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## Village organisations become development partners

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## Village organisations become development partners

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THE WATSAN PARTNERSHIP PROJECT (WPP) is designed and funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC) to create sustainable access to water and sanitation facilities in Rajshahi and Chapai Nawabganj, two north-western districts of Bangladesh. The area covers a population of approximately 4 million people. The project started with a pilot in 1998. The first 3-year phase started in January 1999, with as main components:

- Mobilisation and empowerment of village based organisations.**
- Development and marketing of affordable technology through private sectors.
- Health education aiming at behavioural changes related to hygiene.
- Team and partnership development of implementing and supporting organisations.

The overall objectives of the project are to:

- Improve users' sustainable access and use of affordable water and sanitation facilities.
- Build on the experience learned in the Project toward an incremental integration into the nation-wide 'Arsenic Mitigation Water Supply Project

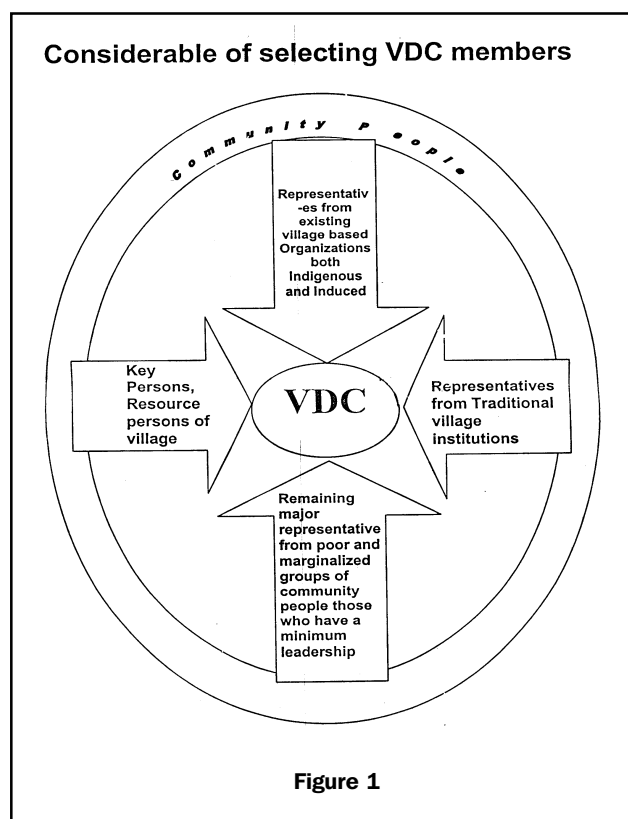
Fifteen local partner NGOs were selected to facilitate the work in 640 villages. These partner NGOs are supported by a partnership of three international NGOs, each contributing their specific area of expertise. CARE-Bangladesh for hygiene related behavioural change, DASCOH (Development Association for Self-reliance, Communication and Health) for community management, and IDE (International Development Enterprise) for affordable technology. Overall coordination and management, as well as policy dialogue and relations to other water and sanitation projects, stakeholders and clients are carried out through the Project Management Units in Dhaka and Rajshahi. Strategic decisions are taken by consensus in the Steering Committee with members from within and outside the project.

### Building representative and able community based organisations

After the international NGOs had agreed how to divide the tasks, the first priority was given to formation of village organisations (hereafter called VDCs – Village Develop-

ment Committees). This process was led by DASCOH. Once VDCs were established and water and sanitation issues were firmly on their agenda, the focus shifted to CARE and IDE related tasks of hygiene education and provision of technology. After some time, VDCs felt the need for development of skills within their committees, and DASCOH's tasks became more prominent again. This dynamic process of fading in and out of the prominence of the three international NGOs would continue all through the project.

Formation of VDCs started by training carefully selected local partner NGOs. The WPP teams of those partner NGOs consisted of 5 members: one community organiser, two male, and two female field facilitators. They were taught how to approach and build rapport with a village community, identify resource persons, how to initiate participatory thought processes and how to facilitate the formation of a VDC. Figure 1 shows the representation aimed for in the VDCs. In most villages it proved difficult to have men and women represented in one committee. Where that was the case, separate male and female VDCs



were formed. After a while, when both the female and male committee had reached a certain degree of maturity, they merged into one, mixed VDC. Once a VDC was formed, it would conduct a number of PRA exercises to analyse the water and sanitation situation in the village, to assess needs and plan, implement and monitor activities.

VDCs prepared a 1-year action plan including awareness raising activities related to sanitation and hygiene, installation of latrines and tube-wells, and capacity building of their VDCs. Progress was monitored in monthly meetings. Training of partner NGO staff was very intensive in this first year, and included awareness raising and hygiene education, operation and maintenance of hand pumps and latrines, PRA techniques, participatory planning, promotion of self help organisations, resource mobilisation, and rural leadership development training. The partner NGO staff in turn trained members of the VDCs, facilitated their action planning and monthly monitoring and access to Jibon pumps and sanitary latrines.

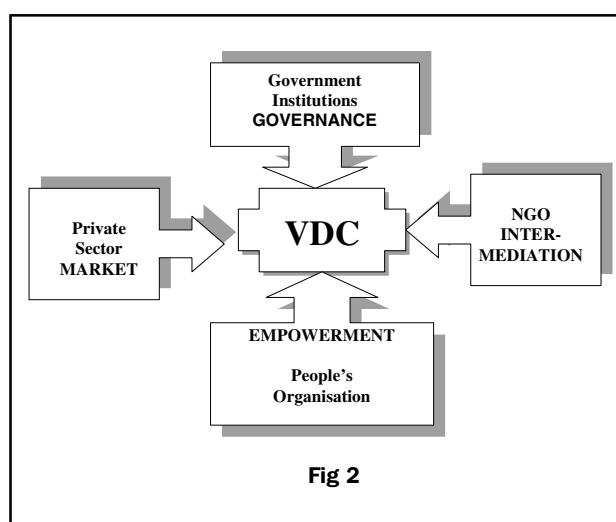
### Does it work?

So far, so good. At the end of 1998, heavy and lengthy floods destroyed many water and sanitation facilities in most places in Bangladesh, including in the WPP project area. Faced by this emergency, WPP started a sub project called the Post Flood Rehabilitation Project in December 1998. In this project the most affected areas were selected and given emergency assistance for latrine and hand pump rehabilitation. Although overall implementation of the sub-project was delayed by 6 months, an evaluation of PFRP in May 2000 showed that the VDCs had been able to allocate the emergency provisions to the poorer families in their villages. The VDCs also managed to procure the number of latrines and pumps as planned and had functioned effectively as a committee in doing so. And although a period of one year is relatively short, there are also signs of increased knowledge among VDC members and participants of hygiene education sessions regarding hygiene related issues.

### The ideas and principles behind the project

The practical implementation of the project was based on the following ideas, also shown in figure 2:

- Empowerment of community-based organisations that have the self-management capacities to such an extent that they are considered as important partners.
- Private sector development in the form of the development, production, marketing and selling of low cost technologies.
- Intermediary non-governmental organisations which – in coordination with other partners – coordinate, facilitate, train and support local partners in the priority issues of community management, hygiene behaviour, technology development and marketing etc.



- Improved local governance, testing new roles of local government institutions and their relations with NGOs, civil society and the village communities.

The ideas and practical implementation are also shaped by the following principles:

A **partnership approach** in which comparative advantages of each partner and synergies in working together are used;

**Participation of users** starting from planning to decision making, implementation and monitoring creating a true sense of **ownership** in the village communities;

**Self-management** of water and sanitation activities;

A **demand driven approach** for facilities and services, on a cost sharing basis;

**Choice** among various **technological options**;

Promotion of **private sector** involvement in WATSAN with supply and marketing of goods and services preferably at the local level;

Collaboration of different partners (public, private, NGOs etc.) for successful implementation and strengthening of the **local governance**,

Promotion of **gender balance** in water and sanitation activities;

Strengthening of the **local institutions and local governance** (public sector, private sector and civil society) in the sector;

A **flexible planning approach**: plans and revised regularly according to feedback and opportunities.

### Challenges

Although the results after one year are very encouraging, each day of the project brings new challenges. A few examples to illustrate:

- Not all VDCs are functioning at the same level. They need different forms of assistance. This asks for a very

flexible attitude from staff at partner NGO and INGO level to change plans, develop new training modules and re-plan; it also requires the donor agency's understanding of frequent changes in time schedules and actual use of the budget;

- Despite the care taken at the formation stage of VDCs, not all VDCs are fully representative, and/or functioning in a democratic way;
- For many of the local partner NGOs the demand driven, fully participatory approach is new. As they are local partner NGOs, villagers often have expectations based on their other projects that included provision of funds or materials;
- WPP is a partnership project, in which the international NGOs are expected to combine their strengths. But partnership does not come automatically and the project consciously reserves time for partnership building through reflection meetings and joint review of components. For example, each of the partners started out with their own monitoring component. This led to duplications at partner NGO and village level. The same data were collected two, or even three times. Recently, VDC members, partner NGO and international NGO staff reviewed that situation and developed a joint monitoring system that answers the need for monitoring at all levels.

## Conclusion

Water and sanitation facilities in villages participating in WPP have improved since the start of the project. Coverage and access to the improved facilities is by no means complete. But the coverage and access issue is merely a side effect of a more lasting and promising change: more and more villagers are increasingly active, organised and able to decide over their villages' needs, and to take the action they choose. The project is not finished; in their self-assessment the VDCs identify the need for additional training and support. But a first cycle of needs assessment, planning and implementation was completed successfully. The big challenge in the coming year will be how to strengthen and apply these skills and strengths to face the problem of arsenic pollution.

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