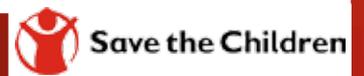




IMPROVING ACCOUNTABILITY IMPROVING SERVICES IN SCHOOL



Transformation begins when you bring together children and school authorities

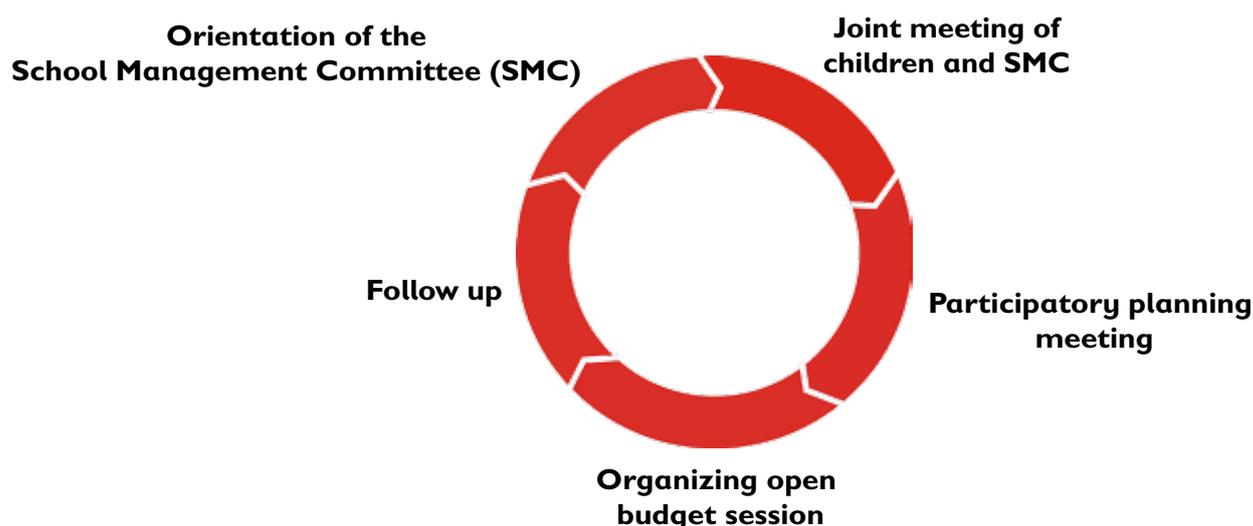
In Bangladesh, School Management Committees (SMC) and teachers define accountability as informing parents about exam results of their children or reporting to the education office on school performance. SMCs and teachers do not hold themselves accountable to students for delivery of quality education in a favourable learning environment. There is in fact no formal or semi-formal opportunities for students to interact with school authorities, and this is both disempowering, and an important barrier for improvement of service delivery to students.

Water, sanitation and hygiene in schools (WASH) is a key driver of attendance and quality learning. Girls in particular are likely to drop out of school, reduce attendance and as a result suffer academically if there are no clean facilities available. Much has been written of the benefit of strengthened WASH facilities, and it is an indicator of service provision that can easily be tracked and evaluated. Save the Children in partnership with the National Children's Task Force (NCTF) decided that centering a social accountability project around WASH would be a good opportunity to answer a number of questions: Can social accountability in schools improve service delivery? Can it empower young people? Can the use of technology as a tool for social accountability enhance results?

As a result from 2014-2016, the two organisations together with Village Education Resource Center (VERC) and the Center for Services and Information on Disability (CSID) have piloted a project in 30 secondary schools in Savar in which children hold teachers, SMCs and education offices to account through an ICT app called My SchoolVoice. In addition, the 30 schools have been supported to hold inclusive budgeting and planning sessions for allocation of school resources. This has resulted in some significant improvements in SMC response towards student needs, transformed their interaction with students and enhanced their contribution to child development in these all important adolescent years.

PROCESS TOWARDS TRANSPARENCY

The project adopted new practices to enhance transparency and participatory decision making between SMCs, teachers and students. These are outlined below.



i. CHILDREN'S INTERACTION WITH AUTHORITY

Prior to the intervention of this project, SMCs and teachers had never considered including students in school management. The project has transformed this. The NCTF has encouraged schools to set up school NCTF committees, which are tasked to speak with teachers and the SMC on issues arising for students- particularly with respect to WASH. Schools have assigned a teacher to support the school NCTF in conducting its activities. NCTF members have access to the head teacher and SMC to share their views on how the best interests of the child can be ensured. As a result WASH is now considered a priority by each SMC in the pilot schools.



“Our school and management system will be improved if we listen to the children and consider their voices”.
– Head teacher of Gokul Nagar High School

ii. ICT FOR DEVELOPMENT

Under the Project, the NCTF and Save the Children, together with mPower, developed an android ICT application called My School Voice (<http://www.myschoolvoice.org/>) to monitor and report on the state of WASH in schools. The project supplied android tabs, kept at the school, and used by NCTF students to collect data on WASH to feed into My School Voice. The information is then reviewed by the headteacher on a dashboard that visualizes the current WASH situation, as well as the school’s performance against other schools, as well as the WASH situation over time. The headteacher can then ensure a response in real time. As a result some visible and important changes have taken place in schools: regular cleaning of toilets, ensuring availability of soap and tissue paper, fixing of water supply for handwashing. In some schools, the SMC has assigned women teachers to address the menstrual hygiene in school. In addition, improved WASH has been included in the performance assessment of school teachers, building accountability for the issue into schools systems.

iii. SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

The linkages that have been established between students (and their representatives through the NCTF), teachers and the SMC in relation to WASH have had an important knock-on effect. When interviewed the adults recognize the importance of consulting students and children, as well as the parents in the governance of the school. In project schools, teachers consult with the NCTF before taking decisions regarding the improvement of school facilities. Governance of school has become more consultative and inclusive of students, parents and teachers.

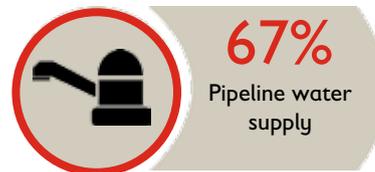
iv. PARTICIPATORY PLAN AND BUDGET

In the targeted 30 schools, none had any prior experience of participatory planning and open budgeting sessions. The project introduced open planning and budgeting sessions with representation from SMC members, NCTF committee members, class captains, the school PTA, local elites, parents' representatives, local government (UP/Ward members). In these sessions participants prioritized spending needs and made recommendations for investment in the school. In all schools, an additional budget line was added on WASH to reflect requirements for infrastructure investment and hygiene materials.

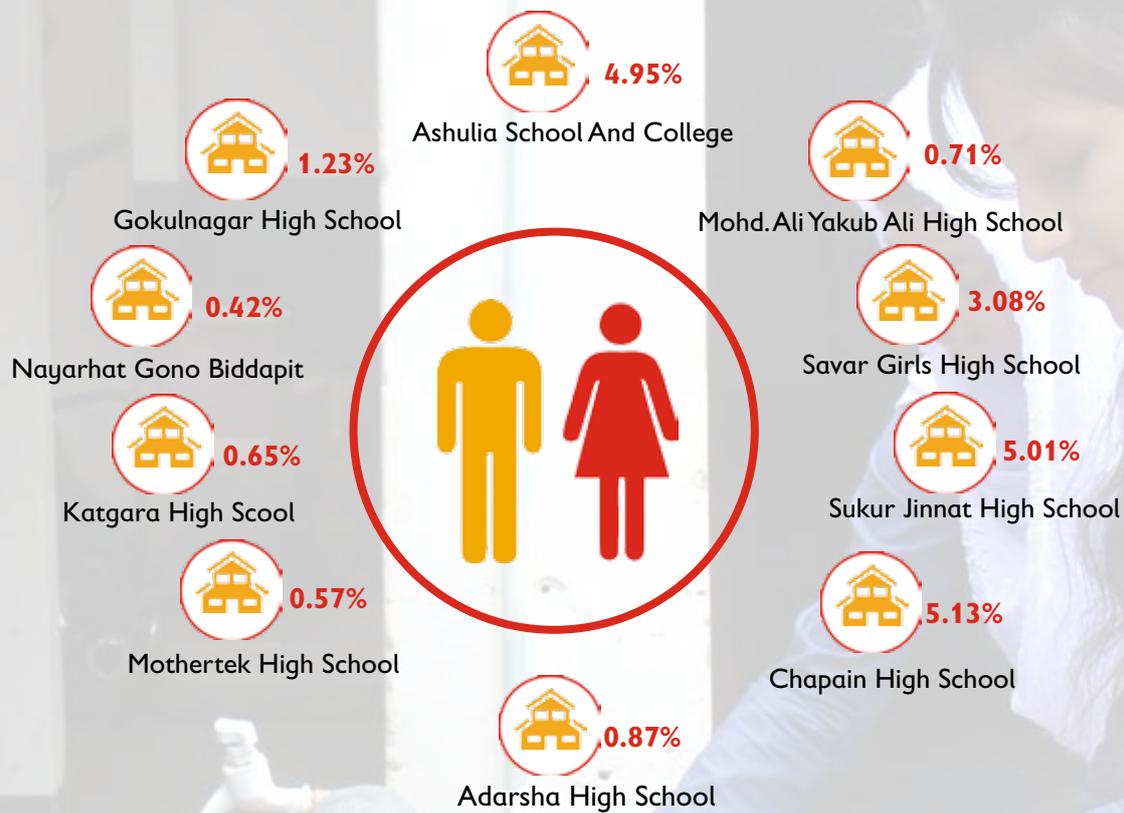
This has been an important session for school morale. Stakeholders feel that the school is listening to their priorities- particularly the children involved. The SMC has been seen for the first time to be taking into account the interests of all interested parties in the school community; and in turn has increased the visibility of the work that SMC members and its accountability to the school community.

TRANSFORMATION WITH IMPROVED FACILITIES

The My School Voice App, the participatory budgeting and planning processes, the ongoing mentoring to both children in schools and decision makers by project partners have resulted in tangible results – changed budget lines to reflect WASH needs resulting in improved infrastructure investment and maintenance as well as better hygiene practices.



Less tangible but no less important have been the new ways of adults and children engaging with one another. The SMC and teachers have now experienced the value to the school and to the students of listening to children's views on the issues that matter to them most. They have also received increased recognition for being responsive to conversations with students on their needs, and for the increased level of transparency and inclusiveness in their governance of the school.



Budget allocation for WASH by Schools (% against total Budget)

CONCLUSION

The project has improved intergenerational relations. It has resulted in physical improvements to the school and have empowered around 26,000 children to make their cases, express their views, and see that they can be change agents if they organize and take positive collective action. Girls in particular have been listened to on an issue that is culturally difficult to address openly- and have had a way of communicating information about menstrual hygiene in a way that is not embarrassing to them- with strong dividends of seeing their views being valued and their toilets being cleaned.

In most of the schools the interaction over WASH and budgets have snowballed into additional initiatives- keeping classrooms clean, increased teacher/student interaction on a daily basis, more organized sport and cultural functions, tree planting and in some cases a citizen's charter and complaint box to give a greater group of children the opportunity to share their views and challenges with the SMC and their teachers.





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