

# Bangladesh

Civil society organisation involvement in urban water sector reform







Front cover photo  
and above:

*A community-  
managed water  
point established  
with support from  
DSK and WaterAid in  
Zakir slum, Dhaka,  
Bangladesh.*

Charlie Bibby/  
Financial Times

**A WaterAid publication written by Clarissa Brocklehurst (in 2007) with contributions from staff at WaterAid in Bangladesh, its urban partner NGOs and stakeholders.**

Edited by journalists at ngo.media ([www.ngomedia.org.uk](http://www.ngomedia.org.uk)) and Libby Plumb.

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This is one of a series of nine case studies outlining civil society organisations' (CSOs) involvement in urban water sector reform. The other case studies cover the following locations:

- **Brazil (Recife) and Venezuela (Caracas)**
- **Ghana (Accra)**
- **Kenya (Kisumu, Nairobi and Mombasa)**
- **Nepal (Kathmandu)**
- **Pakistan (Karachi)**
- **Philippines (Manila)**
- **Uganda (Kampala)**
- **Ukraine**

The case studies accompany the guidance manual ***Our water, our waste, our town***, which offers support to civil society in engaging in urban water and sanitation reforms.

The manual and case studies can all be downloaded at:  
**[www.wateraid.org/urbanreform](http://www.wateraid.org/urbanreform)**



WaterAid's mission is to overcome poverty by enabling the world's poorest people to gain access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene education.



## Section one:

# Background and problem

Historically, poor slum communities in Dhaka and Chittagong have not been connected to sanitation systems or had good access to clean water. For example, only 14% of Chittagong's population of four million people are connected to a piped water system. This leaves the local utility companies, as well as NGOs, facing the twin challenges of increasing connections to water networks and starting up sewerage networks from scratch.

NGOs have long been involved in delivering water and sanitation services to poorer sections of the community in Dhaka and Chittagong. Utility companies are reluctant to provide water connections to people without land tenure, despite the fact that significant numbers of people live in slums and squatter settlements and so face problems getting access to clean and safe water and sanitation services. The NGOs have stepped in to broker agreements between utility companies and communities.



*Unsanitary 'hanging latrines' can be found in the slums of Dhaka and Chittagong.*

WaterAid/Kate Eshelby

## Section two: What CSOs have done

### Pioneering models

Several NGOs have adopted the model of water service provision to the urban poor through the installation of community-managed water points connected to the mains water supply. The model was pioneered in Dhaka by the NGO Dushtha Shasthya Kendra (DSK), supported by WaterAid.

*A girl enjoying water from a DSK water point in Kalyanpur slum, Dhaka.*

WaterAid/Juthika Howlader

DSK started out as a health programme following the 1988 Bangladeshi floods and has been working since 1992 to provide water to slum communities.

DSK's main aim was to set up a water system that could be handed over to the local community to manage and run in the long term. NGOs act as intermediaries between the utility companies and slum dwellers, taking out water connections in their name and convincing the utility company of the credibility of community-based organisations (CBOs) to manage the water points and pay the water bills in the long term. NGOs have also given credit and technical assistance to community groups to support them in the construction of the water points.





## Section three: Challenges and outcomes

### Challenges

#### *Attitudinal*

In general, full scale reform of water and sanitation services has not been possible in Bangladesh. Service providers are not particularly focused on reform. For example, a World Bank-supported reform project in Dhaka in the mid to late 1990s was closed down in 2002 due to lack of investment and serious delays in disbursement. The World Bank attributed this to a lack of interest in the project by the Bangladeshi government.

The utility companies have had mixed reactions to the work of the NGOs and their attempts to give

communities ownership of their own water points and sanitation facilities. For example, the Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (DWASA) has in principle agreed to allow water connections to be made in the name of the community group that uses and manages the water point, and slum CBOs are now applying directly to DWASA for connections. In practice, however, intermediary NGOs are still being pressured to take out connections in their own name.

The Chittagong Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (CWASA) has begun to consider the transfer of water point ownership from the intermediary NGOs to the slum CBOs, as is being done by DWASA in Dhaka,

*The residents of Korail slum in Dhaka have no official water connection. They rely on unauthorised water supplies carried in rubber pipes snaking through the narrow lanes.*

Charlie Bibby/  
Financial Times





*Morshada Begum taking her turn to fill a water container at the only water point in Motijharna slum in Chittagong. She had been waiting for three and a half hours.*

WaterAid/Juthika Howlader

and has asked the NGOs to select and propose the first few cases for such action.

### *Practical*

Until recently, DWASA was enforcing compliance with its ordinance requiring water connections to be made using expensive galvanised iron pipes. This prevented NGOs from using PVC piping, which is practical, inexpensive and flexible, meaning it can be easily transported around the winding lanes found in slums. This issue has now been resolved and PVC piping is now permitted, but this demonstrates the problems of strict adherence to outdated city guidelines.

NGOs have to wade through bureaucracy to find out where their efforts should best be directed. For example, in Chittagong, CWASA has

taken the lead in providing water services to slum areas, so NGOs focusing on penetrating the slums have had to concentrate their efforts on opening up talks with them.

### *Outcomes*

A new World Bank project – the Dhaka Chittagong Water Supply and Sanitation Project – is under way. It aims to improve sewerage systems, storm water drainage and the provision of water and sanitation services to poor communities.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and several other agencies are also preparing complementary projects in the urban water supply and sanitation sector. The ADB investment should prove particularly fruitful.

The roles NGOs have played as service providers and intermediaries have brought them to the attention of utility companies and donors, paving the way for them to be engaged in the reform process. NGOs have been approached to participate in both the planning and implementation of these projects.

In 2007, the Government of Bangladesh also authorised DWASA to provide direct services to communities without land tenure, after an official pilot of the mechanism undertaken with DSK since 2005 was declared a success.



## Section four:

# Lessons learnt and top tips

### Lessons learnt

With the advent of new water and sanitation projects, NGOs have had to think beyond their usual remit and take on wider outreach roles. Sector reform can be a long process; in Bangladesh it took up to a decade to see major changes happen. NGOs and CSOs were patient and pursued their case consistently over the years, which was invaluable in changing

the mindset of DWASA officials. Importantly, NGOs can be or should be a trigger and facilitator of the process. However, for sustainability and real empowerment of slum populations, NGOs need to build the capacity of slum dwellers to handle DWASA independently, reducing the need for NGO intervention and mediation.

### Top tips

1. **Look for practical tools.** For example, the creation of a map overlaying the locations of DWASA's piped networks on the Dhaka slum survey, created by the Centre for Urban Studies, allows engineers, planners, and policy makers to visualise the scale of the slum population and what is needed to help.
2. **Ensure your CSO gets plenty of good support and advice.** The challenging nature of the reform process may leave many CSOs adrift.

This case study outlines the role civil society organisations (CSOs) have played in water service delivery in Bangladesh's largest cities, Dhaka and Chittagong. Many have acted as intermediaries between slum communities and water authorities, negotiating for community-managed water points connected to the mains water supplies to be established. This role has led to CSOs being invited to participate in the new World Bank urban reform project, the Dhaka Chittagong Water Supply and Sanitation Project.

WaterAid, 47-49 Durham Street,  
London, SE11 5JD, UK  
Tel: +44 (0)845 6000 433  
Email: [wateraid@wateraid.org](mailto:wateraid@wateraid.org)

**[www.wateraid.org](http://www.wateraid.org)**



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