



Brief

CSOs' Engagement in Budget Tracking

The Government of Bangladesh has acknowledged the crucial role of the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is also one of the targets (17.17) of SDG-17.

Though no institutional framework has been developed to ensure effective CSO participation, CSOs engagement for SDGs is encouraging in many ways to track the delivery and ensure accountability in its implementation process. Focusing and centering this important role, the government as well as many international cooperation bodies, has initiated many programmes to foster SDGs' implementation.

Two CSOs, namely, Water Management Citizen Committee (WMCC) and Watershed NGO Network (WNN), have been formed and socially-excluded and less-welcome citizens have been included in these two CSOs to attain "Leave No One Behind" goal.

One CSO represents people from various sections of the society while another CSO represents local NGOs who can bargain, influence and sensitise the local Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) authority as well as local citizens. Development Organisation of the Rural Poor (DORP) will act as a facilitator to strengthen capacity of the CSOs in accelerating the process.

Watershed programme has undertaken a number of activities to engage CSO in local policy advocacy and monitoring progress of WASH and IWRM. As a CSO, DORP aims to strengthening capacity of local CSOs in contributing towards achieving SDG-6 by 'Budget Tracking' on WASH budget in Bhola - thus sensitising policymakers towards challenges in implementation and allocation efficiency in resource distribution, bringing more transparency in the implementation process, facilitating exchange of information and coordination with all those working and interested to work on the Water Resource Management (WRM) and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH).

Pre-budget and open budget dialogues are two events which are providing an opportunity to engage CSOs in transparency and accountability process of budgeting. Union Parishad is the lowest tier of local government structure and Upazila comprises of unions. In this particular initiative, two unions namely, Vedia and Dhania are example where Bhola Sadar is administrative unit to access for Lobby and Advocacy by engagement of CSOs.



CSO in Bhola and WaterShed

The CSOs have been engaged with budget tracking through mobilising community people to express their needs. The CSO members have motivated chairmen of union parishads to display their budget (FY 17-18) so that it can be seen by the community and subsequently be published as budget booklet.

CSOs have supported organising pre-budget and open budget discussions through which budget is becoming an issue of discussions at lowest tier of local government institutions and citizens are getting the opportunity to get involved in decision-making process of WASH service delivery and Water Resources Management at upazila-level.

The demand on WASH from the community was shared with Upazila Parishad through the submissions of petitions organised by CSOs. Thus a bottom-up approach and systematic lobby and advocacy is being attempted to be introduced in Watershed programme in Bhola.

It may be mentioned that equity, gender and social inclusion cannot be addressed without inviting and engaging local communities as well as CSOs. However, to engage them, political and social issues also need to be considered in line with local context.

Gradually the initiative can link the citizens and improve understanding capacity of various groups of people at union and upazila level. About 15 per cent budget for WASH from Annual Development Programme (ADP) is a commitment from Local Government Division (LGD) which is an opportunity for CSO to explore and link. IWRM is new in practice level though coordination among service providers and citizens need to be strengthened while training of CSOs on the tactics of lobbying and advocacy and getting into the entry point of lobbying can help in the process.

Pre Budget 2017-18: Beginning of Engagement

Union Parishad Operational Manual 2009 says every union has to conduct ward sabha (meeting) prior to open budget for next fiscal year, i.e., July to June. A union is comprised of nine wards while compilations of community's expectations from wards were unfolded through pre-budget dialogue.

However, this is not unique practice as depicted in operation manual while facilitation is needed to accelerate the process. Watershed programme has brought opportunity to DORP to act as a catalyst and facilitate local CSO to engage in budget tracking process so that CSOs continue to do so even after conclusion of the projects.

On the eve of the pre-budget dialogue in 2017 CSOs sit together to prepare the pre-budget discussions. They get engaged through presenting a paper prepared by DORP which includes basic information of the Union to initiate the discussion at the "Sanitation, Water Supply and Sewerage" standing committee of union parishad. Unions organised pre-budget discussions where CSOs engagement was an added value for local communities as they can now access services better at upazila level.

In the dialogues, multi-stakeholders, government officials and community people were present. Most of the participants expressed their needs, particularly marginalised people like coolies, boatmen, bedes (nomads), yogurt makers, traditional birth attendants (TBAs) who are not properly invited in many events of Union Parishad but they are necessary part of the community and contributing towards their improvement.

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It could be understood that when marginalised people's expectations are addressed by local authorities and they are also part of CSO members, it is empowering them and building confidence as they are able to meet local decision makers and make them listen to their needs and demands.

They mainly highlighted deep tube wells, ring slabs for toilets, public toilets, drains and specified budget for their demands which is BDT 30.47 million for two unions. Based on this, per capita WASH demand stands at BDT 483. CSO are getting engaged with union parishads by preparing wall painting, banner and "miking" (publicity using loud speakers).

The participants of the pre-budget sessions discussed about demands received from wards on WASH, introduction of Watershed and DORP, commitments of elected members of union parishads and inclusion of marginalised people in the process of budget preparation.

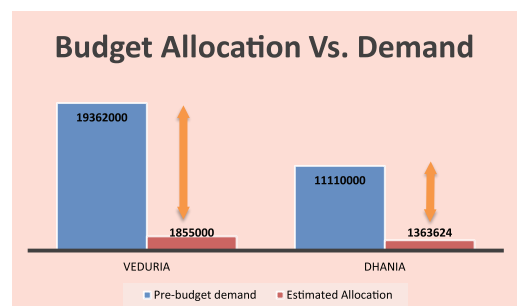
The draft Water Rules-2017 under Water Act-2013 was also being shared by Water Management Citizen Committee (WMCC) and discussed in the dialogue about operationalising the rules. Around 1600 ponds and 491 tube wells in these two unions are the main sources of drinking water (BBS Census 2011 and GoB web portal).

Pre-budget session has given an opportunity for engaging community, CSO, service providers as well as public representatives which is also one of the targets of SDGs. As an example, representatives from DPHE as service provider attended the pre-budget session which was not normal practice but the CSO has brought them to meet with Union people and connected with disconnected. Though four tube well mechanics of Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) is officially posted in one upazila but their presence is not known to the service recipients. The CSO mobilised these to increase sharing with community, which was not the common practice.

Pre-budget is a ground level initiative where people can express their needs. As there is no institutional framework to ensure CSO participation in public interest issues, this type of dialogue has been taking place to give a space for CSO and scope to act accordingly.

Open Budget 2017-18: Downward Accountability

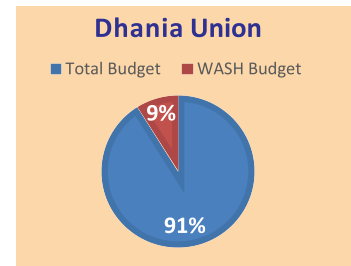
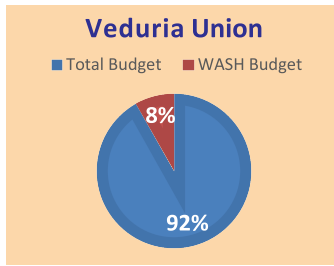
Every union parishad is required to prepare a budget (both revenue and development) with participation of the community people sixty days before the commencement of fiscal year. As per revised Union Parishad Act 2009, it is mandatory to form 13 Standing Committees in each union and the Operation Manual of Union Parishad mentions the conducting of open budget in every year in a befitting manner. But the practice of Union Parishad, as it is existed, is not inclusive and not happening as committed in many rules, policies and plans.



Open budget dialogues in two unions by engaging CSOs is an opportunity through 'Watershed' initiative where community people especially females are getting a platform to express their needs. Budget is a numerical plan. When it is for development purpose then male and female should participate from its preparation to finalisation.

Sufficient publicity through loud speaker (mike) and visualisation of the budget issues through banners, leaflets, posters accelerate maximum community participation and make the budget really open to all.

Thus the initiative of budgets published by union parishads are another milestone of open budgeting characteristics. SDG-6 underscored the need for increased people's participation in ensuring universal access to water and sanitation. Budget tracking is a process by which people's participation as well as CSO engagement can improve the situation.



Around 600 community people including 100 females participated in this dialogue. BDT 20.93 million budget (FY 2017-18) allocated for the Veduria union while budget for WASH is only BDT 1.85 million. Other union called Dhania received an allocation of BDT 1.36 million for WASH against the total budget of BDT 13.92 million.

Way Forward

DORP as CSO having long experience in mentoring other CSOs on lobby and advocacy initiatives based on local context and is playing facilitating role to this process to strengthening the capacity of CSO at Bhola. WASH budget allocated BDT 3.22 millions in two unions in 2017-18 fiscal year which is 9% of total budget and thus per capita allocation is BDT 51.

A bottom-up approach and systematic lobby and advocacy is trying to introduce in Watershed program at Bhola. It is learned that Equity, Gender and social inclusion cannot be addressed without inviting and engaging community as well as CSO. However, to engage them, political and social issues also need to consider in line with local context. Gradually the initiative can link and increase capacity of understanding of various groups of people at Union and Upazila level. 15% budget for WASH from Annual Development Program (ADP) is a commitment from Local Government Division which is an opportunity for CSO to explore and linking. IWRM is new in practice level though co-ordination among service providers, and citizens still need to strengthening while coaching of CSOs on the tactics of Lobbying & Advocacy and getting in to the entry point of lobbying can help in the process.

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Lobby Entry Point

