

PREPARING FOR CLIMATE CHANGE IN RIVER ISLAND AREAS

In the middle of the Meghna River lies Char Madura, home to more than 500 families. It takes three hours by boat to reach the island from Narsingdi, north of Bangladesh's capital Dhaka.

In a few weeks, much of this island community will be flooded due to the monsoon. This year the rains are late but the people are prepared.

Under the UNICEF-supported Sanitation, Hygiene Education and Water project in Bangladesh (SHEWA-B) implemented by the Department of Public Health Engineering with help of numerous local NGOs, communities are learning how to improve their practices and infrastructure to ensure their resilience in the face of climate change. This project is funded by the UK Department of International Development.

Bangladesh's geographic location and geo-morphical conditions mean it is susceptible to regular flooding, cyclones and other natural disasters that impede development. Climate change issues such as sea level rise, soil erosion and salinization increase the need for improved hygiene and sanitation measures.

On Char Madura, community hygiene promoter Md Humayun Kabir has been busy convincing community members to do just this.

To address water, sanitation and hygiene behaviours within his community Kabir promotes regular hand washing with soap or ash, using sanitary latrines and drinking and cooking with safe water.

To remain effective during the monsoon, and as climate change affects water levels, latrines need to be raised and efforts made to protect the safety of drinking water.



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A raised latrine on Char Madura. During the rainy season and as climate change raises sea levels, this toilet will be above water level, preventing sewage contamination.

"There are no unhygienic latrines in this community now. Most of the latrines have been raised above water level during the monsoon to prevent bacteria from seeping out and contaminating the area," Kabir explained. "We also have two arsenic and iron free tubewells serving the community – one for the whole community, supported by UNICEF and one private."

Md Habibur Rahman is in the process of constructing a new, raised latrine for his family. He lives with his wife, six sons, a daughter-in-law and a grandson. "We have already laid four rings, but I will add another two before the latrine is finished," Habibur said. "When the rains come, my family won't get sick."

Women in the community are quick to explain what else they are doing to protect the health of their families.

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In Focus: Water and Sanitation

Poor sanitation and hygiene and unsafe water affect the health of million of people in Bangladesh. This edition looks at what UNICEF is doing to address this public health problem. Pages 3 - 9.

Special Report: Cyclone Aila response

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Q&A WITH UNICEF STAFF

Rezina Sultana, Programme Officer, UNICEF Rangpur Field Office, North Bangladesh. Length of service: 11 years.



Tell us about your family and childhood? I was born in Narshingdi but grew up in Dhaka with my seven siblings (three brothers, four sisters). I am fifth among them. My parents were school teachers. Education was very important in the family and all of us have Masters

(my Masters is in Bengali Literature). My family is now scattered mostly around Bangladesh, but we meet once a year in our home village. I also have my own family – husband Mominur Rahman Bablu and an 18 month old daughter Rodela Rahman Pew.

When did you join UNICEF? I first joined UNICEF 11 years ago, in November of 1997 as UNICEF Project Coordinator in Bogra. I have been involved with programme work since then – monitoring and assisting government and NGOs to implement UNICEF-supported projects. Two and a half years ago I moved from Bogra to Rangpur with similar responsibilities.

Tell us about one particularly interesting or successful project? I was involved with a special water and sanitation intervention in Gaibandha from 2003-2006. The project was initially a pilot in that area, but it was so successful in improving awareness, use of safe water and sanitary latrines in Gaibandha that it was expanded to more districts.

What are your plans for the future? I want to continue working for UNICEF and I hope to develop my own capabilities, experience and eventually progress to a higher position. I like working for UNICEF and feel I have the opportunity to serve women and children of this country directly. Working in partnership with government and NGOs I can make changes happen. Women and children need a lot of help to become proud citizens, receive their due respect and the things they need – especially in light of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. UNICEF offers me the opportunity to serve them. ☐



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A young girl washes her hands with soap using a hand-washing device outside a sanitary latrine in Kondarpar village in Kamarganj Union of Gaibandha Sadar, Bangladesh.

THE FACTS: SANITATION, HYGIENE AND WATER

More than three-quarters of Bangladeshis – over 115 million people – live in rural areas. Although most Bangladeshis now use latrines, most of these are not hygienic.

Of the latrines in rural areas, only 32% meet international sanitary standards. Among the poorest families, almost one in three people still defecate in the open. Poor sanitation leads to diarrhea, typhoid and other diseases that impact childhood mortality and morbidity rates.

Millions of city slum-dwellers live in an environment polluted by rubbish because there is no waste disposal system. Slum houses perch on the edges of fetid cesspools as there is inadequate drainage and access to sanitary latrines.

Also, without water pipelines, slum-dwellers are forced to buy safe water from vendors, which is often prohibitively expensive.

In a country where only a tiny proportion of people wash both of their hands with soap or ash before preparing or eating food, UNICEF is working hard to promote good hygiene and sanitation.

Menstrual hygiene is also a problem for many adolescent girls and women, who lack the privacy to properly wash and dry menstrual rags. Using wet rags often result in infection.

Rapid progress was made in access to safe drinking water through the installation of tubewells in the 80s and 90s. In 1993, arsenic contaminated water was detected in Bangladesh. The arsenic comes from arsenic-rich sediments deposited by the region's river systems thousands of years ago.

Today, about 20 million people in Bangladesh are at risk of using water containing arsenic above the government drinking water limit of 50 parts per billion. This is a major public health concern. □

SANITATION, HYGIENE EDUCATION AND WATER IN BANGLADESH

The Sanitation, Hygiene Education and Water project in Bangladesh (SHEWA-B), funded by the UK Department of International Development, aims to reach 30 million people by working in both urban and rural areas to create demand from local communities to improve their own hygiene behaviors, sanitation infrastructure and practices and water supply points.

2008 was the International Year of Sanitation. During the year UNICEF helped to raise national and local awareness of water and sanitation issues, including by collaborating with the government and other partners on Global Handwashing Day. 75,000 primary and secondary school students participated in the event.

By the end of 2008, the project had:

- supported the development of social maps and action plans in 133,000 rural communities in 19 districts and coordinated intensive hygiene promotion activities
- trained 10,000 community hygiene promoters and all local water and sanitation committee

members to coordinate safe water, sanitation and hygiene practices

- increased knowledge of hygiene and safe water from 72% to 92% in rural areas
- assisted to increase hand washing after defecation from 17% to 30%
- assisted to increase hand washing after cleaning a baby's bottom and disposing of feces from 22% or 34%
- improved latrine use in rural programme areas from 79% to 84% and from 60% to 71% among the poorest
- improved cleanliness of latrines from 56% to 67%
- motivated people to construct 355,000 latrines, benefiting 3.8 million people
- installed 5,300 arsenic-free water points, reaching 550,000 people
- worked with national TV and radio and private TV stations to run a year-long campaign on handwashing and hygiene.

ENSURING ARSENIC-FREE WATER FOR VILLAGERS

No matter how hard Abeda Khatun is pumping the tubewell, no water will come out. Although the rainy season is about to start, everything looks dry. In the canal, boats are stranded on the mud.

The shortage of safe water during the dry season adds to the hardship of the daily life of the villagers living in Zinodpur community and in the other 20 neighbouring villages of Nabinagar upazila (sub-district) of Brahmanbaria district, Bangladesh. But the problem with water is not only scarcity.

The presence of high level of arsenic in the tubewells is also a huge concern for the 550,000 people living in this area, east of Bangladesh's capital city Dhaka.

In Bangladesh, there are more than 8,000 villages where 80 per cent of all tubewells are arsenic contaminated.

It is estimated that 20 million people are exposed to arsenic contamination in the country. Bangladesh has the largest population exposed to arsenic in the world.

"To avoid arsenic, we were using the water from the pond as most tubewell water is contaminated. We used

to boil this water for drinking. For other purposes, we were still using the tubewell but during the dry season, the water problem turned into a crisis as the ground water level fell down and we could not get any more water from these tubewells," says Abeda Khatun (55), one of the villagers.

"During the monsoon, most of the village goes under water and it is even more difficult to collect water. Even if we boil the pond water, this water is causing diseases. Children often suffer from diarrhea and dysentery," explains Shahana Begum, 37, a mother of three children. Her youngest son recently recovered from diarrhea.

Communities move forward with new technology

To address this problem, the Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE), with the support of UNICEF, has developed a pond sand filter.

This new technology is simple and easy to adopt at the local level to ensure safe water supply.

“A simple hand pump is used to lift water from a pond to a concrete tank. The pond water passes through different chambers of sand and brick chip layers, which removes bacteria and other pathogens and is turned into safe drinking water,” said Pronob Kumar Bhowmik, DPHE Sub-Assistant Engineer.

A total of 15 pond sand filters have been installed in Nabinagar Upazilla to combat water scarcity and ensure safe water supply for thousand of local people.

They are built under the Sanitation, Hygiene Education and Water Supply in Bangladesh project funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and implemented by UNICEF.

Arsenic mitigation activities in this project are fully integrated with hygiene and sanitation promotion.

The project aims to install 21,000 new arsenic-free water points over five years and gives priority to communities facing arsenic contamination like Zinodpur.

Communities choose which option is best suited to their needs, considering costs and the possibilities of health hazards, such as contamination by other chemicals or germs.

Communities are responsible for selecting sites, contributing to set-up costs and maintaining and operating the alternative sources.

Initially, villagers who were not knowledgeable about such technology, were not convinced about the water quality.

“People were reluctant and did not believe that pond water can be purified by this simple technology. We organized a meeting with selected local representatives and young people. An engineer from DPHE came and explained the technical aspects of the filter,” said Masud Chowdhury, the local coordinator of implementing NGO Volunteer Association for Family Welfare and Social Development.

“When we understood that this water would be arsenic



A villager pumps water from a pond which has been made free from arsenic by a sand filter in Zinopur, Brahmanbaria, Bangladesh.

© Arifa S Sharmin/UNICEF

free, then we came forward to help build the pond sand filter,” says Farhad Uddin Chowdhury who agreed to have the pond sand filter built on his land and accepted to share the water of his pond with all community members.

Farhad was also nominated by the local Water User Group to be the caretaker of the pond sand filter.

The 10-member Water User Group was formed before installation of the filter and helped to collect about 20 per cent of the total hardware cost. A total of 35,000 taka (US\$ 514) was required to build the filter.

“We have to ensure that the pond sand filter is always full of water,” explains Bilkish Akhter, a member of the Water User Group.

“The rule is very simple: anyone who collects water from the pump should lift the same amount of water from the pond by using hand pump for the next person to use.”

The pond sand filter has brought new hope to this community as well as the surrounding villages who also come to collect safe drinking water.

Today the community members have access to safe water during both the dry season and the rainy season. □

This project is funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

TEACHING SANITATION TO URBAN POOR



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Lipi (blue dress), leader of adolescent group (Kishori Dall), makes house visits with other group members to monitor hygiene practices in Driver Para of Purbo Gobindapur neighbourhood in Gaibandha township in northern Bangladesh.

Mahmuda Akhter is an educated young woman in her 20s. This morning, she is rounding up housewives for an informal meeting. Her mission is to share lessons on personal hygiene, neighbourhood cleanliness, sanitation and using safe drinking water. She is working in a district called Driver Para – or drivers’ area – where low-income drivers’ families live.

During the evening discussion in East Gobindapur, in Gaibandha district town, about 250 km north west of Bangladesh’s capital city Dhaka, Mahmuda explains why the residents should spend their time and money constructing sanitary latrines and concrete platforms around tubewells.

Teaching sanitation

Mahmuda, popularly known as Mukta in her neighbourhood, points to a rough sketch of a map hung from a rope and invites fellow housewives to participate in discussion.

“Who owns sanitary latrines and tubewells with concrete platforms?” Mukta asks.

A few hands are raised from the audience, while those without hygienic facilities look shyly at one another.

Although there are 264 people in Driver Para, there are only six hygienic latrines. Of 34 water points, 26 do not

have concrete platforms to prevent contamination. The areas around the latrines and tubewells are dirty, as no one cleans them regularly.

“Today we will discuss and learn about personal hygiene. Everyone should participate and no one should feel embarrassed about sharing her personal problems,” Mukta tells her audience.

Generating enthusiasm

The informal education programme Mukta attends is part of a nationwide project known as Sanitation, Hygiene Education and Water Supply in Bangladesh.

The project, initiated by UNICEF and the Bangladesh Government in 2007, and funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), works to reduce mortality, morbidity and malnutrition due to diseases – especially among women and children – in 31 urban municipalities.

“It is now three months since we started the courtyard discussions here in Driver Para, and you can already see the enthusiasm among the audience,” said Farhana, who works with Mukta as a UNICEF volunteer.

Makta and Farhana also run similar meetings with children and teenage girls.

Constructing latrines

The meetings convinced Mosammet Parvin to have her own sanitary latrine at home.

Until recently, Ms. Parvin, like many Driver Para residents, was sharing unhygienic latrines and tubewells with her neighbours.

Beyond educating communities, the broader programme is planning to build thousands of latrines – including public latrine facilities – and municipalities will receive support to install rain water harvesters, new drainage systems and waste composting plants.

Composting barrels and tricycle trucks will also be provided to aid in waste disposal and provide livelihood opportunities for urban residents.

Funds are also available for the construction of 720 water pipe systems to bring safe water to less developed urban communities. □



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Mahmuda Akther, a female community hygiene promoter, works on a social map with a group of women in Driver Para of Purbo Gobindapur neighbourhood in Gaibandha, Bangladesh.

These projects are funded by the UK Department for International Development

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Florida Jasmin, Jusna Begum, Akleema Akter and Morium Bibi say they regularly cut nails, wash both hands with soap (after defecating, before eating and feeding children and after prayer), wear sandals when they go to the latrine, cover their food and water and wash dishes in clean water.

Union Supervisor Omar Sharif said: “The community have come a long way to protect their health and sanitation. But there is still some way to go. Community hygiene, including the proper disposal of animal dung, needs to be improved.”

Omar advises there were no cases of diarrhea last year, although some skin problems such as scabies were treated by the village doctor.

As in most poor communities, more expensive water and sanitation technologies such as rain water harvesting tanks, shallow aquifer recharge and piped systems are not fully considered.

“A courtyard meeting was held where I shared information about rain water harvesting but they were not interested. They feel at the moment they don’t need it, as they have tube wells for safe water and have plenty of water during the rainy season for other purposes,” Kabir said. □

Climate change will:

- increase injury, death and trauma resulting from weather-related hazards such as cyclones and floods
- lead to water shortages or flooding, affecting quality and quantity of water supply, sanitation facilities and consequently health and nutrition
- increase diseases such as diarrhea, dengue fever and malaria
- have an economic impact particularly on the poorest families, threatening their livelihoods and jeopardizing children’s education and health
- increase migration and dislocation because of land lost to erosion, inundation and seawater intrusion. “Climate refugees” have a high chance of ending up in slums, with associated problems for children’s health and development.

UNICEF is taking a pro-active approach to address climate change, particularly in the water, sanitation and hygiene sector, including:

- adapting designs of water and sanitation facilities to remain functional during floods
- addressing water resource sustainability, for example by promoting rainwater harvesting and shallow aquifer recharge technologies
- mapping vulnerabilities to enhance emergency preparedness and contingency plans
- pre-positioning of emergency supplies throughout the country for immediate deployment when an emergency strikes
- enhancing coordination and response with key humanitarian actors during emergencies. □

1 A young boy walks on a bamboo bridge to an unsanitary, open, hanging latrine in Bera village, Pabna, east Bangladesh. Although most Bangladeshis now use latrines, most of them are not hygienic.



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2 A young girl collects water from a broken, unhygienic tubewell in Manikgonj, northern Dhaka. Lack of infrastructure and arsenic contamination, particularly in rural parts of Bangladesh, limit access to safe water.

3 Human feces from an open, hanging latrine contaminates water at the river bank in Mohammadpur, Dhaka where women wash dishes and clothing. Each year 69,000 children under the age of five die due to diarrhea.



© Mahmud/UNICEF

4 Razia Begum, 38, comments on a village map she put together with other women in her village, Purbo Gobindapur, in Gaibandha, northern Bangladesh. The map helps assess the water and sanitation situation in the community and ensure community members keep their courtyards and latrines clean.



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This project is funded by the UK Department of International Development (DFID).

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6

5 Athoi Marma, 19, meets with community members to discuss waste management options in their village in Khagrachori. UNICEF-supported promoters are generally young women trained from within the community, who educate their neighbours about the health benefits of sound hygiene practices.

6 A girl collects cow dung for agricultural purposes and keeps her village courtyard sanitary.

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7 Women construct a low-cost, locally-made sanitary latrine in Gazipur, north of Dhaka. The UNICEF-supported project promotes sustainability and encourages community participation.

8 A school girl washes her hands on Global Hand Washing Day in Narsingdi, north of Dhaka, Bangladesh. More than 14.4 million Bangladeshi children joined in the event pledging to promote hand washing with soap after using the toilet and before eating.

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9 Women gather at a courtyard meeting in Purbo Gobindapur, in Gaibandha, northern Bangladesh to discuss how to improve water and sanitation in their community. Good hygiene messages are also communicated via home visits, tea stall and grocery shop sessions, video shows, film shows and dramas. □

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CYCLONE AILA HITS BANGLADESH

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A boat on the Kholpatura River at Nil Dumur Kheya Ghat carries UNICEF relief and aid to Gabura union, benefitting over 1200 families in several villages.

On 25 May 2009 Cyclone Aila hit 11 coastal districts of Bangladesh affecting 3.9 million people. Hundreds of thousands of families were left without shelter, safe drinking water, food or medicine. Some were forced to shelter on embankments, the only place above water level, as sea water continued to flood villages during high tide because of breaches in the dikes and embankments.

Salty sea water spoilt water points, causing a severe shortage of drinking water and an outbreak of diarrhoea affecting thousands of people. As diarrhoea and water-borne diseases spread, children pay the highest toll due to lack of nutrition and immunity and face an increased risk of drowning given water logging.

Immediate response

UNICEF released US\$ 118,800 (BDT 8.14 million) to the Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE) to ensure immediate provision of safe water and proper sanitation. UNICEF helped DPHE to install 287 tubewells and 1,435 latrines at temporary shelters for 71,750 people; repair, raise and disinfect 775 tubewells for 79,500 people; transport drinking water by truck, rickshaw van and boat for 146,750 people; equip four hand-pump equipped tubewells with motor pumps assisting 154,750 people; and distribute 1,580,000 water purification tablets to 56,000 people. More than 5,000 family kits containing cooking materials and clothes and 14,000 jerry cans have been distributed.

A rapid assessment team headed by UNICEF Water and Environmental Sanitation Chief Hans Spruijt visited Satkhira and Khulna districts. According to Hans, the impact of the cyclone was severe and likely to

have a long-term effect.

“Aila struck in many of the same areas where Sidr struck, but Sidr survivors could resume their lives earlier as water receded quicker,” Hans said. “Some of these communities are marooned, completely surrounded by salt water, only reachable by boat. As much repair work is needed to fix the embankments, it is expected that many of the affected people will remain isolated and cut-off from basic services for several months, their situation more precarious by the day.”

Schools damaged, books lost

Half a million children cannot access school in the six most affected districts - Khulna, Bagerhat, Satkhira,

Barguna, Bhola and Patukhali. A total of 445 schools were reported fully damaged and 4,588 partially damaged. Books, materials and furniture were washed away. Some schools are being used as shelters. Pre-primary education facilities have suffered even more than schools as their structures are not as strong.

Safety and security is an issue as many children and women are living in the open with no privacy. Children are also suffering from psychological shock and are in desperate need of recuperation in the face of devastation, loss of family members and sudden displacement.

Safe spaces for children prioritised

UNICEF supports 180 child friendly spaces (CFS) set up by Save the Children Alliance, ActionAid and the Society Development Agency in Khulna, Satkhira, Barguna and Patuakhali districts; supplied 331 recreational kits and 1,000 plastic sheets to the CFSs. Government is mobilising textbooks while UNICEF supports temporary learning centres and supply of teaching/learning materials.

Work continues

As secondary damages become clearer UNICEF field offices are busy ensuring needs are met. Meanwhile stock sent from non-affected regions are being replenished. □

Aila response is funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Netherlands and Australian Governments.

ADOLESCENTS EMBRACE CYCLONE AILA CHALLENGE

The old timber house with palm-leaf roof belonging to 80-year-old Nirod Chandra Roy is reduced to debris. He sits idle in front of the makeshift house built with the bits and pieces. In this remote coastal village of Hoglepasha, Nirod has survived precariously without food or water until relief started reaching his area three days after Aila swept everything away in south-west Bangladesh.

People had barely recovered from the devastation of Cyclone Sidr last year, when Cyclone Aila hit. Homes are ruined, latrines destroyed. Saline water has spoilt ponds and tubewells. Crops are damaged and supplies cut from the area. Once again people need to rebuild their houses and livelihoods. It is a long and arduous task, but life must go on.

It takes four ferries to reach this coastal village, south of Dhaka. Once densely covered by rich vegetation and palm trees this is now almost a clean delta land. About 40,000 people are affected by Cyclone Aila in this district alone.

“We were under chest-deep water for at least three days and hardly had any dry place for shelter. With surging tides and gusts, Aila swept away almost everything. We had nothing to cook or drink for days until help arrived on boats,” Nirod said.

In this troubled time, villagers are being supported by groups of adolescents trained through a UNICEF-supported project. These adolescents are going from door to door asking people not to lose heart and teaching them simple things such as how to make water safe or prepare oral saline and sanitary ways of disposing of dead animals. Safe and hygienic practices may not be a priority for those in Aila-affected areas. However they are critical to prevent outbreaks of diarrhea and other water-borne diseases.

Through the “Empowerment of Adolescents” project adolescents have been trained on how to help in pre- and post-disaster situations to minimize damage to life, property and give moral support to community members. Since May, NGO partner, the Centre for Mass Education and Science, has been training adolescents in disaster prone communities to help their own families and neighbours during emergencies.

Defying scorching sun and humidity, a group of adolescents come to Nirod’s shelter and give him three jerrycans and some water purifying tablets.

“You can use these tablets to purify pond water,” explains 12-year old Mamun.

Then, led by Monira, a class IX student, the group goes to Geeta Rani’s house. In a queue they meander their way into Geeta’s small single-room wooden house fenced by matted bamboo slips. Monira and her friends greet the fisherman’s family of four and explain the training they have received. She describes how several folds of used cotton cloth can help filter contaminated pond water before boiling it to make it drinkable.

“Remember to bury any cattle or poultry that is dead. Otherwise, decomposed flesh from the animals could turn deadly, spreading diseases,” explains 14-year old Masoom Billah, another adolescent volunteer.

“We are encouraged by seeing those young children”, said Geeta Rani’s neighbour Biba Rani. “They give us motivation to fight.”

Beyond their village, the group inspire other adolescents and adults to share responsibility and play a positive role in their communities. □

This project is funded by the European Union and Netherlands Government.



Adolescents deliver a jerry can to Nirod Chandra Roy in Bokultola, Chorduani Union, Pathar Ghata, Borguna.

© Tanvir Murad/UNICEF

WATER TREATMENT PLANT SAVING LIVES IN BARGUNA DISTRICT

Patharghata and Noltola, two of the most isolated coastal regions in Bangladesh, about 420 km south of Dhaka, were devastated by Cyclone Aila. The cyclone destroyed homes and muddy roads and flattened thousands of trees on the delta island.

Powerful winds that reached speeds of up to 170 km/h crushed the sturdy coastal flood protection embankment at several points allowing sea water to flood low lying areas.

When the sea water gradually retreated it left a trail of devastation - ponds were contaminated with rotting trees, dead cattle and the water remained salty.

Between 2000 and 2500 tubewells and 100 ponds are now unfit for use in Patharghata and Noltola. These communities face a severe safe water crisis.

Mother of five, Jahanara, has to walk two kilometers every day to fetch safe water for her family from the distribution site in Ruhita, Patharghata.

Rowshana and Howa live in Sonatola village, another village in Barguna. They walk almost an hour to Gazi Mahmud village to fetch drinking and cooking water for their families from the water treatment plant managed and operated by the government.

The Bangladesh Government was quick to respond to the crisis. UNICEF supported the government to provide safe drinking water and medical assistance to prevent water-borne diseases.

To assist with the water crisis a 1750 kg portable water treatment plant was sent to the Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE) in Barguna. The 2000 litre plant filters pond water for safe consumption. The petrol-driven plant fills large reserve tanks, which are refilled as they empty.

Because many of the affected people live in isolated areas, the reserve tanks are loaded onto rickshaw-vans and carried to remote locations for distribution.

“This is our lifeline now. In fact, it is the only source of drinking water in the entire area,” said Munir Hussain from Kumirmara village in Noltola.

Every day hundreds of people crowd the water plant to fill their aluminum kolshis (water jugs) with safe drinking water.

Within a few days of the cyclone, DPHE staff with support from local people, distributed 4000 10-litre jerry cans, provided by UNICEF, filled with water purified at the plant to distressed families in remote, cyclone-hit coastal regions. □



© Tanvir Murad/UNICEF

Jahanara (35) with her grandson Rafik (9) collect safe water from the water treatment plant everyday. They use this water for their household work and drinking. This is the only safe water available in their village, Ruhita, Patharghata, Borguna, Bangladesh.

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A child friendly space in Gabura Bazar, Satkira that operates between 8am - 5pm every day. 250 children and 50 pregnant mothers visit the centre where they receive lunch, snacks, and activities such as singing, dancing and drama.



© Khaled Sattar/UNICEF

A woman carrying a "family kit" box received during UNICEF relief distribution for victims of Cyclone Aila at Gabura Union, Shyamnagar. The "family kit" contains items such as cooking utensils, plates, mugs, toiletries and plastic sheets.

© Hans Spruijt/UNICEF



People take shelter along the embankment at Satkira, Khulna, Bangladesh.

CYCLONE AILA IN PICTURES

© Hans Spruijt/UNICEF



Jerry cans are filled with filtered pond water in Satkira, Khulna, Bangladesh.

© Hans Spruijt/UNICEF



Makeshift houses built on the embankment at Satkira, Khulna, Bangladesh.

CHILDREN INTERVIEW BANGLADESH PRIME MINISTER ON TV

Twenty anxious children sat on lush sofas at Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's official Dhaka residence waiting to interview her in March. Among them were children living on the streets, child workers, orphaned children and child journalists.

They wanted to share with her their problems and concerns in an open conversation broadcast on National Children's Day. They were ready with a range of questions from personal to policy issues that affect their lives.

"Amader Kotha" (Voice of Children) was the first programme in the history of Bangladesh Television (BTV) where children were able to ask questions face to face with the Prime Minister during a 45 minute broadcast. The Prime Minister was candid in her response to the children's questions.

When a nine-year-old girl, Jhumur, who has been living on the streets, asked her how she felt being the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina answered: "As people voted me to power, they have also given a lot of responsibilities to me. In many ways, these responsibilities relate to the wellbeing of children. If children like you remain on the streets, my mission will not be fulfilled."

Asked by Rony, 15, a child journalist from Gazipur, whether she wanted to be a politician when she was a child, she said she did not. Instead she wanted to be a school teacher or a doctor but had not done well in mathematics in her school finals so had to give up the dream of becoming a doctor. "My childhood was not always a happy one because we had to visit our father in jail...My father's political doctrine, which was

The TV programme, a Bangladesh Government-UNICEF initiative, was the first in a series of monthly broadcasts where the country's top policymakers face questions from the children. Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid, Speaker of the National Assembly Md Abdul Hamid and Social Welfare Minister Enamul Haq Mostafa Shaheed also faced the children.

all about the wellbeing of the people of this country, influenced me."

Shaheda, 13, a working child, raised the issue of dowry, stating that many women still have to give their lives on account of dowry demands and that such violence was increasing. She asked Sheikh Hasina whether she gave or received dowry for her children. Responding that the issue of dowry hadn't been raised when her children married, she added: "Dowry is still pervasive and spreading like cancer in our society. Apart from legal sanctions, there should be more social awareness on the issue so that people start to practice what they preach."

In response to Osman Gazi, 14, a vegetable vendor, about what the government would do to ensure education for all children, she said, "After the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, primary education was made free. We are now thinking to make education in the public sector free up to graduation level. We are also thinking of providing a light meal at primary and secondary schools to increase student retention levels. In our new education policy, we will look into how working children like you can be included in the formal schooling system."

Child journalist Mala, 14, spoke about children in border areas who are being used to transport smuggled goods including drugs, often becoming addicted. The Prime Minister said: "Smuggling itself is bad but when it involves children and drugs, it becomes worse. I will seriously look into the problem."

"Poverty is the root of all evils. If we can ensure the basic necessities of all children and their families, we can get children out of these terrible situations. Laws are there, but enforcement is often weak".

She added that she longed to see the day when there will be no street children in Bangladesh. □



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A relaxed photo session between the young interviewers and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina followed the 45 minute dialogue.

PARVEZ MAKES A SPLASH

When Parvez first came to the attention of the Bangladesh Swimming Federation he was a shy 10-year-old from the slums of Dhaka who, along with a bus load of other children aged between 5 – 10, were embarking on their first lesson of survival swimming, funded by UNICEF and run by the Centre of Injury Prevention and Research, Bangladesh.

The program, SwimSafe, was developed to combat high rates of child drowning in Bangladesh, where more than 17,000 children a year lose their lives so unnecessarily. To date approximately 28,000 children have been taught how to swim, and not one of them has drowned since. SwimSafe is one component of a child injury prevention project currently implemented in three rural areas and one urban area, specifically targeting underprivileged families and children.

Despite being malnourished and noticeably small for his age, Parvez stood out from the other children in his lesson due to his swimming talent.

“We recognised the potential in Parvez immediately. He picked up the technique of freestyle more easily than the other children. He had a relaxed, easy manner as he moved through the water and he was fast,” said Md. Golam Mostafa, National Swimming Coach and Member of the Bangladesh Swimming Federation.

Mostafa followed his instincts and encouraged Parvez to enter in the 2007 National Swimming Competition, by which time he had already completed the survival swimming course. In the competition Parvez competed amongst 500 children and came third in the heats for his age group where he raced against 25 other children. He narrowly missed a prize-winning place, coming fourth.

The next competition will be held next August. Mostafa believes Parvez, now 12, has an excellent chance this year if his diet improves and his body weight increases. This will prove a challenge though, as he is cared for by his grandmother who does not have the financial means to provide him with more nutritious food. This angel of a woman adopted Parvez after he was found abandoned as a baby, only a few days old. When asked if he is good to his grandmother, Parvez nodded happily and offered a genuine, “Yes.”

Naturally quiet, Parvez is modest when asked about his swimming despite his instinctive ability. When asked if he was apprehensive about going in the water



© CIPRB/UNICEF

Parvez (12) started swimming just two years ago. Now he is competing in national swimming competitions.

before his first swimming lessons, Parvez is adamant that he was not, but after a little gentle probing he admitted to a few fears.

“Before I started the swimming lessons I was a bit scared of the water. I wanted to play with my friends so I would still go, but I’d stay in the shallow parts,” he said. “Now I swim anywhere.”

With the weather now warm and the local pool open for swimming, Mostafa is encouraging Parvez to go swimming at least twice a week, even showing him new strokes such as butterfly, to enhance his fitness and speed. These specialized lessons go above and beyond the survival swimming lessons which Parvez completed nearly two years ago at the Bangladesh Swimming Federation swimming arena. One of the community leaders in Parvez’s neighborhood has committed to escorting this upcoming competitive swimmer to the pool himself.

“Now all my friends want to take the swimming lessons, and a lot of them already have,” said Parvez.

Perhaps, Bangladesh, not known for its sporting prowess beyond the cricket ground, had a future Olympic swimmer on its hands.

UNICEF Bangladesh continues to provide financial and technical support to the SwimSafe programme. □

This project is funded by the UNICEF Netherlands National Committee and the Government of Spain.

GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL – A CHILD-TO-CHILD APPROACH PREPARES CHILDREN FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL

In the sticky heat of early afternoon, the children at the Haribhanga Dargarpar Government Primary School are bent over their school desks drawing.

Today, in a school set amidst the lush green rice paddies of Sadar upazila, Lalmonirhat district, north eastern Bangladesh, the children are drawing pictures of new words they have learnt and are singing a song about parts of the body that come in ones and twos.

This class is a mix of 10-year-old students attending Grade 5 and five-year-olds who have never been to school before.

The children gather at the school once a week, part of the Bangladesh Government-UNICEF “Getting Ready for School: a Child-to-Child Approach” project. In total, 1283 students (429 young facilitators and 854 young learners) are part of this innovative pilot project.

Piloting the Getting Ready for School project

The one-year programme is designed to reach young children the year before they are eligible to enrol in primary school. A young facilitator, a student from Grade 5, is paired with two eligible pre-school aged children. The Grade 5 students now become the ‘teacher’, engaging younger mates in learning.

The programme is implemented during a school year, with one session each week under supervision of a teacher.

Young facilitators and learners receive early learning kits filled with activities to foster the skills of early literacy and numeracy, which progressively become more complex. Activities include pictures, games, rhymes and songs that encourage children to experiment with common everyday objects, solve problems and draw conclusions.



Young teacher Sumi (9) with her young learner in class at Haribhanga Dargarpar Primary School, Lalmonirhat, Rangpur, Bangladesh.

© Amir/Drik/UNICEF

Happy children, happy families

Momotaj, 10, along with the other young facilitators, meets with the teacher once a week to review the previous class and plan for the next one. She collects Bipul, 5, and Nahid, 5, on her way to their class each week, and they also get together every day to practice what they learnt in class.

“The children are good students, they learn quickly and practice all the time,” Momotaj said. “I love to teach, so it also benefits me. I’d like to go to university and become a doctor.”

Bipul echoes the hopes of his classmates: “I will do a lot of things in my life.”

The community in Lalmonirhat now realise that education is the key to breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty and have high expectations for their children’s futures.

Bipul’s mother Bedana Begum said: “I expect Bipul will be well educated now. Everyday he is taking time to learn something and can express his opinions and interests. His concentration is better now and he takes very good care of his school books.”

Improving primary education in Bangladesh

The project, which began in March 2009, is being piloted in 30 schools in six upazilas chosen from a group of schools with high dropout and repetition and low completion rates.

This approach is a new and cost-effective way to ensure children can participate effectively in age-appropriate learning activities, for their cognitive, linguistic, emotional and social development.

“Preschool learning is an important component of early childhood development which prepares children for primary school, decreases drop-out rates and increases learning achievements in the long term,” UNICEF Education Officer Sari Korkalainen said.

More than 30 per cent or 2.7 million children in Bangladesh are still not enrolled in primary school on time, less than 47 per cent complete the five-year primary school cycle.

Less than 15 per cent of children aged three to five were attending a pre-school of any kind in 2006,

which means over 11 million children did not have this opportunity.

When the first phase of the project ends in December 2009, Bipul and his classmates will be ready to start Grade 1 and teachers will be busy selecting the second batch of young learners to begin their year-long journey of preparation for primary school.

Ongoing project monitoring and evaluation will be used to determine whether the project will be implemented nationally in the future.

The project is also being piloted in China, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Tajikistan and Yemen.

In Bangladesh, the project is being implemented in collaboration with Directorate of Primary Education, under the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education. □

This project is funded by the Australian Government (AusAID).



Group photo of young facilitators at Haribhanga Dargarapar Primary School, Lalmonirhat, Rangpur, Bangladesh.

Young learners talk about education

Young learners and young facilitators involved with the Getting Ready for School: A Child-to-Child Approach project, at the Haribhanga Dargarpar Government Primary School in Lalmonirhat in the far north-western corner of Bangladesh, talk about their school and the importance of education.

Young facilitators and learners each receive early learning kits filled with activities to foster the skills of early literacy and numeracy, which progressively become more complex. The activities include pictures, games, rhymes and songs that encourage children to experiment with common everyday objects, solve problems and draw conclusions.



Khairul (10)

“The best thing about school is that we are getting an education and we can play. School is for pleasure – for fun learning.”
Khairul (10) young facilitator

“The children are good students. They learn quickly and practice very hard. I love to teach – it benefits me too. I want to go on to university and become a doctor.” Momotaj (10) young facilitator



Momotaj (10)

“I want to go to school. An education is important because it means I will be able to do a lot of things in my life.” Bipul (5) young learner (Momotaj is his teacher and cousin)



Bipul (5)



Nahid (5)

“I really like the alphabet song. I practice it at home and my mother knows all the words. Education is important for me and my family.”
Nahid (5), young learner (Nargis is his teacher)



Ruhul (5)

“My favorite part about coming to school is singing and games. After the session each week I practice – now the rest of my family know the songs too!”
Ruhul (5) young learner

“My dream school would have more classrooms, a pretty uniform, a big garden with fruit trees and fans in all the classrooms. We would have a big canteen so we could all sit together and take lunch.” Sumi (9) young facilitator



Sumi (9)

“By helping Nahid (5) prepare for primary school, I am also learning. That’s why I wanted to be involved. I hope after school to get a job as a teacher.” Nargis (10) young facilitator



Nargis (10)

DONOR PROFILE: UK DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (DFID)

UNICEF collaborates with government ministries, non-government organization, UN agencies and a wide range of donors and is funded entirely by voluntary contributions. The UK Department for International Development (DFID) is one of UNICEF Bangladesh's top five donors, funding especially the water and sanitation programme.

DFID Country Representative Chris Austin discusses DFID's commitment to working alongside UNICEF to improve the living conditions of people in Bangladesh.

The UK is a major donor of UNICEF's Water and Environmental Sanitation (WES) programmes in Bangladesh. Why are these issues of importance to the UK Government, particularly in Bangladesh?

Water and sanitation are central to achieving our poverty reduction objectives.

Every 20 seconds, somewhere in the world, a child dies from water-related diseases. In Bangladesh, 75 million people do not have access to a hygienic toilet. And over 30 million people do not have adequate safe drinking water. Unless we tackle these problems children will continue to die needlessly. Millions of days of work or schooling will be lost to avoidable illness. Women and children will continue to be burdened with the daily drudgery of fetching water. And girls will continue to drop out of education because schools have no toilets.

What improvements have you seen in the projects you support in Bangladesh recently?

Over the past three years we have helped 1.8 million people to access safe water and over seven million to have improved sanitation. The recent independent impact assessment shows that this is making a real difference to people's lives. Families are spending significantly less on medicines and losing fewer days work to diarrhea-related illness, so they have more money to spend on food and education.

Have you recently visited any local-level projects and seen first-hand the impact they are having on Bangladeshi communities?

I have visited several urban and rural areas to see UK aid in action. For example, the Mirpur Tekpara slum in Dhaka, supported by UK government,

WaterAid and Dushtha Shasthya Kendra (DSK). When the project began in 2003, the slum's 2,300 people had only two latrines, drainage was very poor, with frequent water logging – especially during the monsoon – and little understanding of how to maintain even basic environmental hygiene. Now they have 20 hygienic cluster (53 chamber) latrines.

For Hasna Banu and the others living in that slum, this work has meant that chronic diarrhoea and skin diseases caused by unsafe water and poor sanitation are now becoming a thing of the past.

What are your priorities in the coming year with regards to work you are sponsoring in Bangladesh?

Bangladesh remains one of UK's five priority countries for improved water and sanitation. We will continue to support UNICEF's work with government, and broad based poverty reduction projects such as the Urban Partnership for Poverty Reduction and the Chars Livelihood Programmes. These programmes should improve access to latrines for more than five million of the poorest people in urban and rural areas, and access to safe water for at least one million people.

The UK supports programmes in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Caribbean and Latin American. How, in your opinion, is Asia (and Bangladesh in particular) progressing to meet the MDGs?

Out of the total 900 million people in the world without safe drinking water, 468 million are in Asia. Amongst 2.5 billion people without sanitation, 1.79 billion are in this continent. Reaching the MDG targets remains a big challenge.

If Asia is to achieve the MDGs, national and international partners need to pull together. This means focusing our efforts around the 'five ones' framework - through one annual global monitoring report and one high-level annual meeting at international level and nationally through one national plan for water and sanitation, one coordinating body and one lead UN agency. □

DFID Department for
International
Development

1 Bangladesh hosts conference on arsenic mitigation

Fifty-three experts and senior government officials from 12 Asian countries met in Bangladesh in April to discuss ways of mitigating the impact of arsenic contaminated water which put people at risk of poisoning.

Among all countries, Bangladesh and India are the most affected with over 30 million people exposed to high levels of arsenic in the water. Bangladesh is also home to UNICEF's largest arsenic mitigation programme. Arsenic contaminated water represents a major health problem as even low concentrations of arsenic, when ingested over a period of years, can result in a range of serious effects - including skin lesions, cancer of the skin, lung and bladder, and gastro-intestinal and pulmonary conditions. Chronic arsenic poisoning has also been found to affect children's cognitive development. There is no medical cure for arsenic poisoning. The only solution is to stop drinking arsenic-contaminated water

The International Learning Exchange, held in Dhaka and facilitated by UNICEF, allowed sector professionals to

2 Child malnutrition and household food insecurity remain major concerns for Bangladesh

One in four households in Bangladesh is food insecure while two million children aged six months to five years are affected by acute malnutrition, according to a recent survey released recently by WFP, UNICEF and the Institute of Public Health Nutrition. Of those two million malnourished children, half a million are suffering from severe acute malnutrition, a highly vulnerable condition where the child needs appropriate management and treatment. Given that the nationwide survey was carried out during a harvest season, malnutrition levels are expected to be even higher during periods of food scarcity.

The survey showed a clear link between malnutrition and household food insecurity. Food insecure households also had higher percentages of malnourished children. Almost half of the surveyed children aged six months to five years are stunted (48.6%) – too short for their age – which depicts a very high prevalence of chronic malnutrition – one of the highest in South Asia. In addition, 37.4% of the same children are also underweight.

The survey was undertaken throughout the whole country from November 2008 to January 2009, with representative samples collected from the six divisions and by area (urban, rural). A total of 10,378 households were surveyed and 4175 children under five years were assessed for their health and nutrition status.

share knowledge, learn from each other's experiences and discuss plans to strengthen arsenic mitigation activities. Participants also visited Bera upazilla, Rajshahi division, west Bangladesh to see UNICEF-supported Sanitation, Hygiene Education and Water Supply project. The project aims to install 21,000 new arsenic-free water points over five years, giving priority to communities facing arsenic contamination.

3 London Olympics puts sport on the agenda

International Inspiration, a project that forms part of the legacy programme of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, was launched in Bangladesh in May. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the governments of Bangladesh and the UK.

The project, implemented by British Council, UK Sport, UNICEF, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, aims to deliver on the promise made by the London 2012 Olympic bid team in Singapore to inspire young people around the world through the power of sport. It aims to create sustainable structures and systems in 20 countries, enabling at least 12 million young people to access sport and improve their lives as a result.

In Bangladesh, implementing partners hope to reach 1 million children by the end of 2012. Through the project, 200,000 children aged 4-10 will learn swimming as a means to save them from drowning - 28% of all deaths among children above the age of one in Bangladesh are due to drowning. Swimming lessons will be conducted by adolescent and community coaches.

4 Sixty second stories

Seventeen children aged 12 -20 celebrated the premiere of their one-minute videos in June, the films produced after a five-day workshop.

At the filmmaking workshop, the children learnt how to tell their story in a one-minute video. Topics were chosen by the young filmmakers, who worked in front and behind the camera.

The workshop was organized by UNICEF in association with European Cultural Foundation and the One Minute Foundation. Local partners were the Children's Film Society and Children's TV Foundation-Bangladesh. The videos premiered at the Goethe Institut-Bangladesh on 4 June. After the screenings, certificates were handed to each of the participants. This is the first time this workshop has been held in Bangladesh. □

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