Sector Forum on Gender-transformative Social Accountability for inclusive WASH

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Hotel Sarina, Dhaka

Water for Women Fund: SHOMOTA Project & Research Award

Introduction to Gender-transformative social accountability for inclusive WASH Research Award

This Sector Forum Outcome Report is part of a Research Award supported by the Water for Women Fund of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The Fund seeks to address knowledge gaps in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) project delivery. The research has been undertaken over four years (2018 to 2022).

The research is being implemented through an academic-NGO partnership between: the Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney (ISF-UTS); World Vision Bangladesh (WVB); World Vision Australia (WVA); and the University of Rajshahi (UoR).

The research explores the contribution of social accountability to inclusive WASH, with a focus on improving water service levels in rural Bangladesh. The research contributes to WVB's implementation of Citizen Voice and Action (CVA), a social accountability approach which mobilises and equips citizens to monitor and advocate for the improvement of government services.

The research is linked to the implementation of Strengthening Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in WASH in Bangladesh (SHOMOTA), a civil society organisation (CSO) project also funded under the Water for Women Fund. Implemented by WVB, SHOMOTA is an integrated project incorporating water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), the empowerment of women and people with disabilities, and engagement with government and the private sector. The project's primary goal is to equip key stakeholders within sub-national governments, schools, businesses and community-based organisations (CBOs) to improve gender- and disability-inclusive WASH in schools and communities.

The research award is structured across four phases.

Phase 1 - Explore the praxis of gender-transformative social accountability through literature review and case study of CVA practice in the Nobo Jatra Program (NJP)

Phase 2 – Lead and document the co-design and start-up of gender-transformative social accountability in SHOMOTA project sites

Phase 3 – Lead reflective research of of gender-transformative social accountability implementation by SHOMOTA

Phase 4 – Assess outcomes and promote learning on gender-transformative social accountability

Across all four years, the research partnership seeks to catalyse sector dialogue on gender-transformative social accountability for inclusive WASH through discussion forums and dissemination of research findings.

Report of Sector Forum - Tamara Megaw (ISF-UTS) and Proshanto Roy (WVB)

Overview of Sector Forum on Gender-transformative social accountability for inclusive WASH

The purpose is to catalyse sector dialogue with Bangladesh stakeholders through discussion forums and dissemination of research outputs, to build momentum for learning, commitment and ongoing action for gender transformative social accountability for inclusive WASH. In 2020, a successful WASH Sector Forum was held to discuss the co-design of the gender transformative social accountability model. In 2021, no WASH Sector Forum was held due to COVID-19 impacts and restrictions on meeting. In 2022, the WASH Sector Forum focused on the outcome assessment of gender-transformative social accountability (GTSA) piloted through SHOMOTA project. The event both shared information from the Project and invited discussion from sectoral actors in Bangladesh to learn from their experiences.

Attending the Forum were 66 participants from several organisations including: Ministry of Social Welfare, Director General of Health, Chairman of Union Parishad, UNICEF, UNDP, Organisation of People with Disability (NCDW), Disability network, Sanitation and Water for All network, Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council Bangladesh, FANSA BD, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Dhaka Post (DFAT), WVB and other non-governmental organisations. Community members of Citizen Voice and Action Working Group participated in the Forum. ISF-UTS and UoR supported the facilitation of the Sector Forum.

This document is a record of proceedings and discussions from the Forum, for use by the organisations which attended as well as other organisations who work in WASH, gender, social inclusion and/or good governance policy and programming. The purpose is to build momentum for learning and action in inclusive WASH, and to inform ongoing sector dialogue.

Highlights of the session on Gender-transformative social accountability for inclusive WASH

The Sector Forum began with welcome remarks from Chandan Z Gomes, Director Program Development and Quality Assurance, World Vision Bangladesh, and Duncan McCullough, Second Secretary for Economic and Commercial Diplomacy at the Australian High Commission Bangladesh. After the introductory session, the Project Manager of SHOMOTA from World Vision Bangladesh, Proshanto Sharma Roy shared a short video highlighting the contribution of gender transformative social accountability to the improvement of gender- and disability-inclusive WASH services in schools and communities.

ISF-UTS researcher Dr Keren Winterford (ISF-UTS) then presented key learnings from the outcome assessment of GTSA piloted through SHOMOTA project. The outcome assessment found gender-transformative change outcomes were evident in (i) increased agency of women and people living with a disability, especially to participate and engage in decision-making in WASH governance (ii) equitable relations – gendered relations in households, at the community level, and changed relations between government officials and women and people living with a disability in formal governance structures. The outcome assessment identified significant contribution of GTSA to improved institutional structures for WASH governance, through activating non-functioning Ward and Union WATSAN committees and strengthening service user and provider relationships through dialogue. New allocation of government fundings mobilised through GTSA provided more inclusive WASH infrastructure.

Three community leaders shared their experiences, learning and challenges working as members of the CVA Working Group: Hamida Begum, Tulshirchar Union Parishad, Sadar Upazila, Jamalpur; Shihab Siddique, Fingri Union Parishad, Sadar Upazila, Satkhira; and Asha Begum, Kanchipara Union Parishad, Fulchari Upazila, Gaibandha. Hamida and Shihab shared from the perspective of people living with disabilities. Three chairs of Union Parishad and UP WATSAN Committee (local government representatives) shared their reflections and benefits of GTSA engaging with CVA Working Groups: Omar Saki Ferdous Palash, Kulla Union Parishad, Assasuni Upazila, Satkhira; Harun or Rashid, Gidari Union Parishad, Sadar Upazila, Gaibandha; Abdur Rahim Badsha, Goalerchar Union Parishad, Islampur Upazila, Jamalpur.

Shukendu Shakor Ray, Ministry of Health and Family Planning, delivered remarks representing the Directorate of General Health Office. Salma Begum, Assistant Director, Ministry of Social Welfare, delivered her remarks on behalf of the Ministry. Sagor Marandy, Director – Operations, WVB, provided concluding remarks and a vote of thanks.

Question and Answer session on Research Learnings

A variety of different themes were represented in questions from participants. Participants asked about the representation of people with disabilities, transgender people and the sample size, in the research process for the outcome assessment. They also asked about how the research and CSO project responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Questions were asked about indicators to measure control of resources, independence, decision-making ability, women's empowerment and confidence, within gender-transformative change. Participants were also interested in how the mindsets of men have changed and in which ways have they changed. Further questions were asked about disability inclusion within the SHOMOTA project, the scorecard indicators and sustainability concerns. Participants were keen to reflect on how can gender-transformative social accountability be effective in sectors other than WASH.

Small Group Reflections

To discuss the learning from the project in more detail, small groups were formed comprised of both external participants and SHOMOTA project staff and researchers. Below is a summary of the group reflections:

Best learnings and messages to take away

- Inclusion of people with disabilities and other marginalised people was impressive
- Increased leadership role of persons with disabilities in CVA
- Disabled people are getting their desired rights and benefits
- CVA approach is an effective approach towards social accountability and sustainability
- Sensitisation of rights holders was successful
- Awareness on menstrual health hygiene of adolescent girls
- Certification of 100% inclusive sanitation coverage achieved
- Created a clear, visible impact
- Women are becoming self dependent day by day
- Involved local government
- Transformation of gender roles
- Ownership by community
- Social accountability mechanism functions well

Areas of improvement

- There needs to be a strategy to support hard to reach groups
- Other marginalised people (such as sexual minorities, gender diverse community, religious minorities) need to be included
- WASH infrastructure as example so that community and local government can take this forward with replication
- Gender transformative mindset need to be carried on
- Need to include person with disability in market value chain and income generating activities
- Need to functionalise the Union Parishad
- Create active partnership with government members so that sustainability is ensured
- Follow-up of CVA activities is needed and should be supported by local government
- More investment to promote inclusion of people with different disabilities
- To connect project with national policy and strategy through local and international platforms
- Consider how to replicate success in other areas
- Promote equitable access to services

- Increase training
- Rehabilitation services including assistive device should be recognized as a tool for inclusion, budget should be included
- Use universal inclusive designing for infrastructure development
- Mechanism for the sustainable WATSAN Committee meeting

Next steps

This Sector Forum was an important step to greater collaboration between non-government organisations, government partners and World Vision Bangladesh in sharing learning about inclusive WASH.

The Learning Paper from the outcome assessment will be shared on the ISF-UTS website and the Water for Women Learning Hub in the coming weeks. To stay updated about the research award, Gender-transformative social accountability for inclusive WASH, please see https://waterforwomen.uts.edu.au/social-accountability/

For more information on the Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney please see https://www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/our-research/institute-sustainable-futures/our-research/international.

For more information about the Water for Women Fund, please see https://www.waterforwomenfund.org/en/index.aspx

Photographs

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