

# **Report of Gender Impact of the Watershed Project in Bhola Bangladesh**



***Giving water users, women and men, a voice***

**Dieren/Dhaka, August 2020**

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We are also grateful to the NGO Network and the Water Management Citizens Committee for their enthusiasm to learn about Gender and Inclusion and apply their new knowledge effectively. The Union Chairmen and Union Members, as well as the officers and engineers of the service holders DPHE, LGED and BWDB all have been available for our questions, whenever we asked them.

Most of all we thank the many women and men of Bhola who freely gave their time, whenever we asked, and openly answered our many questions. They had a lot to tell.

Joke Muylwijk en Runia Mowla

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### Introduction

The Watershed, Empowering Citizens – project is completed by the middle of 2020. For more than three years the Gender and Water Alliance worked together with DORP in Bhola to increase the awareness about the importance of inclusion and gender: if all categories of people are involved in the Civil Society Organisations, and if they learn to speak up, chances are largest that the project has a positive impact.

The Watershed project has been collecting outcomes during the past three years, but not impact. Impact is not written as objective in the project document. Nevertheless, all through these years, GWA has collected information about the influence that the project has and the changes that can be seen in Bhola, based on which we try to write this brief Gender Impact Report.

In 2020 the planned visit could not take place, because of the corona-crisis, so we conducted interviews by phone with the members of the CSOs, decision-makers, politicians, beneficiaries and DORP staff in Bhola. In case of calling people who have not been met before, doing interviews by phone about gender and power relations, such subjects may be too sensitive to be sure of the validity. Because the interviewees are well known to us, such interviews were possible and can be considered as valid. Even so, if we had been able to go to Bhola in person, we would have met more and different people, and the information would probably have been richer. Information is used which was collected during Coaching sessions of CSOs, Focus Group Discussions, Transect Walks, interviews, inquiries, various field visits, observation, meeting with Local Government and Government Service Holders, and interviews by telephone. Both people who were involved in the project as those who were not, have been interviewed. From the beginning to the end, CSOs have been very keen to be involved in the project, and all express their wish that the project can continue for a few more years. Especially so as to bring the impact up to scale.

In this report the impact is written in the form of two tables, with columns about 2017, which is to be considered as baseline, and about 2020, which is impact. Furthermore the information is analysed, using the Empowerment Approach. Then there are lists of achievements and quotes.

Because 2020 is a dramatic year: first the cyclone Amphan, then the corona crisis, we write a section on both, referring to what the interviewees have told us. The report is ended with Conclusions, a very brief summary, including a few recommendations, which also were conveyed to us by phone. GWA's recommendations have been included in all earlier reports.

### Methodology of Gender Impact Study

Information for Baseline (2017, 2018) and Impact study (2019, 2020) was collected in the following ways:

1. GWA read the initial documents of the Watershed project, and those all through the time of implementation.

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2. GWA staff participated in all meetings and workshops, where more information about the project and the situation in Bhola could be learnt.
3. In Bhola Focus group Discussions were conducted in various villages, men FGD, women and also mixed FGDs. Further FGDs with men and women separately, in villages who were not involved in the Watershed project.
4. Meetings with the CSO-members, visiting their organisations (NGOs, hospital, homes), seeing them perform in their own activities.
5. Coaching sessions for the Water Management Citizens Committee (WMCS), which were held participatively, and making sure all participants would contribute from their own interest.
6. Group work in coaching sessions.
7. Inquiries, which are open interviews, with various categories of people in and outside the selected villages.
8. Meetings with Union Chairmen, and members (women and men) of the Union Parishad.
9. Meetings with Government Departments' representatives, responsible for IWRM and WASH, such as Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE), Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), and Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB).
10. Visits to houses of vulnerable people, for interviews.
11. Transect walks through villages, markets, over embankments, along water sides, etc. to see water-logging, storms, toilets, fisher people, net-makers, livestock keepers, flood-control, etc.
12. Visits to Cluster villages, where people live who are land- and homeless, many because they lost their land to the river, by river erosion.
13. Visits to schools, to see the situation of toilets, for girls, boys and for teachers, discussing with teachers. Head masters and students.
14. Visit the Union Parishad buildings to see the Open budgets painted on the walls.
15. Observation of farming practices and what women and men do.
16. **When the field visit of 2020 could not be held because of the corona situation, Runia Mowla had telephone-interviews with most members of the NGO Network, DORP-Bhola, WMCC, Union Chairman, Woman member of Union, four Hindu inhabitants of a Juggi Polli (cluster village), BWDB sub-divisional engineer, fisherman and fisherwoman. <sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> All interviews have been written out, and are available on request. They contain a lot of details which cannot all be included in this report.

## Findings

The first column gives the different issues related to the position of men, women of different categories in Bhola. The second column lists the situation that was found in 2016 and 2017. The third column mentions the changes that have taken place, mostly resulting from the Watershed project.

The colour red means a non-desirable situation. Light green means an improvement, and darker green is really a positive impact. No colour means no obvious change.

Aspects of gender, inclusion, WASH, IWRM in Bhola	Overall average situation in 2017	Overall average situation in 2020
Equality amongst members of CSOs	Well-to-do men found it very hard to listen to marginal women and men	All listen to each other and influential men also give marginal women a chance to speak
Opinion about access to WASH	Influential people hardly see a problem in the level of access to drinking water and sanitation facilities	That marginal people lack proper facilities and access to safe water has become clear to all CSO members, and is given priority in their advocacy work
Opinion of decision-makers	Unaware of gender and inclusion. They are not interested to listen to the CSO members.	After the motivation, and petitions for tube wells and toilets for marginalized people, they started listening to the CSOs. They are now aware that broken toilets and lack of proper tube well is a lot more disastrous for women than for men. They also now realise that poor women and men need sanitary toilets as well as safe water, just as much as rich people.
Access to tube-wells	In water logged areas, various tube-wells are not functioning. Old tube-wells are deeper and give better water (30-45 years old). Poor women are not allowed to take as much water as they need.	Some more tube-wells have been constructed for poor people. Our impression is that more vulnerable people are being included in the selection for DTWs to be newly constructed than before. But this does not mean that the need is satisfied. Compared to other unions the situation now in Dhanai and Veduria seems to be better.
Quality of water	The water is not saline, there is hardly any arsenic, nor iron. Only some tube wells which are not deep have water with a strange taste. In one cluster village we found water with salinity and iron.	Two DTWs in one cluster village are now repaired.



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Aspects of gender, inclusion, WASH, IWRM in Bhola	Overall average situation in 2017	Overall average situation in 2020
Fetching water	Only women fetch water, men are ashamed when they have to fetch water.	The imam fetches water, because his wife and daughters are in strict purdah.
Sanitary latrines	Such toilets are wanted but few can afford them.	A few sanitary latrines have been constructed for poor people
Ring slab toilets	Most people have access to ring slab toilets, but some women have no toilet at all.	According to the Chairman of Veduria, before only 10% had ring slab toilets, now perhaps even 90%.
Toilets and waterlogging	Most of the year many toilets are submerged, and faecal sludge goes everywhere.	For some toilets, the system has been changed, with more septic tanks.
Tidal surge	This is one of the biggest problems now, and women suffer because toilets are unusable and their vegetable gardens are lost.	
Selection of beneficiaries by Union Parishad	On the lists of households where tube wells and toilets will be constructed are mostly in the names of friends op UPs. These are households who may already have one or more tube wells, paid by the government.	Before preparing the demand list, NGO Network conducts a needs assessment survey in the areas so that marginalized people like the people on the embankment are not left out. CSOs now check the lists, and have their own lists, which the Union Chairmen look into. The Watershed project could not achieve the installation of 100% tube wells according to the needs of marginalized people as they assessed.
Cluster villages are groups of very small houses, built on khas land, for landless people and those who lost their land to the river.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not in all cluster-villages the hand pumps are in working order.</li> <li>- Thus women have to walk 30 minutes four times a day to fetch water.</li> <li>- The toilets that were constructed at the time of construction of the cluster- villages, are in a deplorable state, and not usable.</li> <li>- Thus women have to walk for 10-30 minutes in the night to reach a toilet.</li> <li>- Women are scared in the night, when looking for a toilet: scared for animals, to fall, and for being harassed by men.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In one or two cluster-villages, the tube wells have been repaired,</li> <li>- and some of the toilets now replaced the drain pipe towards the canal, with a septic tank.</li> <li>- At the end of 2019, one woman, living in a cluster village is joining the WMCC.</li> </ul>

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Aspects of gender, inclusion, WASH, IWRM in Bhola	Overall average situation in 2017	Overall average situation in 2020
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cluster villages also lack proper entrance roads.</li> <li>- Cluster villages are not represented in the CSOs.</li> <li>- In one year 40 families lost their land to the river in one union Vedula. It is very difficult to find khas land for all of them.</li> </ul>	
Religious minorities, 90% of the population is Muslim, about 10% Hindu.	Muslim and Hindu people live together peacefully	This has remained the same. One para (neighbourhood) of poor Hindu people who produce puffed rice, has received a new DTW for drinking water. Of their own money they constructed toilets, one for each family.
Elderly	<p>Old widows, who live alone, are very poor, and use DTW for drinking and pond water for other purposes.</p> <p>Old people are often very poor, unless taken care of by their children. Fetching drinking water is a major problem for them: water points are far away and the work is heavy for people who have a problem to walk.</p> <p>About toilets, most would like to use a high commode, but they are were told not to be available.</p>	Few of them have better access to DTW water
Disabled people	Most disabled people are begging in and around their own villages. They have no adapted toilets anywhere.	Few of them have better access to DTW water
Youth	Many young people are unemployed. This is a dangerous situation. Few try to get away, but need a loan to do so, which indebts their mothers even more. It is also not easy to find work in Dhaka when coming from a village in the South.	This is not influenced by the project
Fisher people	Most of them are living below the embankment, on either side - areas most at risk of flooding and eroding. They have access to very few tube-wells and hardly any toilets, which are all <i>katcha</i> .	They benefitted from a few new tube wells and a toilet. Also fisher people have learnt about hygiene practices, and that open latrines are not hygienic.

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Aspects of gender, inclusion, WASH, IWRM in Bhola	Overall average situation in 2017	Overall average situation in 2020
	Many months there is a ban on certain fishing. Then the government gives the families 30 kg rice, but we are told, that they don't get it.	
River nomads, Bede	Bede are also fisher people, but they live on their boats, having no access to land. Some may have a reasonable income during monsoon when there is enough fish. They have no access to schools, and they are not allowed to take more than one pitcher of water from tube wells. They are only allowed to use the hanging toilets. On the boats especially the women suffer most from lack of adequate and safe water and sanitation facilities.	The DPHE officer told that there could not be a toilet for Bede, because there is no land available. Nevertheless, the project constructed one toilet and one DTW at the embankment, for them.
Women CSO members	Women are not asked for their opinion.	Because of the Watershed project, now women can do meetings and training closely sitting with BWDB and DPHE staff, which was not possible before.

Other important issues	2017	2020
Irrigation and the threat of ground water going down	In Bhola farmers only use surface water for irrigation	This is still the same
Tidal surges, which occur every 15 days with high tide	Ring slab toilets are often washed away by the tidal waves. Women suffer most. Ponds get spoiled, and fish flows away.	This is still the same in most places
Debts, loans and credits	Nearly all households are indebted. For women this is extremely stressful. NGOs have credit programs, loans are in women's names, but they hand the money to the husband. Women have to repay.	This is not influenced by the project



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Other important issues	2017	2020
Employment	For women there is no paid employment, and also for the youth who completed their schooling, there are no jobs. Women work 15-16 hrs per day and men 8-10 hrs.	This is not influenced by the project  See table on next page.
Dowry and violence	All marriages require dowry which is high in Bhola. Various women are then asked again and again for more dowry. They are hiding in their parental home. Domestic violence is common.	This has not changed because of the project, but domestic violence has increased during the corona-time
Early marriage	High levels of child marriage	Slowly the number of early marriages is going down, because of strict new laws. But due to the corona crisis, incidences of early and forced marriage have increased in different districts all over the country, and not in the least in Bhola.
Migration	When there is a temporary ban on fishing, men migrate to pull rickshaws in the towns. The wife has to borrow more money to survive.	The number of months that fishing is not allowed have increased, so this problem has increased.
River bank erosion	Many people lost their lands, more than one time. In Bhola, there are thousands of climate refugees living on the town saver embankment on the bank of the Meghna. The people who came from different places after losing their lands and houses in river erosion. Chairmen and members do not give attention to their needs as they are not the voters of this place. Addressing their WASH needs seemed a far cry. Chairmen and members of the Union Parishad don't even consider to repair any broken tube well or toilet. Political leaders rather distribut these facilities among their people and relatives although they can install those facilities on their own. Chairmen only understand their needs and luxury, not the needs of poor people at all.	Again land got lost, and more people lost their livelihoods. Union chairmen, some of them, have now learnt to think about and listen to poor and marginalised people. Perhaps not after the project ends.
Cyclones, floods and relief	There are good cyclone shelters, but they are too full for women to go there safely. Relief is given to men. Old widows tell not to receive it.	

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Other important issues	2017	2020
Men migrate, women stay behind	Women, with or without husband present at home, have no chance of employment	
Income earning	Women earn small amounts by raising poultry and livestock, often sold by the husband	Nobody wants women to work in public works. Poor women think, that if employment would be available, they can convince their husbands.
Embankments	Embankments are many all over the island, and very low, compared to the mighty Meghna, and they are in need of repair. Bhola is 7 feet higher than the sea, and there is no soil for high soil embankments. Women are scared for the rivers flooding.	Some stretches of embankment have been strengthened by sand bags and concrete blocks, by BWDB.
Market places		Some toilets are constructed
Integrity		The project slowly moves corruption away, and makes decision-makers more accountable
Positive issues, mentioned by women and men	Good electricity Good roads Fresh air Good drinking water Lots of culverts to solve water logging Many schools Many mosks	
Suggestions for improvement, mentioned by women	A garment factory closeby Sewing machines More livestock and poultry Low cost education Employment for women and adolescents, for example earth work.	

## Empowering citizens

Empowerment is a process of improving one's position, gaining self-confidence for individual development as well as to contribute towards development of others. It refers to increasing the economic, social, political, physical strength of any individual or group. Empowerment is not only of women, but also of men and of children and of minorities and vulnerable groups. The Watershed project's subtitle is "Empowering Citizens". In this paragraph the situation of women and men in Bhola, in the selected unions, at the beginning is compared to the situation at the end, to assess the impact of the project on the four elements of empowerment. Some generalization is needed, even though there always are exceptions. For detailed facts about WASH and IWRM, please read the three Bhola reports GWA has written.

**All the four elements of empowerment are interrelated** and together they indicate the degree of empowerment of an individual or group. So, for example, just being educated (socio-economic empowerment) on its own does not mean a woman is empowered, if her husband does not allow her to work after marriage. Groups and individuals (not only women) who are on the lower side of the hierarchy, empower themselves if they are convinced, and if they are able. Empowerment means to be proud of one's own identity.

- 1. Economic empowerment:** is about the right to relevant educations and to choose one's subject of schooling. It also deals with the right to work that one enjoys, and the same income for same work for women and men, access to relevant resources, assets, land, money, water, etc. One's work must be recognized. The right to decide about spending benefits and income belongs under economic empowerment. Economic empowerment is important but not enough. The other three forms of empowerment are necessary to turn economic progress into real empowerment. The situation of the people in Bhola who have been considered a target group of the Watershed Project, was not economically empowered. For women there is no employment at all for which they would get paid. If the husband is a farmer, women also work hard in preparing nurseries, processing yields, and making food for

### ***No paid employment, but a lot of work.***

In one FGD we ask men what women do, and then we asked the women if the men had forgotten something:

#### **Men list what women do:**

- Collect water
- Cook food
- Take care of the children
- Take care of other household members

#### **What men forgot to mention about women's work:**

- cut grass for cattle
- look after poultry
- take care of their husband
- do homestead gardening
- clean everything
- wash the clothes
- sow and repair clothes
- stitch kantas (blankets)
- embroider topis (caps for men)
- plant trees
- clean toilets
- carry food to children in school
- care for elderly
- supervise homework of children for school
- collect fuel (reeds from river bank)
- weeding in the field (farmers)
- post-harvest work: cleaning rice, parboiling, drying, take rice to mill (farmers)
- prepare whatever husband needs (fishers)
- call husband and encourage him to go and fish
- clean the fish, bring water for cleaning fish and tools and yard (fishers)
- repair the nets (fishers)

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labourers. If the husband is a fisherman, she helps with preparing his food, repairing nets, washing all the tools, washing the fish, for which a lot of water has to be collected. In general women are used to do such work and call it only helping their husbands, instead of division of tasks. Women tell us that all are indebted. Farmers lose land to the river, government bans fishing for various months of the year. None of these categories, which is the majority of the population, can be considered as economically empowered.

***At the end of the Watershed project it is noticed that the people who have been involved, are not more economically empowered than before, even less so: the corona-crisis has made more people dependent on handouts by the government, begging and many are borrowing even more money. Traders sell far less and migrant family members came back to the village, without work.***

2. **Social Empowerment:** is about a positive self-image, and a high social status. How does the society see you, as one of this particular category? Increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma is part of social empowerment. To take part in decision-making, and to make one's voice heard, so that one's voice is making a difference. Also here access to education and to information is important. Freedom of movement and mobility in a safe and secure environment is a condition for social empowerment.

At the beginning of the project, different categories of people are found to be very differently socially empowered. Women are not allowed to speak up, men make all the decisions, also regarding children and the larger household issues. They find this a normal situation. Well-to-do men, those who have jobs and income, they are certainly socially empowered. In the meetings it is very clear that women are not supposed to be there at all, and now that they have to be there, because that is what the project prescribes, they better be quiet. This is the general situation during the first sessions. This subject is discussed during coaching, and slowly, each year better, more women got involved, and they were giving their opinion, when asked. Specific attention for disabled people, for nomads, who are traditionally the lowest at the ladder of social hierarchy, for elderly, for men and women who live in poverty in the Cluster villages, has changed the manner in which the influential men behave towards the vulnerable women and men, and towards women in general.

***At the end of the Watershed project, social empowerment is clearly achieved by vulnerable women and men, who have learnt to speak up, and who are now quite often listened to. They find themselves allowed to sit in meetings with the Union Chairmen and other policy- and decision-makers, and they are even listened to, when they give their opinion. For example, members of the CSOs are asked for their opinion, who should be on the list and who not, of people who should get priority with subsidized toilets and tube wells.***

3. **Political empowerment:** entails the right to organize one selves, for example in Water Management or Farmers' Groups, it also is the right to vote and to be voted for, in general to take part in democratic processes. Decision making power and leadership qualities are important for political empowerment. Also access to information, and above all: to live under rule of law: to be able to utilize the institutions that are meant to protect the citizens.

In 2016, and even now, rich and influential people can always approach the Union Parishad and the government service holders, to lobby in their own and their family members'

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advantage. But poor and vulnerable people, and above all women, they should not even try to approach and speak their mind to the power-holders. There is a direct overlap with social empowerment: women and poor men, elderly and disabled, Dalits and Bede (nomads), are now formally represented by members of the WMCC, they have organized themselves, and as such they have taken steps towards political empowerment. They visit the power-holders together with influential men, also members of the same Citizens' Committee. Whilst at the start hardly women were members of the WMCC, more and more joined. Women represented for example Bede, inhabitants of Cluster villages, midwives and schools.

***Towards the end of the Watershed project, all those who have been selected member of the WMCC and also the NGO Network, have witnessed political empowerment. To be organized means political empowerment, and to be able to speak up, and talk in the benefit of the category of people one represents, is certainly politically empowering. This is positive impact of the Watershed project.***

4. **Physical empowerment:** is of great importance. All economic, social and political empowerment becomes without meaning if physically the basic conditions are not fulfilled. These are amongst others, the right to decide about one's sexuality and about the number of children and spacing between them, family planning methods and use of contraceptives. It also is necessary to have right to proper healthcare, recreation, choice of food, and physical mobility. Most of all access and right to clean water, sanitation facilities are important. The ability to resist violence, the right to safety and security, are steps towards empowerment.

At the beginning of the project GWA staff was told by various women that domestic violence is very common. Most women are not allowed to be involved in decision-making in the family about their sexuality, the number of children, and family-planning methods. School girls have to walk home to use the toilet, and drop out of school all together when their menstruation begins. Child marriage is very common.

Richer households have more than one DTW, and then even are prioritized for yet another one. They also have proper toilets. But poor women and men, elderly and other vulnerable groups, their access to clean water is not always sure at all. Some are not allowed to get water from the DTW of the better off, and then have to drink from ponds or even from the river. Most toilets are not hygienic, and difficult to clean. Toilets are often shared, which is a cause of poor hygiene, since no one feels responsible. The water logging resulting from tidal surges makes the toilets overflow, and unusable. Men choose for open defecation, but for women the situation is a threat to her health, even more so during menstruation, during pregnancy and childbirth.

***The Watershed project has resulted in some more toilets for poor people, some DTWs also. Not many, but certainly some of the target group in Bhola have been physically empowered, because of the attention for hygiene, also in schools, and for menstrual hygiene management (MHM), and for actually getting access to a sanitary improved latrine and a functioning tube well. Regretfully the corona-crisis has disempowered girls and boys, making them marry early, out of poverty, whilst this process was on its return.***



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Waiting for the Focus Group Discussion to begin, with women in Ilisha, a union which is not included in the Watershed project.

### Gender and achievements reached by lobbying and advocacy by CSOs

1. The first achievement was to organize the WMCC with representatives of many categories of people, from highly educated to illiterate, and from well-to-do to very poor, into a group who could work together in a rather equal manner. Together they are Agents of Change.
2. CSO members were asked to check the list of the Union Chairman with names, who would get subsidy for toilets and DTWs, and to make sure that poor people were prioritized. This has changed the behavior of the government departments.
3. CSO members have become skilled in building awareness about the marginalized people, and of them on water, sanitation, gender and advocacy.
4. Open budgets include the separate mentioning of allotments for women, youth, and marginalized people, including for young girls who study in high schools. They also kept budget for establishing deep tube well for marginalized, separate toilets for women, and physically challenged people.
5. The total budget for WASH was increased in the two selected unions.
6. In a total of 9 Union budgets, now there is a separate budget for women.
7. To ensure accountability and transparency, Unions were asked to paint budget on walls.
8. Bede (river nomads) now have 1 DTW in Dhania Union.
9. In one of the unions, of a total of 32 new DTWs, 18 were installed for the poor.
10. In fifty schools of both unions, distributed six thousand sanitary napkins.
11. One sluice gate was renovated in Dhania
12. WMCC influences the UPs to increase allowances for disabled and elderly.
13. In Dhania, the WMCC arranged an annual meeting with marginalized people about the use of safe water.
14. 12 DTWs for marginalized people in the other union.
15. At Bankarhat bazar in Vedurua union, 1 toilet block for men and 1 toilet block for women and 2 DTWs have been installed. Also a 200 meter long drainage system was constructed in that market.
16. The toilets in the cluster village which GWA visited earlier, had an underground pipe to the canal. But that canal was high so that pipe did not work. Now these pipes were cut, and instead septic tanks have been made, so that these toilets function again.



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17. In Dhania, in the same cluster village two DTWs that were unusable before, have been repaired.
18. Rain water harvesting was started by some people, in which the midwife, member of WMCC, took the lead.
19. After GWA training, last year, WMCC identified some areas where needs were the highest.
20. WMCC held meetings with DPHE, BWDB to assure that they will support them in their attempts to make poor women and men benefit more.
21. Woman member of Veduria Union tells that because of the Watershed project, she gets funds for 5 tube wells for poor people, she selects, per year.
22. A woman member of WMCC tells that she conducts an education program for a marginalized group of people about water sanitation and also discusses gender relations in Alinagar, outside the Watershed selected unions.
23. Marginalized people from the nomadic village now can understand water related important issues after getting the training from the Watershed project. Now they convey the same message to the marginalized people in their own language style so that all can internalize the deepness of this subject.
24. Important learning by GWA: Access to safe water is a right.
25. Because of some Petitions for tube wells directed at the UPs, some tube wells are in place now.
26. From Union Parishad to Upazilla Parishad, now many of them are keeping budget for sanitary napkins to distribute in the schools.
27. All women members of the WMCC and the NGO Network visit schools to give a programme talking about water, sanitation, hygiene and menstrual hygiene and distribute sanitary napkins among the girls.
28. Recent meeting organized by Tarun, Jahangir and former UP Chairman with Union Parishad about Gender Guidelines of DORP.



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### Quotes selected by the end of the Watershed project

**Chairman of Veduria Union (67):**

"Marginalized people might not be benefitted from the Watershed project financially or materially, but they have been benefitted with the knowledge about water sanitation and hygiene which can help them to be safer and healthier"

**Fisherman (48):**

"Those who are solvent families can give Tk. 20,000 to the UP, according to government rule tube well users supposed to pay only Tk. 8000, but the Union Parishad asks more Tk. 12,000 from the tube well user before installation. Still, poor people did not get tube wells as long as they can talk to someone influential".

**NGO Network member (woman of 48 year):**

"Even in Corona pandemic, oppression against women in different forms is not stopped, continuing, including forceful prostitution".

She herself says: "All this way I have access to law enforcement officials and other influential people, even the District Commissioner listens to me".

**Yoghurt-maker, member of WMCC (30):**

"Open budget sessions of the UPs help to know the allocation of their budget for marginalized people, including women. Open defecation is also less but not 100% unseen yet."

**Woman member of NGO Network, leader of her NGO for Human and Women's Rights (60+):**

"Because of the Watershed project, women came out of the house to work for the project, attended different meetings and training, we could learn many things related to water and sanitation. By sitting idle at home we could not learn anything of it. If the project is extended, we could convey the message we learned to more people."

**Agricultural Officer (m, 56):**

"After this project, some women CSO members became confident to express their WASH agendas on behalf of poor women, and Government departments are also now a little bit inclined to listen to them when they explain about women's needs."

**Retired professor and Secretary of CSO:**

"From the training sessions of the GWA, I learned about gender and inclusion, how and why we should include diversified people, including women in all kinds of Water Committees. GWA nicely accomplished their training and awareness building session on gender and inclusion with the CSO members. CSO members then conducted awareness-building programs on water and sanitation and gender and inclusion with stakeholders of the project."

"How we tried to get close to the UP and DPHE in need of poor people, but it seemed the project is leaving in the middle of the pathways, Upazilla Parishad also came forward for this work, if the project could stay 2-3 years more, we could do work in other Unions, replicate and scale-up of this work for sure".

**Midwife (65):**

After working with the Watershed, she has noticed: "When women members of the CSO got to the office of BWDB and DPHE, the officers want to listen to them and ask the office assistant to bring tea for them too!"

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### **Bakery owner (50):**

“People are more aware of fresh drinking water and sanitary toilets now, many people in the village have shifted to sanitary toilets. I have started drinking safe water but was careless about this before”.

“With corona, I can only earn 20% of regular income now”.

### **Woman who leads NGO, member of NGO Network:**

About the Watershed project, she said, “By getting involved with the activities of the project including having training about WASH, women CSO members she found are now more vocal about their rights than before”.

“The training of GWA on Gender, Inclusion and Advocacy was very useful for me”.

### **Woman owner of NGO (47):**

“When friends of my children came to my house, I also taught them about water sanitation and hygiene, including proper hand washing”.

“Earlier, the fishermen and nomadic people did toilet in the river, now they can use the installed toilets on the ground. For the Watershed project, she went to the schools to train the schoolgirls and on water sanitation and Hygiene and some other social menace to the girls like eave teasing, early marriage, etc.”

### **Journalist (32):**

" Women and men both have been benefitted from this project, and marginalized people not a hundred percent."

### **Leader of NGO (m, 33):**

“From the scope of learning and awareness building about Water and Sanitation, the project has been a great success”.

"Local government leaders like Chairmen and members of the Union Parishad, only understand their own needs, interests, and luxury. They are not looking at the needs of poor people at all, forget quickly they won the election with the mandate of those people”.

"The Watershed project could not (yet) curb the corruption of local government leaders as well as the government departments in Bhola district.”

## **Corona**

DORP staff distributed leaflets about the precaution of Covid-19, masks, and went around the villages with a mike-rickshaw to make people aware of the situation. Also billboards, beside the roads were setup and a TV-scroll for the local channels.

During Coronavirus lockdown, and after Amphan Cyclone, some Solvent CSO members raised some funds to help the poor CSO members and other poor people of Juggi Polli and Cluster villages.

Fishermen depend on high sales during a few months, and now, because of corona, the sales are down, whilst the costs remain as high.

There are many fishermen whose economic conditions are affected by the Corona pandemic, not a single taka fishermen received, from the incentive package announced by the government to compensate for the damage caused by the Corona, he added. These poor fisher families have used up their working capital to cover family expenses, they need to be supported, his wife said.

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The lockdown and social distancing rules, due to Covid-19, has affected every area of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors: from catching, through landing, processing, and marketing, as well as stocking of ponds, all are harshly affected. From Watershed, the help for Corona and the cyclone Amphan was not enough to cover all marginalized groups in Bhola.

At the beginning of the Corona outbreak, there were no people or only a few affected in this district, but during Eid, many people came back to villages for celebrating Eid, which caused the spreading of Coronavirus very fast in Bhola district. The woman, who told us this has installed a water tap in front of her house with soap, besides the road, for passers-by.

As a worker of two women rights organizations, her observation revealed that "even in Corona pandemic, oppression against women in different forms are not being halted, rather increased.", in the last one month, she got information about ten domestic violence in her area, some were so critical that she had to inform the Police Super (SP). She mentioned, for example, one-woman victim came to her with a complaint about her husband, who does not have any work outside the home now, he stays home for the whole day, and engages in quarreling with her and he also beats her. Another woman who came to her with a complaint about her husband who got married to another woman leaving them without money to somewhere with that woman, then she fell in a deep problem of supporting her family. In such a kind of violence and harassment, she had to inform the Police Super (SP). During the Corona pandemic, like many others, she is also with fear of falling into a deep financial crisis soon. From Watershed project in Corona time she did not get a call to attend any meeting with CSOs, and she did not know even there was any meeting or not.

The yoghurt-maker of the WMCC tells that the business of his family is down, and his income is less than half of before. People are now not allowed to arrange social gatherings like wedding ceremonies, where he used to sell sweet curds as a dessert. During the Corona pandemic, poor people are not only striving for food and money but also for maintaining social distancing. They are in fear of visiting the hospital, with any other health problems. Although Schools keep their classes shut down, their toilets are kept unlocked so that the public can use it

From the beginning of the Watershed project, they taught about hand washing, and now they are more practicing it, they never forget to clean the hands before doing anything. She has come in need of her neighbours, who were corona affected and survived. For the protection of Corona, in different villages, young volunteers keep the drums of water with soap in the entry points, and they monitor people clean their hands on the way to enter and exit villages.

During the Corona outbreak and after the cyclone Amphan, the Purshova Commissioner distributed relief (bag with rice, lentil, potato, oil can, Dettol, detergent soap, etc.) among 20 distressed families. In all these relief distribution work, DORP staff and some CSO members attended.

The NGO Network helped 20-30 distressed families in the Corona pandemic. One of the interviewees told, that as far as he knows, during corona and after the cyclone Amphan, all over the country 140 Upazila chairmen were arrested for stealing government relief.

In the Corona times, chairmen and members of the Union Parishads of the ruling party got 3 to 4 bags of rice, but poor people on the embankment, for whom the relief was meant, got nothing.



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### Amphan

During Amphan cyclone, in Bhola Sadar Upazila, there was not much damage.

The Hindu people who earn their living with puffed rice, their clay oven drowned in the cyclone. Their living goes downhill.

After Amphan, for example the Adorsho Cluster village was flooded with water, toilets were still not good to use. The people of the Adorsho cluster village do grocery shop business and work as day laborers in the agriculture field and construction work, which scopes are limited now.

After the cyclone Amphan, the Upazila Agriculture office provided with vegetable seeds (free of cost) for the poor farmers through the Union Parishad. But nobody received financial incentives yet.

After Cyclone Amphan, the midwife helped many families in the neighbourhood, and also being a member of the CSOs, she raised funds for marginalized people, and also distributed it.

After the cyclone Amphan, the relief first came to the UNO Office of the Upazilla Parishad, and, Upazilla Parishad sent it to the Union Parishad, from Union Parishad Office, they distributed 2500 bags of dry food among the distressed family. According to the demand list of the Bapda Union, people of the Juggi Polli has also received that relief. On the other hand, after the cyclone Amphan, DC office, Naval Office, Red crescent, and police also distributed relief in the cluster villages. A group of members of the CSOs did some work of relief distribution ( packets of rice, edible oil, potato, lentils, and musk soaps, hand sanitizer) by following WHO and government health safety guidelines for Corona. They could not give relief to many distressed people this time because some CSOs members were not solvent, they had to help them too.



Cluster village

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### Conclusion

Overall, it is clear that the situation has improved, as far as the project intended and had the power to do. The organisation of CSOs by DORP was very successful, and the CSOs grew from a group of influential men and one or two quiet women into a group with more equality and appreciation for each other's contributions. Towards the end, the number of women was a bit higher, and they were definitely politically empowered in the sense, that decision-makers would listen to them. From a gender perspective this is a major and also a substantial achievement.

Both safe water and hygienic toilets are more important for women than for men. Men may use more water for bathing etc., but women are responsible to fetch it for them and for all family members. Water is heavy for women, for girls, for disabled and elderly people, so for all of them it is beneficial to have a tube-well with hand pump nearby. Much more than for men. Also hygienic toilets are vital for women, whilst men have no problem with less hygienic options. This is the reason that this project was essential for women. Every functioning tube well and hygienic toilet that has become available to poor, elderly and disabled women, is a great advantage to them.

From the telephonic interviews it is clear that the biggest gain of the project is the impact on awareness and knowledge about hygiene for health of all.

In previous reports GWA has listed many recommendations for the ongoing project. Here we focus on the recommendations that were expressed by the interviewees by telephone in July and August 2020. Because the project is over, most recommendations are about extension and scaling up, some are about what could have been done better.

1. The Watershed project did not include any hardware. The DORP staff in Bhola express the need for some funds, at least for repair of tube wells and toilets of poor people.
2. If the project is extended for a few years, the learnings can be applied for scaling up to eleven Unions.
3. If the project is extended, CSOs will be more empowered, and more effective in bargaining with the government department officers, which could bring changes in removing corruption, and making them more accountable to the people.

From a gender perspective the project has been very positive for women and vulnerable groups of people, but the coverage has been limited. It is wished that the CSOs will stay collected and continue to do their advocacy work together.

