

## Better WASH interventions impacted to increase school attendance in Bangladesh

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**Abstract:** The CDI2WASH program was implemented by BDRCS in collaboration with International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies at four communities and 29 schools of Rangpur and Gopalganj in Bangladesh from 2014 to 2018. Different types of hardware and software WASH interventions including context specific water and sanitation technologies, WASH sessions, meetings and discussion were done under the program. The study was conducted to assess the impact of WASH intervention on class attendance between 2015 and 2017 year in the 15 schools of two districts under the program. The study results were derived using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Some significant changes were seen among the students and teachers of these schools centering the WASH practices. Improvement of education was also seen in the selected schools and its surroundings as well. Increasing attendance rate in the schools was one of the significant achievements of the program. It was revealed that class attendance of the students increased significantly in 2017 comparing to 2015 and 2016. The study found that the class attendance in the selected schools was 67% in 2015. It gradually increased to 73% in 2016 and 75% in 2017.

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### 1. 1. Introduction

It has been declared in the goal six of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that universal access to safe water and inclusive WASH1 for all should be ensured by 2,030. But the people of many developing countries around the world are struggling to have access to safe water and improved sanitation facilities. Though Bangladesh have achieved significant improvement to ensure safe water and improved sanitation for the country people but there are many people are still deprived of getting this entitlement. The overall WASH condition in the educational institutions in Bangladesh is not satisfactory. Though in most of the cases, there are water points at the schools in rural side of country, but the condition of the toilets is not healthy and universal at all. In most of the situation, there are no special WASH facilities for female students in schools. In 2014, the Education Ministry of Bangladesh Government formulated a circular on “improvement of toilet and sanitation system of secondary and higher secondary schools, madrasahs<sup>2</sup> and technical educational institutions”. It’s clause 3 complies ensuring gender friendly sanitation in all educational

institutions with establishing separate toilets for the female students and clause 3 also stresses on the efforts of Managing Committee of educational institutions in providing sanitary napkin (on payment, if necessary) to the girl students. But in most of educational institutions, this circular is not followed due to different circumstances. According to the National Hygiene Survey Report (2015), only 3% of the schools in Bangladesh have separate school toilet blocks for both boys and girls.

To overcome the challenges and with a view to ensuring the safe water and improved sanitation services for people specially for the hardcore and vulnerable, different types of government and non-government programs are implemented in Bangladesh. The CDI2WASH was one of such programs that was implemented to enable vulnerable individuals and communities in targeted areas to address their WASH related needs as part of the broader resilience. The program was implemented by BDRCS in collaboration with IFRC Bangladesh through Australian Red Cross, supported by Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Australia in two districts (Gopalganj and Rangpur) to improve health condition of the people of targeted four communities and 29 schools through WASH intervention from 2014 to 2018.

The direct target beneficiaries of the program were 23,000 and the program also targeted 83,000

<sup>1</sup> Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

<sup>2</sup> is the *Arabic* word for any type of educational institution, secular or religious (of any religion), whether for elementary instruction or higher learning.

people as indirect beneficiaries. The program engaged government and other stakeholders principally at district and local level. WASH activities were conducted in a specific approach to their surrounding environment including hygiene promotion, water testing training, leading to latrine construction, water supply provision and water resources management interventions. The program also included 29 schools in the two districts. Different types of hardware and software WASH interventions were conducted at these schools. Interventions like functioning School Management Committee (SMC), installing and renovating water and sanitation technologies, introducing 'SONO Arsenic Removing Filter' for safe drinking water, separate toilet block for male and female students and people with disability (PWD), Children's Hygiene and Sanitation Training (CHAST) session for students, weekly session on WASH, Menstrual Hygiene Management and health, observing different days for raising awareness, arranging parent's forum meeting were done under the program. As a result, some significant changes were seen among the students and teachers of these schools centering WASH and health practices. Beside this, improvement was seen in education also. The study identified the increasing attendance rate at class was more than previous time in the schools. The objectives of the study were:

- To assess the class attendance between 2015 and 2017 in the schools.
- To identify the reasons if the school attendance increased.

## 2. Material and Methods

The study was conducted at 15 schools of Rangpur and Gopalganj districts in Bangladesh. The schools were located at the communities at four Upazilas namely Rangpur Sadar, Mithapukur, Gopalganj Sadar and Tungipara of the two districts. The study was conducted from both qualitative and quantitative perspective. Quantitative data were collected from the schools using specific tools and qualitative data were collected from the respective respondents. Random sampling method was used to choose observations by random number generator. 15 schools were used as the sample (8 schools from Rangpur and 7 schools from Gopalganj) from 29 targeted schools. The data for the study were collected from the school attendance sheet/register. Attendance of the students was collected from different classes (from class 3 to class 10). In this regard, the last date of class of every month was considered as the standard. The attendance of the last day of every month (January to December) of the selected class was counted for this assessment. If the school was

closed for any month then this was taken into consideration while analyzing the data.

- Class attendance was collected from a single class from the selected school.
- Class attendance was collected from January to December of 2015, 2016 and 2017.
- Last class attending day of every month was counted as the standard of attending day.

## 3. Results

The study found the improvement in class attendance in both districts where the CDI2WASH program was implemented. It was revealed that in both district, the school attendance increased in 2017 than the previous year 2015 and 2016.

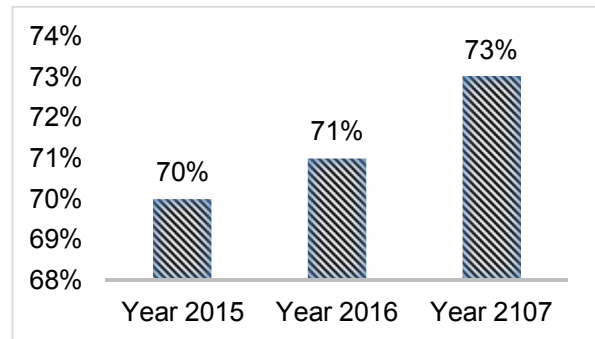


Figure 1: Improvement in class attendance in Rangpur

The figure 1 shows that the rate of school attendance among the students of the schools under CDI2WASH program of Rangpur increased during the last two years. The rate of school attendance was 70% in 2015. It increased to 71% in 2016 and 73% in 2017. So, rate of class attendance gradually increased in last two years in Rangpur.

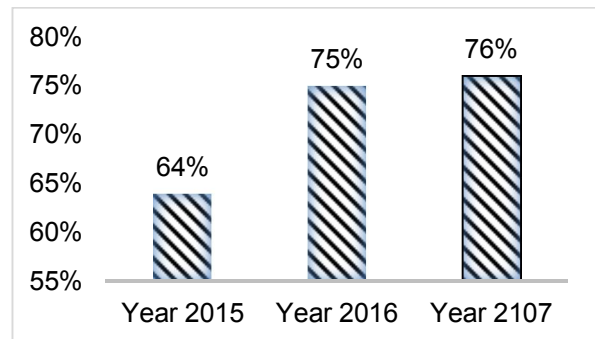


Figure 2: Improvement in class attendance Gopalganj

The figure 2 demonstrates that the rate of school attendance among the students gradually increased in significant proportion in Gopalganj. In 2014, the rate of attending students in the class was 64%. But, it consecutively increased in last two years. About 75% students had attended in 2016 while the rate of school attendance reached to 76% in 2017. So, the class attendance increased in significant proportion in last two years compared to 2015.

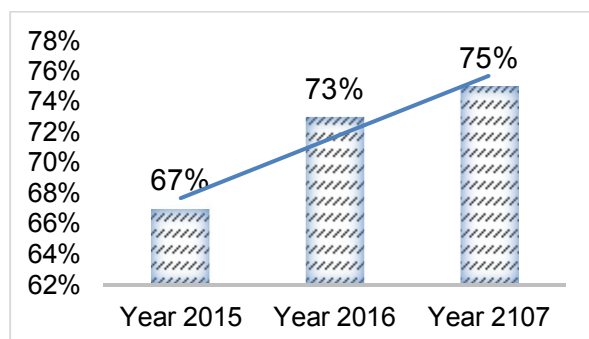


Figure 3: Gradual improvement in class attendance in the schools in both districts

The figure 3 shows the gradual improvement in the rate of attendance in both Rangpur and Gopalganj districts. The trendline in the figure illustrates that 67% school of attendance was found in 2015 in the schools under where the CDI2WASH program was intervened. The rate of attendance gradually improved to 73% in 2016 and 75% in 2017. So, the program intervention functioned as catalyst to enhance the rate of attendance.

Some reasons were identified that kept contribution to increase the attendance in schools. Installed water and sanitation technologies in the schools reduced the hassle of students during the school time for WASH purpose. CHAST session contributed to increase the awareness among the students and increased their awareness and interest on WASH issues. The assigned CHAST teacher disseminated information for the students that made the students aware about water, sanitation, hygiene and menstrual hygiene management. The School Managing Committees played significant role to improve the class environment of schools and used to keep school premise neat and clean. The female students attended more in the class as MHM facilities were ensured as part of universally accessible toilet block installed at the schools. CHAST award was provided to the students in every year by SMCs also motivated the students to attend school more than the previous time. Low literature rate, dirty environment, open defecation, frequent outbreak of water-borne

diseases, early marriage and non-disposed fecal reduced at the school areas along with the communities than previous time. These factors inspired the students to attend class regularly. The female students also felt confident to come at school as the program had ensured the gender-friendly WASH environment in schools.

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