every para which helped them in manage the safe water and control the water-borne sufferings. .

Samia Begum, a VDC member, says, initially it was thought that the community-managed WatSan programme would be a programme of NGO Forum and its partners but after participation in few meetings, she finds that the programme is more for the villagers. She like many other villagers now feel the ownership of the programme and receive the benefits of safe water supply.