

Understanding the Relationship between Government and BRAC in Implementing WASH Programme

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Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BDP	BRAC Development Programme
BHP	BRAC Health Programme
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DPHE	Department of Public Health Engineering
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
LGED	Local Government Engineering Department
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	Non Government Organization
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RED	Research and Evaluation Division
SAE	Sub-Assistant Engineer
SRE	Senior Regional Manager
UEO	<i>Upazila</i> Education Officer
UHFPO	<i>Upazila</i> Health and Family Planning Officer
UNO	<i>Upazila</i> Nirbahi Officer
Union	Cluster of villages with an average population of 25,000 people, on average 10 unions form one <i>upazila</i>
<i>Upazila</i>	Sub-district with an average population of 250,000 people
UP	<i>Union parishad</i> , the lowest tier of local government
USSO	<i>Upazila</i> Shomobay Shamity Officer
VO	Village Organization
VSC	Village Sanitation Centre
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene programme of BRAC
WATSAN	Water and Sanitation
WM	WASH Manager

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Abstract

To explore the relationship between government and BRAC in the implementation of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) programme this qualitative research was undertaken. This involved purposive sampling of programme sites for conducting semi-structured focus group discussions. The government and BRAC staff were interviewed at different locations to find out different dimensions of relationship. The programme organizers of BRAC and sub-assistant engineers of the government play the most significant role in implementing WASH programme. Water and Sanitation committees were found almost inactive. *Union parishad* (UP) chairmen and members wanted financial and hardware support to cooperate effectively. They have lost some of their bureaucratic power as villagers can now depend on NGOs for development. The discussion reveals that BRACs long history of development works helped them communicate properly with the government. BRAC staff felt that they lack official authority in their communications with the government officials and community members, for which felt their efforts to motivate behavioural change were constrained. Internal disagreements and status struggles within and between BRAC programmes also impact negatively on the respect and authority according to the WASH programme. There is disagreement on data about sanitation coverage between UP and BRAC. Numbers of staff work in the programme seemed to be inadequate. Staff turnover was high which hampers the smooth running of the programme. Authorization letters need to be issued by the government to field level offices regarding BRACs involvement in the programme. Quality of sanitation products should be maintained high. BRAC should come up with a resolution to overcome internal programme conflicts. Training should be taken and promotional materials should be distributed regarding keeping mutual respect and understanding at a standard level between BRAC and government staff.

Introduction

Bangladesh faces multiple challenges in sanitation, hygiene and water sector. According to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) data for Bangladesh, latrine coverage stood at 33% by 2003, while the proportion of the population with access to safe water was about 75%. In spite of concerted efforts to provide safe water, it was estimated that 25 to 30 million people are affected by arsenic contamination in drinking water.¹ There is no reliable country-wide data on hygiene practices. BRAC has established Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) programme to *facilitate, in partnership with the Government of Bangladesh and other stakeholders, the attainment of the MDGs related to water, sanitation, and hygiene for all, especially for underprivileged groups in rural Bangladesh and thereby improve the health situation of the poor and enhance equitable development.*

The proposed programme will ensure that 17.6 million people - spread over 150 *upazilas* - have access to sanitation services that are effectively used, including consistent hygiene practices. Besides, more than 8.5 million people will be provided with safe water.

The five-year programme has three objectives:

Objective 1: Provide sustainable and integrated WASH services in the rural areas of Bangladesh.

Objective 2: Induce safe hygienic behaviour to break the contamination cycle of unsanitary latrines, contaminated water, and unsafe hygienic behaviour.

Objective 3: Ensure sustainability and scaling-up WASH services.

Its overall strategy focuses on participation and collaboration at the Union and the village level where hygiene practices will be the backbone of the programme supported by improved sanitation and safe water supplies. The micro-strategy is to stimulate bottom-up participation and planning through WASH committees at the village level whose members represent the entire village (and particularly the

¹ BRAC WASH Proposal: www.brac.net/downloads_files/WASH_Proposal.pdf

poor and women), including other committees and other agencies or NGOs that may be active in the village.

Overall, this is an innovative learning programme. It contains a preparation phase of 6 months followed by a start-up period of one and half year. During this initial 2-year period, there will be action research and experimental or comparative trials.

The main functional coordination will be done at the UP level, which is the lowest tier of the local government. It is expected that BRAC will actively participate in the Union's WATSAN Committee and actively support its activities, as well as ensuring that sufficient attention is given to hygiene promotion and education aspects, and that the UPs will play an important role in facilitating the programme planning and implementation. Training will be arranged by the programme so that the UP members and other key personnel at the Union level develop the required capacity.

The programme will harmonize its work with the development programmes of the Bangladesh government and other donors and NGOs. The harmonization will be carried out at various levels – from the national government and local government levels to the field levels.² So, it was important to understand the relationship in practice.

In some countries, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are major contributors to development process. This is not uniform, however. In a number of countries, NGOs are weak or play more of an oppositional rather than operational role and government are highly suspicious of them. A number of factors influence the development impact of NGOs; many of which are determined by the relationship between the NGO sector and the State (Clark 1993). This paper finds out the dimension of relationship between BRAC and the state in implementing WASH programme. BRAC is the largest NGO in Bangladesh and the WASH programme is one of the largest programmes. So, it is the rationale to conduct a study which explores the relationship and its impact on running the programme. Clark (1993) in his paper describes different characteristics of relationship, concentrating on issues which affect the efficacy of NGOs, the attainment of governments' poverty reduction and other social objectives. This study has also tried to investigate issues on mutual respect and understanding. In the paper "Government-NGO collaboration: the case of tuberculosis control in Bangladesh", Ullah ANZ *et al.* (2006) analyzes the basic concepts and key issues of existing collaboration between government and non-governmental organizations (NGO) in healthcare. The paper first examines the experiences of different projects promoting government – NGO collaborations in

² BRAC WASH Proposal: www.brac.net/downloads_files/WASH_Proposal.pdf.

the health and population programme in Bangladesh, to identify the policies within which these collaborative projects are being implemented and the different mechanisms by which providers of healthcare collaborate. Elizabeth (2005) in her paper titled “China’s Environment Movement” has mentioned that the Chinese government has generally adopted a positive attitude towards environmental NGOs, recognizing that they fill a critical gap in the state’s capacity to protect the environment effectively. Different research papers have shown different dimensions of relationship, but no paper was found that discovers the relationship between the government and an NGO in implementing a programme which integrates the unique approach of combining three essential components of life - WASH.

Thus the purpose of this paper is to identify strategies for overcoming the constraints and challenges that emerge from the relationships between government and BRAC in implementing the WASH programme. The study documents how the relationship works in practice and how personal behaviour or organizational culture impacts the programme. The study also attempts to provide insights into the benefits of the relationship, the degree of cooperation on different issues, and practical constraints to developing a more productive partnership. This paper emphasizes the importance of dynamic relationship in implementing an important programme like WASH.

Methods

Exploration of the relationship between government and BRAC staff in the implementation of the WASH programme was undertaken through qualitative research. This involved purposive sampling of sites in Bogra, where the first of three phases³ has been implemented, and in Tangail where phase 2 is being implemented, taking into account that these districts feature both high and low sanitation coverage *upazilas*. Eight semi-structured focus group discussions and 36 semi-structured interviews were conducted in each of four *upazilas* in each selected district. Government and local government representatives (who are also members of WATSAN⁴ committees) interviewed include:

1. UNO (*Upazila* Nirbahi Officer),
2. SAE (Sub-Assistant Engineer) of DPHE,
3. UP (*Union Parishad*) Chairman,
4. UP (*Union Parishad*) Secretary/UP (*Union Parishad*) member,
5. UEO (*Upazila* Education Officer), and
6. UHFPO (*Upazila* Health and Family Planning Officer).

In absence of any of the above, the *Upazila* Shomobay Shamiti Officer (*Upazila* Cooperatives Officer) was interviewed.

From the BRAC side, WASH programme staff interviewed included

1. SRM (Senior Regional Manager),
2. RM (Regional Manager),
3. PM (Programme Manager),
4. PO-7 (Programme Organizer at pay level 7), and
5. PO-5⁵ (Programme Organizer at pay level 5).

³ BRAC is implementing the project in 3 different phases (covering 50 *Upazilas* in each phase)

⁴ WATSAN: Water and Sanitation

⁵ Programme organizers (PO) work at the field level. PO 7 are more experienced or in a senior position than to the PO 5.

Findings and discussion

Assumptions being made by BRAC head office staff about relationships between the government and BRAC

Two BRAC head office staff members were interviewed to clarify programme issues, in particular constraints and challenges regarding cooperation and coordination between BRAC and the government.

BRAC head office staff think that the main issue which has brought both BRAC and government closer is the same target of achieving 100% sanitation coverage. Previously Sub-Assistant Engineers (SAE) used to depend on information gathered by UP, but they found that the data had been exaggerated and cannot be fully trusted. Some UP Chairmen show overstated data as it is an indicator of good performance.

According to BRAC head office staff, *Upazila* WASH Manager and Programme Organizers (PO) first make contact with *Upazila* Nirbahi Officers (UNO), Sub Assistant Engineers (SAE), *Upazila* Education Officers (UEO), and Secondary Education Officers (SEO) and introduce themselves to them. They share their objectives with the government officials and then develop union and *upazila* profiles. Government officials help them develop these profiles. Programme guidelines are focused on facilitation of demand creation for sanitary latrines among the community people and local elected bodies like UP, so that they can take over the responsibility of improving the state of sanitation over time. BRAC staff have the opportunity to build rapport with community people while conducting the household baseline survey. According to the head office staff, BRAC PRA⁶ teams are supposed to build rapport with community through cluster meetings.⁷

⁶ PRA: Participatory Rural Appraisal.

⁷ *Cluster Meeting: BRAC arrange meetings with small group of villagers to share and discuss different issues regarding WASH. Each of these groups is called a cluster.*

The main actors in the government system

SAEs play the key role in enabling BRAC to implement the WASH programme. *Upazila* PM and PO 7s keep in touch with SAEs. Though UNOs tend to be busy with their diverse responsibilities, whenever they are invited to attend any orientation meeting, workshop, or advocacy meeting of WASH, they accept invitations and try to attend or send representatives. Now workshops are being arranged jointly by BRAC and UNO offices which has created a strong partnership.

According to the guideline prepared for WATSAN committees, they are supposed to do the following work:

- To fix target of achieving 100% sanitation coverage for the *upazila* in 3 stages (2005, 2008, 2010).
- To prepare work plan for observing sanitation month (October) each year, implement it and coordinate with other departments involved.
- Review the work of UP, NGOs and other development partners and make suggestions for improving implementation of the work.
- Assist all the stakeholders to prepare work plan and in implementation of the work.
- To ensure supply of poster, leaflet for sanitation month.

BRAC head office staff think that WATSAN committees at *union* and *upazila* levels are almost non-functional. BRAC staff reported that the government circulated one '*Poripatra*' (circular) regarding WATSAN, its formation, roles and functions to the concerned government offices including UPs, but there was insufficient monitoring and budgetary allocations for the WATSAN committee. They also noted that the members of WATSAN committee generally attend monthly meetings at the *upazila* offices, but they discuss only issues regarding WATSAN in the last 15 to 20 minutes. BRAC head office staff told us that WATSAN committees are only active during sanitation month (October), because the budget is only allocated for these activities, and there is no separate allocation in the remaining 11 months.

UP is one of the most important stakeholders in WASH programme. UP has approximately 30 activities under different sectors of the government. In the experience of BRAC WASH programme staff, some UP chairmen are committed, but others are not. Many UP chairmen live in the towns and are rarely present at UP offices. Initially BRAC staff were questioned by UP chairmen for not providing hardware support. They said, "*Apnader sab-e bhalo kintu aparato kichu den na!*" (Everything is fine about you [BRAC], but you do not give

anything). They think only message dissemination cannot be enough to meet the demand of poor people. But BRAC staff explained the importance of BRAC's software support. Advocacy meetings have helped changing the negative attitude of the UP chairmen towards BRAC activities. Now, UP chairman, members, and villagers do not demand rings and slabs from BRAC WASH programme like they used to demand earlier.

Issues that make cooperation higher

BRAC head office staff told us that BRAC chairperson is also the chairperson of NGO Forum. NGO Forum was working for sanitation in 367 unions. BRAC excluded those areas to avoid duplication. For example, BRAC excluded three unions in Dinajpur, as NGO forum was working in those unions. But the Deputy Commissioner (DC) and UNO told BRAC staff that BRAC should start working at those areas too as others are not capable enough to make changes in the field of water and sanitation. This suggests a degree of confidence in BRAC based on previous experience.

Government practices and procedures that BRAC staff need to work with

WASH programme HO staff reported that most of the field level staff previously worked with BRAC Health programme (BHP) and Essential Health Care (EHC) programme, and have experience of working in collaboration with the government through these programmes. This has taught them how to maintain official decorum and behave with government officials, although staff who lack such experience may face some problems in this regard. But this issue has been considered and addressed properly in training sessions. In training sessions, facilitators ask participants to play the role of BRAC WASH staff who have to meet with UNOs, SAEs, UEOs, SEOs, UP chairmen and members. So, they are able to overcome these kinds of problems. BRAC also regularly invites government officials to participate in orientation meetings, workshops and advocacy meetings, in order to create an enabling environment for both the parties to work together. Head office staff gave some examples to show the relationship between BRAC and government, such as when the government officials cooperated with BRAC staff to enable access to different educational and social institutions by issuing and sending authorization letters. BRAC staff maintain communication with the government officials through personal contact and telephone conversations.

How the relationship works in practice?

SAE vital actor, role of UNOs, UP chairmen: The Upazila WASH Manager, PO 7 and SAEs are the focal persons in the implementation of the WASH programme. Upazila WASH Managers and PO 7s play significant roles in

maintaining liaison with SAE. In some cases UNOs cooperate willingly, but in most cases BRAC staff have to make a lot of effort just to meet with UNOs. Sometimes SAEs invite WASH managers to attend coordination meetings at *upazila* level, which helps the managers to explain and promote WASH programme to the government officials. Moreover, they can thus explain or clarify any misconception about BRAC WASH programme.

WATSAN committees were found to be effectively non-functional in all the study areas. According to half of the SAEs interviewed, lack of monitoring activities and budget constraints are the main reasons for this. None of the WATSAN committees in the study areas had arranged separate meetings recently; instead the last 10 or 15 minutes were spent discussing water and sanitation issues during the monthly *upazila* coordination meetings. This may explain why some members of *upazila* WATSAN committees were not fully aware of the WASH programme, while WASH committee members were similarly unaware about WATSAN committees.

Area of programme implementation in which interaction is low

One area of disagreement between the government officials, local government representatives and BRAC is sanitation coverage. Many UP chairmen prefer to show to UNOs that they have achieved high coverage, and so calculate coverage in terms of the numbers of rings and slabs distributed. In contrast, BRAC counts only sanitary latrines which have been properly installed. This leads to higher government estimates of sanitation coverage than BRAC estimates show. In Ghatail *upazila* the SAE criticized the UP chairman for overstating sanitation coverage in order to receive an award from the government. The SAE also noted political pressure under the last government (2001-2006) meant it was difficult to work transparently, and that if the practice of overstating coverage continues, the gap in coverage would not be filled. However, other government officials view BRAC as in opposition to their success, and refuse to cooperate.

Perceptions of capacity

What different government and BRAC actors say about each other

BRAC staff view UNOs and SAEs as the two focal persons in government with whom BRAC needs to work. BRAC staff felt that SAEs were cooperative, giving them their mobile numbers and asking them to call without any hesitation. BRAC staff view this as the result of the similarities in their responsibilities: both are working towards 100% sanitation coverage. In contrast, the UNOs are busy with many administrative programmes and their focus is not exclusively on water and sanitation.

UP chairmen and BRAC staff also have mutual interests, as chairmen are required to inform SAEs and UNOs about their progress on sanitation coverage; SAEs and UNOs tend to cross-check this information with BRAC staff, encouraging cooperation. But some of the BRAC staff reported that UP chairmen were non-cooperative because BRAC does not provide financial benefits to them like other NGOs, nor do BRAC's promotional activities lead to direct gains by the UP chairmen. Some UP chairmen asked BRAC to provide support in the hardware sector, noting that other NGOs give rings and slabs whereas BRAC only gives messages. According to some of the BRAC staff these chairmen prefer to have money or hardware so that they can distribute a proportion to their party members and acquaintances. A few POs told us that BRAC's wide range of activities in the field have created awareness among the communities and somehow has taken a hold on UP chairman's monopoly control over development of local community. Previously the communities had to depend on the UP chairmen blind-folded as they did not have any other option. Now many NGOs are working and they have wide options to choose services from them.

Mutually beneficial relationship

Many argue that the voluntary sector may be better placed to articulate the needs of the weak, to provide services and development in remote areas, to encourage the changes in attitudes and practices necessary to curtail discrimination, to identify and redress threats to the environment, and to nurture the productive capacity of the most vulnerable organizations and the public and private sectors (Clark 1993). Some government officials acknowledged that BRAC works in every part of the country and it has achieved considerably good level of success in various areas including health over the decades through hard work and efficiency. They told us that the government of Bangladesh is aware of BRAC's contribution, particularly achieving success through motivational and awareness raising activities. However, a strong voluntary sector does not guarantee a high degree of interaction among the various organizations. There can be a rigid divide between voluntary organizations and the public sector (Clark 1993). BRAC staff mentioned that sometimes government uses BRAC facilities and resources to implement their programmes. There may be a shortage of competent staff especially at local level; corruption and nepotism may be rife (Clark 1993). They also mentioned that because BRAC is a NGO, and people listen to government officials far more than to NGO worker, they intentionally maintain good relationships with government bodies. It appears that where the interaction is high the climate is most favourable for poverty reduction and other social priorities, though cause and effect may be difficult to separate (Tandon 1991). Whether a strong nongovernmental organization (NGO) sector encourages governments to pursue such priorities, or assists them attain their objective, this vehicle of civil society has potential importance which has hitherto been largely neglected (Clark 1993).

BRAC's role as monitor

One UNO noted that because BRAC has a large number of staff they can properly monitor the installation of latrines, whereas the government officials are fewer in number and often have to depend on BRAC for this monitoring support.

Public authority and personal respect

Authority of BRAC compared to government/UP actors with respect to community members

Some BRAC staff feel they lack authority in their communications with government officials and community members, and feel their efforts to motivate behavioural change are constrained by their lack of official authority. One strategy used by BRAC staff for addressing this limitation is to involve government staff, including SAEs, at village level, to give villagers the impression that BRAC works along with the government as a partner in WASH programme implementation. The presence of government officials makes many BRAC programme activities easier, for example, when demolishing unsanitary latrines, BRAC staff try to get SAEs or UNOs to accompany them to provide justification, and so that the villagers understand the importance of doing so. An *Upazila* WASH Manager told us that BRAC staff try to maintain good relationship with UNOs and SAEs so that they will accept their invitations to attend advocacy and opinion leaders' meetings⁸ which encourage villagers to follow hygiene messages properly.

Respect and protocol between BRAC staff, government officials and UP representatives

Some government officials felt that BRAC POs were inadequately trained in the appropriate means of approaching a UNO or other government officials. There were cases in which BRAC staff were felt to have failed to approach and communicate with government officials and UP chairmen in the appropriate manner. For example, a chairman said that he had been angered by a PO 5 who entered his room without prior permission and did not introduce himself properly and rudely asked the chairman, "*Apni-e-to monay hoi cheyarkan naki?* (I guess you are the chairman, right?)". When the chairman asked him, "Who are you?" the PO 5 replied, "I have come from BRAC." The chairman displayed his anger by retorting, "*What is BRAC?*", although he was fully aware of BRAC. In another example, a PO annoyed a UNO by behaving in an extremely casual manner with the official.

⁸ Opinion leaders are those who are considered as respectable and commendable persons in rural societies; like Imam, teacher, members of Army, BDR, Police, woman entrepreneur etc.

In their defence, BRAC staff note that while government officials and local representatives expect others to be extremely well-mannered and respectful of their status, their own attitudes and behaviour are questionable. As Tandon (1991) clarifies, a “genuine partnership between NGOs and the government to work on a problem facing the country or a region... based on mutual respect, acceptance of autonomy, independence, and pluralism of NGO opinions and position.” Although some UNOs and UP chairmen felt that WASH Programme Managers and PO 7s were not polite enough towards government officials, some BRAC staff also felt that they were not respected: officials frequently kept them waiting for meetings as though their time was unimportant. BRAC staff are expected to accept criticism and be grateful for any interaction with government officials. Another issue which should be mentioned is by keeping a low profile they may actually be making themselves more vulnerable to government attack (Bratton 1990). In one case, a UNO accused BRAC staff of failing to submit a report to him in the required time, even though the PO 7 had submitted the report to the SAE within the required timeframe and according to the existing system. But the SAE had failed to submit the report to the UNO; the PO 7 was unable to say anything in front of the UNO. But this situation is not very rare. The mutual distrust and jealousy appears to be deep-rooted all over the world. Government fear that NGOs erode their political power or even threaten national security (Fowler 1992). And NGOs mistrust the motivation of the government and its officials.

Management of internal BRAC staff relations

There is always potential for conflict between NGOs and the government, between different NGOs (because in most countries they are far from a homogenous group) and even within an individual NGO (Clark 1993). Internal disagreements and status struggles within and between BRAC programmes can also impact negatively on the respect and authority accorded to the WASH programme. An *Upazila* WASH Programme Manager recounted how he had spent a great deal of time and effort in building up a good relationship with the local UP chairman, only to have this damaged by the local BRAC Development Programme Manager criticising the WASH Programme as insignificant and less important than his own programme.

Practical issues and constraints

Understanding of BRAC's role

Some government staff acknowledge BRAC's extensive field network capacity based on previous programme experience. According to them BRAC has diverse programmes like microfinance, health, education, advocacy, forestry, nursery, etc., which helped it build networks with different departments and sectors of

government, other NGOs, locally elected representatives and community peoples, which positively affect the implementation of WASH programme. Many of these programmes are based on awareness building, social motivation, socioeconomic development, etc. These programmes have been appreciated and recognized by the government and development partners. They thought BRAC can use its concerned and competent staff of these programmes to build good relationship with government.

However, with respect to BRAC's WASH programme activities, some government staff consider BRAC's focus on the provision of software support to be inadequate: a UNO commented that, "*Shudhu waz-mahfile kaj hobena!*" [*Only awareness messages won't work*]. He added, "People are more or less well aware these days, they know what is good for their health. But due to poverty, they can not afford to buy sanitary latrines. So, NGOs should better contribute in hardware promotion."

Information sharing

BRAC regularly share report with the government. They update the government time to time about their activities, sanitation coverage, etc. WASH Managers share reports with SAEs and UNOs as scheduled and these are usually accepted by them. They use these reports for further assessment of the government programme, and to identify the necessary steps needed to increase the coverage of latrine in problem areas.

In contrast, UP chairmen tend to disagree with BRAC data, which usually shows that sanitation coverage is lower than they claim. The UP offices do not share key information, particularly the master roll with BRAC staff. The master roll is a record of people who have received sanitary latrine hardware (rings and slabs) from the UP. SAEs agreed with BRAC staff that access to the master roll was vital to BRAC WASH programme activities. Without this document, BRAC staff are unable to monitor sanitation coverage in a particular area. According to many villagers and some BRAC staff, UP chairmen and UP members do not always provide the sanitary latrine materials to the villagers though it is recorded as distributed in the master roll. May be that is a reason why they do not want to share the master roll with BRAC staff. On the other hand, sometimes UP chairmen and UP members consider themselves as a part of the government and do not think they need to share information with NGO members. Also there is no agreement between government and BRAC about sharing information mutually.

Recruitment Policy

Number of POs is always the same for different WASH areas. Staff recruitment seems to have a fixed structure and it does not matter how big or small the

corresponding *upazila* is, the staff number remains fixed. So, in some big areas it becomes tough for the POs to perform their regular duties. For example, Gopalpur (2nd phase) is a very big area with a large population. The POs of Gopalpur has to work hard to communicate with all stakeholders. So, many a times they have to arrange orientation or refreshers' meetings once in every two months instead of one per month.

Allocation of fuel

According to the POs, amount of fuel allocated for their motor cycles were inadequate especially in big areas. So, either they spent money from their own pocket or they did not cover all the areas. Sometimes they failed to meet with the government officials as per work plan to save fuel.

Financial issues and the cost of public officials' time

BRAC pays an honorarium to government officials for attending meetings, seminars, and workshops, as an acknowledgement of the fact that they need to spend their valuable time in support of the BRAC programmes.

High Staff turnover

High staff turnover both in BRAC and the government is another problem for both the organizations. It takes time to build relationship, but when a staff is transferred the whole process of building relationship with the new staff starts again. A SAE has mentioned that the previous WASH Manager was very well known and well accepted among all the government officials of UNO office, but the new one will take sometime to gain the same level of good relationship. According to a BRAC head office staff, sometimes it is good that some hostile officers are being transferred and helpful for BRAC programme. Two of the four UNOs we talked had been transferred from another *upazila* within the last 2 months whereas more than half of the BRAC WASH staff were transferred from or to another *upazila* in the last one month.

Authorization letter

Some problems arise because the government officials do not feel empowered to work with BRAC without authorization from Dhaka to clarify that the WASH programme is a partner of the government. This should improve BRAC staff access to government officials and facilities.

Successful dimensions of government-BRAC relations in the WASH programme

Successful cooperation or good relationship between the government and BRAC depends on some factors:

- A healthy relationship is only conceivable when both parties share common objectives (Clark 1993). The objectives of the BRAC WASH programme are aligned with that of the government; both aims to achieve 100% sanitation by 2010.
- BRAC's success in various areas over the decades including intervention of (Oral Rehydration Therapy) has strengthened its position to interact with the government. Many government officials are aware that BRAC has strong capacity in terms of technical, logistical and staff support, which are likely to have positive impacts in the implementation of WASH programme.
- The strategy of facilitating participation of UNOs and SAEs has helped BRAC to draw on the public authority of government officials to motivate rural communities towards sanitary latrine installation and use.
- Regular interaction with government officials has helped strengthen the relationship between BRAC and the government.
- The government officials value and to some extent, depend on, BRAC's effective system for monitoring and reporting on progress towards sanitation.

Problem areas in government-BRAC relations in the WASH programme

Most serious constraints in promoting BRAC-government cooperation

Poor quality sanitary hardware is a major constraint in implementing WASH programme. Most villagers showed their dissatisfaction about the quality of ring and slab. One SAE explained that increases in the prices of construction materials and buyers' price-sensitivity have led entrepreneurs to produce cheap items, and reluctance to purchase higher-priced rings and slabs produced by DPHE. According to him the materials being used for making rings and slabs by others were mostly of poor quality. These rings and slabs last for 9-18 months. According to the SAE, these rings and slabs might be broken or eroded due to harmful elements of excreta. This serious practical constraint reflects the need for coordinated efforts on the part of BRAC, government staff, entrepreneurs of Village Sanitation Centers and communities. To develop and sustain a government-NGO collaboration, both government and NGOs must see considerable gain from it, and that if both stand to gain from the collaboration, they have much to contribute (A N Zafar Ullah *et al.* 2006).

Areas where problems could be addressed

Environment laws

BRAC staff most of the time inform people that open defecation is bad for health and it is against environment law. But as the villagers are not aware of environment laws, according to BRAC POs they are not afraid of violating. So, SAEs suggested that BRAC should provide its field level staff with a copy of environment law to aware the villagers.

BRAC can also arrange professional training on environmental laws for small grassroots groups like China is planning to do. In case of China, China's State Environmental Administration (SEPA) has emerged as a strong supporter of NGO activity, and work very closely with NGOs – both publicly and behind the scenes – to achieve common goals (Elizabeth 2005).

Reasons behind not so good relationship between government and BRAC

Lack of mutual respect and understanding

Some government officials feel BRAC staff do not show sufficient respect to them, and fail to maintain appropriate protocol in their interactions with them.

Lack of coordination

There are several factors by which government can influence the operational environment for NGOs: a) Nature and quality of governance (pluralism, accountability, etc), b) The legal framework (registration, reporting, requirements, etc.), c) Taxation policies (on imported goods, local philanthropy, etc.), d) Collaboration with NGOs (when? sector? nature of partnership?), e) Public consultation and information (policy impact of NGOs), f) Coordination (role for governments in coordination NGO activities), and g) Official support (government funding, official contracts) (Clark 1993). In this study the lack of coordination has been identified in several cases:

- Some UP chairmen believe that regular interaction between BRAC head office staff and UNOs will be a useful strategy for raising the priority UNOs currently give to coordination with the WASH programme: at present, *upazila*-level government officials tend to feel that BRAC field staff are not of sufficiently high status to merit their support.
- Lack of coordination and authorization at higher levels results in no formal representation from BRAC WASH programme in the monthly coordination meeting at *upazila* level.

- Some government officials said that they could not always help BRAC staff as they did not have any official permission to do so. There is always opportunity cost of attending BRAC meetings, workshops and field visits. They had to forgo their regular official activities in that case.
- Intra-programme conflict of BRAC is sometimes open and known to the partners, which detracts the credibility of the WASH Programme and the professionalism of BRAC field staff. It somehow reflects lack of coordination at the center.
- During field visits we have seen that massive transfer is going on in both BRAC and government offices, which seems to have an adverse effect on the existing good relationship.

Information gap

- Most of the UNOs were inadequately informed about the purpose and value of software support and motivational activities and perhaps that is why they considered awareness rising ineffective and unproductive.

Conflict of interest

In most cases, POs were not given any photocopy of the *master roll* developed by the local government. UP chairmen/members preserve it for documentation as a proof of distributing ring and slab. Without the *master roll* it becomes almost impossible for the POs to monitor the coverage of sanitation in a particular area.

Recommendations and conclusion

This study explored the relationship between the government and BRAC staff using qualitative research method. It was found that even though there was a prompt initiation of partnership, strong and mutual relationship would take long time to be established. Financial interest, opportunity cost of different collaborative efforts, coverage debate, difference in mutual interest etc. were identified as the key factors that obstruct developing the relationship rapidly. On the other hand, some individual's positive attitude towards cooperation and group work has initiated the programme to attain some commendable successes.

Clarity in information sharing is a major field where both BRAC and the government have to work with full transparency for attaining the MDG goals related to water, sanitation and hygiene. NGOs are often described as offering "development alternatives" but this is misleading. The dictionary defines "alternative" as meaning of two or more possible courses;..mutually exclusive". The population of any country does not have a choice between the development model offered by government and that by NGOs. NGOs can play an important role in helping certain population groups, or filling in the gaps in state services, or in pressing for a chance in the national development strategy, but they do not offer realistic alternative pathways. Their innovations may test out new approaches, but these only become sustainable or of significant scale if they influence national development (Clark 1993). BRAC high level officials should make a good relationship with responsible government officials so that they authorize BRAC as a partner in implementation of WASH programme. It will then be easier for the BRAC and the government officials in the field level to work together and avoid coordination gap. Lack of mutual respect and understanding should also be addressed jointly to overcome problems regarding staff turnover, sharing of master roll, etc.

BRAC should come up with a resolution to overcome internal programme conflicts. Otherwise it will be as destructive as now for mobilizing the society and building rapport among communities to promote hygiene education and awareness messages.

The relationship between NGOs and the GoB has been and is mixed, varying from having parallel or competitive activities to cooperation and collaboration for

social sector programmes (Asian Development Bank 1999). A number of studies have shown that the government and NGOs have common goals and vision with respect to social sector development, particularly in health and nutrition, poverty alleviation, human resource development, environmental protection, non-formal education and women's development (Perry 1999, Begum 2000, and Ahmad 2001). An effective collaboration should therefore recognize the differences and build on the basis of the respective advantages of government and NGOs (Begum 2000). If both BRAC and the government can maintain the successful dimensions of their relations seriously, achievement of sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene programme may not be impossible. On the other hand they have to work seriously on the issues that hamper the success of the programme.

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