



Documenting change in the WASPA project: *Involving farmers and other beneficiary groups in WASPA Bangladesh*



In March 2006, the first interactions with the farmers in the Terokhadia area were informal; the team walked around the fields and asked questions to understand the situation better and to build a relationship. At first the farmers were not very interested and were reluctant to speak. They were very busy working and did not wish to be disturbed.



Staff from the partner NGOs in Rajshahi made daily informal visits. The project team wanted to learn more

WASPA Bangladesh focuses on a group of approximately 247 farmers in the Terokhadia area in Rajshahi city. These farmers use wastewater from the Bashuar Beel drain and the Cantonment drain to cultivate a total area of 100ha. The wastewater is pumped directly from the drains into their fields. The main crops are leafy vegetables, wheat, potatoes, corn, papaya and rice. These crops are mostly sold in local markets.

about which farmers used wastewater, how farmers used the water, why they used the water, positive impacts of using the water and any health problems that the farmers were aware of.



Focus Group Discussions (FDGs) were held between August and October 2006 with all of the farmers using wastewater. At these FDGs the farmers realized that they shared some problems and concerns, related to wastewater, agriculture and sanitation.

Because there is no alternative water source, the farmers use wastewater for irrigation and for many other purposes, like washing vegetables and for bathing.



The water from the drains contains liquid and solid wastes from small industries, clinics and houses in Rajshahi.



The wastewater is free of charge and easily available. The farmers said it reduces the fertilizer needed.



They also identified negative aspects of using wastewater: health problems such as itching skin and diarrhea. Furthermore, the wastewater has a bad smell and sometimes contains sharp objects and needles from the clinics. These collect in the drains and can cause injuries to the farmers. Solid waste clogs the drains and the farmers' pumps. Many mosquitoes breed in the stagnant water.

Before discussing this together with the WASPA team, the farmers were not aware that certain health problems were related to using wastewater. The farmers also stated that they have no access to relevant officials and don't see many options for improving their situation. The farmers became more interested in WASPA because they expect improvements from the project.

As the project progressed, farmers' involvement increased. When field staff visited, the farmers became eager to talk and made time to sit down.. After the Focus Group Discussions, the partner NGOs visited the farmers again to gather information for the agricultural survey. The farmers had become more aware of the negative aspects of wastewater, but they had no organization to take issues up collectively nor a platform to communicate with other stakeholders.



On May 23rd 2007 three farmers were invited to the first Learning Alliance (LA) workshop that brought all the project stakeholders together. Staff from the partner NGO in Rajshahi who know the farmers well, identified these farmers as influential and confident to communicate the concerns of their group. They were briefed on the objectives of the LA meeting and what kind of questions might be asked to them.

In the Learning Alliance workshop these three active and vocal farmers contributed to the group work

about problems, visions, and actions, but were not yet confident to speak out in the plenary.

(October 2007)



In December 2007, three meetings were held with the farmers to share the main findings of water quality testing and agriculture assessment. Around 20 farmers participated in each meeting. They agreed with the assessment results and stated that they use wastewater instead of fresh water due to its accessibility within the Terokhadia agricultural area and financial difficulties in getting fresh water. There were lively discussions and the farmers expressed their expectations that WASPA could help improve their access to clean water and support from the relevant authorities.



In order to improve the situation relating to wastewater the farmers emphasized the importance of proper operation and maintenance of the drainage systems by Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC). In addition farmers suggested that RCC should take necessary steps in waste management to stop the flow of solid and hazardous liquid wastes into the storm water drains.

The farmers' active participation and enthusiasm in the three formal meetings shows their increased awareness about the project and can be considered a positive factor for the project. They have expressed their willingness to continue meeting with WASPA team in the future and expressed an interest in learning more about how to use wastewater safely.

(January 2008)

In February 2008, NGO Forum organized a one day hygiene promotion training for the wastewater farmers. The training was provided on four days and a total of 100 farmers out of the 247 in the Terokhadia area attended. Before inviting the farmers the objective of the training was briefed by both the WASPA team and the partner NGO staff which helped the farmers understand the relevance of the training.



The farmers received information on the importance of safe hygiene and safe use of wastewater for their health and that of others. Many of the farmers are illiterate and this was the first time they participated in such a training. Interactive sessions focused on safe drinking water, use of hygienic latrines, using wastewater in irrigation with proper treatment, and how to keep pathogens and faecal micro-organisms at safe levels.

Their feedback revealed that the training provided new information about solid waste and wastewater and helped to raise their awareness of the risks of using wastewater and the importance of sanitary toilets as well as their understanding of how to maintain hygiene.

(April 2008)

In May 2008, interviews were conducted with the women and wastewater farmers following a structured questionnaire developed by IWMI. This was done with a view to obtain a better understanding about how different people think about wastewater, sanitation and agriculture and what they know about the WASPA project. For example, women interviewees expressed that nobody else has come to them to talk about issues like sanitation and hygiene except for the WASPA team and the Partner NGOs.



The interviews revealed that the farmers had also become more aware of the linkages between wastewater, sanitation, hygiene and agriculture. The farmers mentioned the importance of wastewater and agriculture for their livelihood. They always use wastewater and it gives them good crops. The WASPA project has given the opportunity to discuss solutions for the solid waste problem, such as the garbage trap.



One woman mentioned the meeting held between women groups and the WASPA project in December 2007, where the WASPA team had informed them about the potential health risk of using water from the beel (seasonal pond). However, agriculture very important to them because it is the only source of income for their family.

In May 2008, a meeting was held between the farmers and the Ward Commissioner to discuss the garbage trap and its operation and maintenance (O&M). Farmers mentioned that it would be difficult for them to maintain the garbage trap and its O&M because they are fully occupied in their daily activities.

Women also received information on the testing results of tube-well and wastewater and relevant hygiene issues. When they were interviewed, the women urged to stop the connection between the septic tanks and drains. They recognize that all types of wastes flow into the drains and that drainage water enters into the agricultural lands and therefore hygiene practices should be properly maintained by the farmers as they use wastewater. Women shared the opinion that the Rajshahi City Corporation should take up this issue.



In June 2008, NGO Forum together with the Metropolitan Agricultural Officer of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) organized one-day training on agriculture practices and fertilizer management in which 102 farmers participated. After hearing good stories about the hygiene training, two wastewater farmers who had not been previously

involved in WASPA also became interested and attended the training.



In a meeting with the EC Delegation held in July 2008 the wastewater farmers affirmed their positive experience of working with WASPA project and mentioned that they hoped that it would continue in the future.

(July 2008)

The construction of the garbage trap has been completed. This garbage trap is expected to benefit the farmers to a great extent by reducing the solid wastes that have been clogging their pumps causing adverse effects on agriculture. RCC has agreed to take responsibility for operation and maintenance of the garbage trap.

(December 2008)

In this training, farmers obtained information about how the quality of wastewater could be improved and how they can reduce their application of fertilizer and insecticides. The Metropolitan Agricultural Officer of DAE encouraged the wastewater farmers to cultivate crops which need less wastewater.

In the LA core group meeting held on 23 June 2008, the representatives of the farmers shared their training experiences with the other stakeholders. One of the farmers spoke out and urged RCC to undertake appropriate measures so that they can use wastewater safely. Their active involvement in this meeting showed their increased confidence and involvement in the LA process.



Both the hygiene and agriculture training were mentioned by the farmers as significant in obtaining useful information and they were also valued for providing a platform for sharing and exchanging common problems.