

SPOTLIGHT

Statistics:

Addressing specific problems and prospects of the management system of water supply and sanitation facilities for the street dwellers.

FAYEKA ZABEEN SIDDIQUA

Due to inadequate access and insufficient water supply, the “floating” or street people of Dhaka have to spend more money on average on water, compared to the people living in slums and apartments, researchers say. Through a questionnaire survey conducted in different areas of Dhaka, the research finds that 40 percent of the street people collect water from distribution pump houses of DWASA, 37 percent from mosques, 16 percent from DWASA’s roadside posts, 4 percent from houses of other people and the rest 3 percent from schools, public toilets and other sources. By spending 30 to 45 minutes on average per day, they are able to collect around 15 to 25 litres of water

used for drinking, cooking, bathing and cleaning purposes which is nearly 25 percent of the minimum water demand for a person every day.

“More than 60 percent of the respondents have said that they can collect water without any cost, but the rest have to spend 15 to 25 taka per day on transport costs,” explains Subrata Chowdhury, the key researcher and Assistant Professor, Department of Civil Engineering, Stamford University Bangladesh.

“A floating family of four members that consumes around 20 litres of water on average has to spend more than Tk 500 per month to collect and transport water, whereas a family that consumes more than 80 litres of water on average a day has to spend nearly Tk 500 per month for their piped water supply.”

What is more alarming is that even



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

after spending a large amount of money, the water that the street people consume is unclean, whereas the pipe water users have access to good quality water for both cleaning and drinking purposes. The research addresses the need of a planned

rehabilitation programme and different initiatives from private organisations and NGOs to help distribute water to low income street dwellers so that they can benefit from the same facilities as everyone else.

A SOLUTION TO WATER CRISIS

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

Each year torrential showers of the monsoon season pour millions of gallons of fresh water over Bangladesh. In cities like Dhaka, where drinking water is a costly commodity, this abundant blessing should not go to waste.

ABM Water Company, established by young entrepreneur Ataul Karim Selim, has been providing facilities to utilise rainwater for years. With his team of skilled engineers, he has been installing rainwater harvesting plants in different important establishments in Bangladesh.

One of the company’s rainwater harvesting plants has been installed at MTB Tower situated in Dhaka’s Bangla Motor area. Ahmed Sami from ABM Water Company says, “Rainwater is

collected from the rooftop and stored in several reservoirs. The plant purifies the water by treating with chemicals. It has the capacity of purifying 10,000 litres of rainwater per hour. This water is purer than the water supplied by WASA.”

Clearly, the crisis of drinking water can be solved easily by setting up rainwater harvesting plants in the city households. “The concept of rainwater harvesting in the urban areas is still quite



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

new in Bangladesh,” says Selim. “The good part is that we are getting a positive feedback regarding this water conservation technique. To date, we have set up five rainwater harvesting plants in different parts of our country.”

By utilising this blessing of fresh rainwater, it is possible to ensure safe drinking water for our people, all year round.

SAVING RAIN WATER

ANANTA YUSUF

South Asia has a long drawn history of rain water harvesting. In many places of South Asia, including Bangladesh, rain water harvesting and water tanks can be traced back to the 9th or 10th Century AD. To this day, water is considered sacred by people living in rural areas, and they ensure that even an ounce of this “precious gift of nature” is not wasted and best use is made of it.

People in Bangladesh have been getting water from ponds and dighis (small water bodies), collecting rain water on rooftops in traditional clay pots from age immemorial. During the pre-Maurayan period, a unique water reservoir system was used in Wari Bateshwar to collect and preserve water.

Interestingly, the method of rain water collection on rooftops has been practiced in our society for thousands of years. This does not only satisfy the need for clean water in many villages but also helps them to preserve water for subsequent dry spells.

Architect and Environment Activist, Iqbal Habib believes that we can adopt this indigenous method in our everyday urban lifestyle. “Access to clean drinking water has been a pressing issue in big cities like Dhaka. The government should make laws to ensure water harvesting zones in the city and, of course, on high rise buildings,” he says.

Rooftop catchments and rain water collection is practiced to this day in rural villages. They put a simple vessel on the edge of the roof that drains rain water into a pot placed on the ground below. However, the amount and quality of rainwater collected depends on the area and the type of roofing materials used.

Underground reservoir systems could also be introduced in urban cities to preserve enough water to cater to a whole city. Iqbal Habib believes that introducing sand-filter water collection is not very difficult in big cities. A proper guideline and government initiatives are all that is needed to make people aware about rain water harvesting.

Exhibiting the Importance of Water

NAZIBA BASHER

ActionAid Bangladesh has taken the initiative of opening the first Water Museum in Asia.

Established on December 29, 2014, the museum is situated in Patuakhali, and has already received positive feedback from everyday visitors. The goal of building this museum is to make people aware of their numerous river and water resources.

documentaries and literatures related to our rivers, to sensitise the public towards water conservation.

“The need to shift our attention to water comes from a history of abuse we have wrought on water and watercourses in a number of ways,” says Shamsher Ali, Manager, Programme-Policy-Campaign (Land-Water Rights), Bangladesh. “Large embankments and structural interventions, uncontrolled urbanisation and encroachment, river pollution and mismanagement etc. have taken a toll and manifested into desertification, intrusion of salinity in sweet water bodies, erratic rainfall and biodegradation,” he explains.

According to information from ActionAid Bangladesh, the lives and livelihoods of people are adversely affected by the shrinking of rivers. The seven hundred or more rivers and tributaries that crisscross Bangladesh’s plain land that gave shape to its economy, culture and heritage are now at risk.

“The South Asian nations lack in adequate initiatives to protect the rivers. We need a realisation and initiative that goes beyond nation-state boundaries,” says Ali. “We also need a regional forum that shares resources and responsibilities. We need to realise the peoples’ right to water and acknowledge the rights of the rivers.”



PHOTO COURTESY: ACTIONAID

Water from Padma, Meghna, Jamuna, Buriganga, Andhar Manik and many more has been stored in the museum. There are plans to bring water from all 57 Bangladeshi rivers to the museum in the near future.

There are various water related products housed there as well. Information on river related life and livelihood is also offered in the museum. There are photos,

WHERE THE CONDEMNED ROT

ANIKA HOSSAIN

two every morning to get access to water. “At times, we don’t have electricity for 5 to 6 hours a day because we cannot pay the bill. We have no water during that time,” says Najma Begum, another resident. “The farthest house from this tap is ten minutes away, and people come here quite a few times each day to fetch water. We only have 20 toilets to accommodate all 12000 of us. It is very difficult to live like this,” she tells us.

A few roads down, lies another camp, the Geneva Camp, which houses 35,000 people. “We have only two taps here for all our residents,” says M Shoukat Ali, the General Secretary of the Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee (SPGRC). “The water that comes out of these taps are foul smelling and filthy, and people are forced to drink it because they have no choice. We only have 228 toilets for all the residents and half of them are out of order. We have regular outbreaks of diseases such as cholera, dysentery, typhoid and dengue,” he continues, “We have one water filter and I let the children from our school drink from it. It is insufficient. The city corporation wants nothing to do with us, they refuse to clean our camp or let us dispose of our garbage the way everyone else does.”

Ali Hossain, a resident of Geneva Camp who has been here since our independence, says, “Waiting for the bathroom every morning is difficult for me, I am an old man. There are some like me who cannot wait an hour and soil themselves. We aren’t even allowed to preserve our dignity.”

The open toilets, some with no doors, are surrounded by filth that needs to be scooped out by the residents themselves each day. Only one toilet for women has a roof. The residents in this camp, who live in 8ft by 8ft rooms, know no privacy, basic hygiene or any of their basic human rights. Although they have been granted citizenship they are not treated as our equals.

On March 22, the World Water Day, let us think of the plight of people all over our country who are deprived of their right to clean water and healthy lives- an issue that needs to be addressed immediately.

PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO



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