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F2F 2015: Integrated floods management: Acting locally, linking beyond!

Integrated Water Resource Management Project (IWRM) Project in North West Bangladesh

– A GO/NGO venture to pilot the implementation of Bangladesh Water Act 2013

Country/Region: Bangladesh / Asia
Institution: Swiss Red Cross (SRC)
Time Frame: 2014 – 2018
Partner(s): WARPO (govt.) and DASCOH (national NGO)
Beneficiaries: 250'000 (direct); 1 million (indirect)
Key words: IWRM, 4R, LGI, BWA, IBRS
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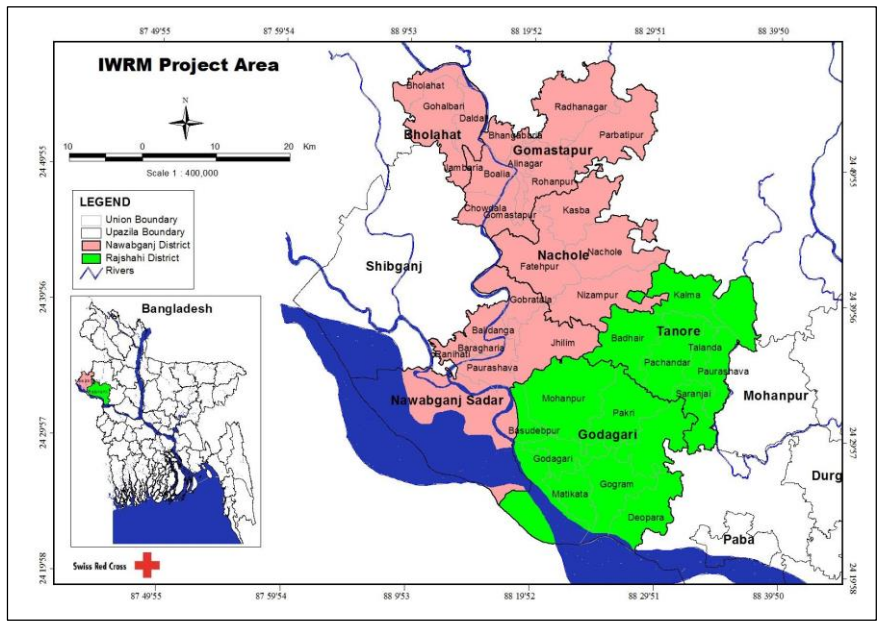
1. Context and rationale

Bangladesh achieved tremendous success in attaining food security and in providing 97% of its population with improved water supply. Such achievements were mainly due to the use of groundwater for irrigation and domestic water supplies. However, the discovery of arsenic in shallow groundwater in mid-1990s has overshadowed such achievements. Further, over-extraction of groundwater for irrigation renders shallow tube wells inoperable for three to four months a year. From only 8% in 1985, reports of low water table have risen to over 50%. The proneness of this region to natural hazards exacerbates the difficult living conditions. Since the present groundwater use has exceeded the usable recharge limit, the drinking water sector is already at high risk and thus affects the sustainability of the exclusively ground water dependent farming practice in the long term. In order to safeguard a minimum standard of quality and quantity of drinking water for all. It is necessary for the drinking water sub-sector to engage with the water resources sector at large.

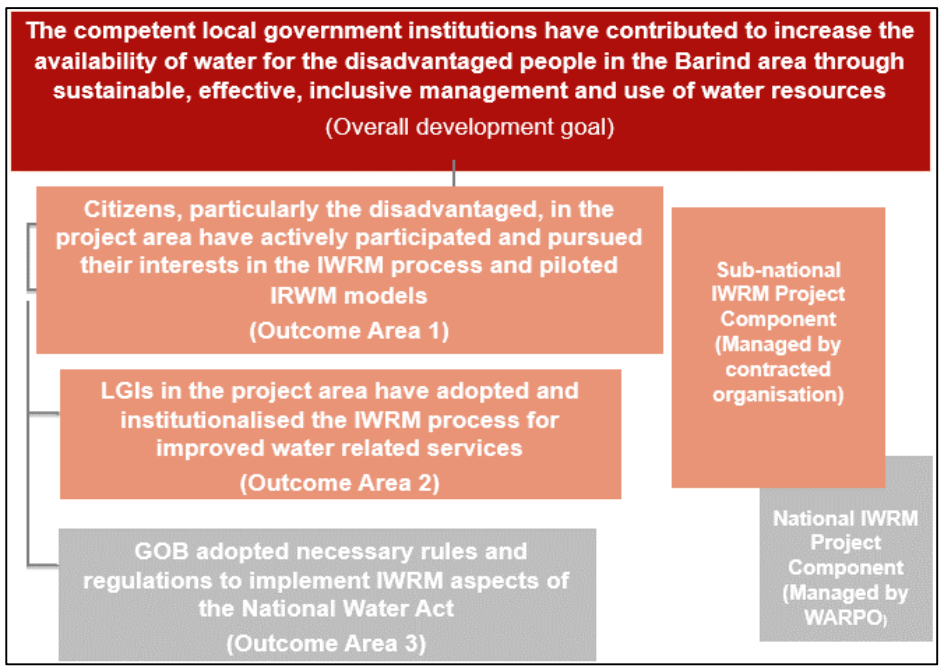
The Bangladesh Water Act (BWA) 2013 seeks to resolve the competition for water use holistically and to the satisfaction of all users. It provides a legal framework for integrated water resource management (IWRM). In Bangladesh, water resource management remains fragmented: The approach to water management continues to be supply led, technically driven, and top-down. The results are unsustainably high economic, social and ecological costs. The IWRM project emphasizes an integrated approach and coordinated decision making processes across different sectors and levels of government. Accordingly, the present project aims at operationalising the BWA 2013 by reforming the institutional engagement in water resource management, in order to enable people to reap sustainable and equitable benefits from improved water availability.

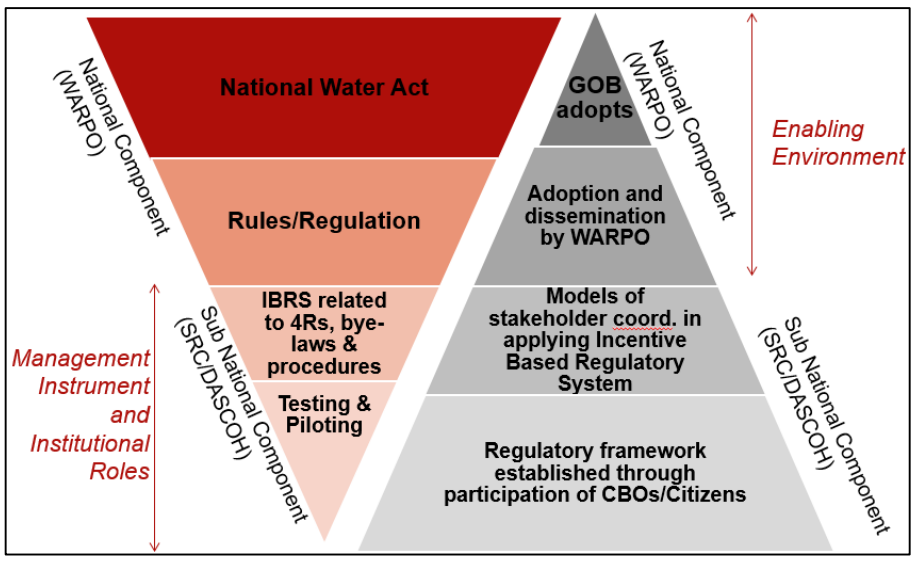


2. Description of intervention approach / project

The project endeavours to develop an incentive-based regulatory system (IBRS) that steers the transformation away from a sectoral management of water resources to one that is coordinated and holistic. To achieve this, the project engages (i.) at the micro level with water consumers and managers to promote 4R-aligned water management practices; (ii.) at the meso level with Local Govt. Institutions (LGIs) through a range of licensing, financial and social instruments to aid development of a regulatory model for water resource management; and (iii.) at the macro level with higher levels of administration and ministries to secure the buy-in for proven project results resulting in their institutionalisation into the policy regime. The objectives and key features of the project are explained below:

Enabling Environment	**Rules:** that support the regulation of decentralized water resources governance **By-laws:** that ensure compliance of water managers and users **Social norms:** that drive to conserve water resources
Institutional Roles	**Consumers:** limit water usage to make sufficient water available for all users **Asset Owners:** efficiently manage water resources in compliance with rules and by-laws **Local Governments:** license compliance of water asset owners and service providers **Village Courts/Standing Committees:** resolve local water disputes / amend by-laws **Central Government:** regulate LGIs against water resources failures **Regulatory Commission (does not exist):** arbitrates on fees/tariffs for water resources **Coordination mechanisms:** drive integrated decision making
Instruments	**Licensing:** Planning Approvals, NoCs, registration, trade licenses **Financial:** Rebates, recognition, rewards, reductions, tariffs/cross subsidies, fines **Technical:** Alternate water resource switching, efficiency & re-use options **Social:** Mobilization, information sharing, benchmarking, collective decision making **Arbitration:** Water standing committees, village court, regulatory commissions





Examples of priority water resource management practices being piloted/tested by the project in collaboration with LGIs:		
	Goal	**Instrument**
Reduce	Reduce abstraction	Support for the shift to surface water sources
		Rebate for the reduction in water use by a collective of farmers
		Reward UPs with the best results in reducing over-abstraction (measure water table)
	Reduce pollution	Reward collective efforts to clean up polluted ponds
Reuse	Rain water harvesting	Rebate to any owner (community) that excavates a private silted pond (khas)
	Wastewater	Rebate for households/organisations that treat and re-use wastewater
Recycle	Ground water recharge	Support for government buildings to pilot rainwater MAR systems and households to pilot surface water MAR systems using disused tube wells
		Rebates to agricultural owners that construct small (earthen) check dam
		Support for communities that construct and maintain large (concrete, rubber) check dams
Restore	Water Safety (Chemical)	Rebate to any household that has screened their tube well for arsenic
	Water Safety (Bacterial)	Reward for UPs that introduce a random bacterial water testing regime
	M&E by UPs	Reward UPs for setting up a database of all households

3. Lessons learnt

- Poor water governance in the region combined with resource constraints pose great challenges to the promotion of IWRM in the region.
- Lack of viable and long lasting alternatives to ground water is a concern; especially given the geo-ecological features of the region characterised by low rainfall, high temperature, and low availability of surface water sources.
- Interagency collaboration cannot be achieved through decrees but rather through dialogue between sectors for more equitable and efficient allocation of water resources, building synergies, and reducing trade-offs through convergence of goals.
- Implementing far-reaching institutional reforms is strongly resisted as the political class and bureaucracy have vested interests in continuing the present regime.

4. Entry points for scaling up the approach

The project is piloting the implementation of the Bangladesh Water Act 2013, which establishes the authority and responsibility of the local governments to regulate the abstraction and usage of water resources with the explicit purpose of ensuring sufficient allocation of water to all sectors, in all places, at all times. Being a pilot, the aspect of scaling-up is inherent in the programme design and will depend on implementing and testing the following actions:

- Formulation of rules and regulations to implement the BWA 2013, that delegate responsibility to local governments for the building a regulatory regime followed by its testing at the sub-national level;
- By-laws to be passed and implemented by local governments to license abstraction by all asset owners and monitor their compliance with these rules and regulations;
- Central government to regulate failure of local governments through 'spot checking' to identify failures and incentivize local government achievements in water management;
- Mobilization of users to temper their demand for water resources and ensure the participation of all actors in water management.

The piloting experience and results at the sub-national level will feed into the national policy regime followed by its implementation at the national level.