SKS’ Measures to Combat COVID-19 Crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic situation is worsening in Bangladesh as death toll is rising. The Government is trying in different ways to save life & livelihood during the pandemic. Many of the NGOs, CSOs and International organizations are complementing the Government in the fight against novel coronavirus. They are putting their best efforts to uplift the marginalized. As a development organization, SKS Foundation has also taken various initiatives to stop spreading the fatal virus in different districts under its intervention. It has been continuing with various initiatives to stop spreading the fatal virus in Gaibandha and other districts under Rangpur & Rajshahi division, and Satkhira, Jashore and Meherpur of Khulna division. SKS is creating awareness, providing health facilities, promoting water, sanitation & hygiene services as well as distributing food & cash package to the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach people.

In Gaibandha, as coronavirus is spreading rapidly in the district, the establishment of a 100-bed Isolation Centre at Ansar VDP Training Centre has been fully supported by SKS Foundation and handed over to the District Coronavirus Prevention & Control Committee on 3 April 2020. The Isolation Center has been serving the coronavirus patients separately in the district being managed by the District Administration.

As part of awareness building and providing the mass people with hygiene support relating to COVID-19 prevention, SKS Foundation has distributed PPEs, masks, hand sanitizers, soaps, hand gloves, etc among and through the doctors, journalists, law enforcing members, NGO staffs cleaners. To provide the mass people with hygiene maintenance facilities, SKS has installed different type of Hand Wash Devices at various public places in rural & urban areas.

NCA Demands Incentives for the Charland Extreme Poor

The char is in Bangladesh are one of the extreme poverty pockets. These isolated landmasses, scattered across 100 upazilas in 32 districts, are home to 6 million people, hundreds of thousands of them being among the poorest. The COVID-19 pandemic is posing an unprecedented danger, and already faced with crisis in food security, access to basic services, and communication, the pandemic threatens to put further strain on the char dwellers’ lives and livelihood that they are hardly in a position to sustain. National Char Alliance (NCA) appreciates the efforts and necessary measures taken by the Government of Bangladesh. Yet considering the extent of marginalized and poverty of the char dwellers, NCA seeks the attention of the Government and policy-makers of Bangladesh to the following 8-point proposal for the impoverished char dwellers-

1. The Government of Bangladesh’s COVID-19 response should prioritize the marginalized char communities to ensure effective testing services, availability and distribution of medicine, expansion of health services, isolation centers and make-shift facilities, and support and protection for the health professionals.
2. Government of Bangladesh’s risk communication should adopt a targeted approach for the marginalized and most vulnerable char people to disseminate clear, accessible, frequent, gender sensitive, and child-friendly health awareness messages tailored to the dialect of the region.
3. Women headed households in char regions need to be immediately identified and special targeted measures should be taken to provide Government’s cash grants, VGD, VGF, food ratio, and monthly allowances to these households. Furthermore, regular social safety nets for the women and elderly needs to be continued.
4. Agriculture is the major mean of subsistence for the char dwellers, immediate measures should be taken to provide agricultural credit at zero interest rate to farmers, as well as to small entrepreneurs for them to cope with the impending economic shock induced by COVID-19.
5. COVID-19 induced circumstances threaten to severely disrupt the value chain of agricultural products in market. Therefore, local administration has to take effective actions ensure farmers’ access to markets, retention of their productive capacities, and selling their produce.
6. Targeted measures must be taken to support the marginalized girls of char region who are disproportionately impacted by gender-based violence, including, sexual violence, child marriage, and domestic violence.
7. The Government must ensure that preparedness and control measures to protect children and ensure appropriate care for children of the vulnerable char communities. This includes putting in place comprehensive plans to enable remote-inclusive learning for students out of school, and ensuring their mental and physical wellbeing.
8. Seasonal laborers should get assistance: Seasonal laborers of char lands remain unemployed for a long period. Any financial assistance under national social safety net programs or through work for food program should be offered to these seasonal laborers during the time of this crisis.

Saidpur LICs Covered with Handwashing Devices

Having 34,000 households, Saidpur in Nilphamari district is a densely populated municipal town lacking with WASH services for the poor while majority of the population live in slums. SKS Foundation in partnership with WaterAid Bangladesh has promoted 7 type of Handwash Devices including “Contactless Inclusive Handwash Station” to keep the risk of Coronavirus low among the slum dwellers with special focus on the people with disabilities. In total 35 Handwashing Devices have been installed at this low-income community entry points and other strategic locations covering 46,400 users.

(See page 3)
SKS’ Special Financial Package to Combat Corona Crisis

The regular earning of the marginalized section has faced a severe setback due to COVID-19 lockdown. Alongside, the flow of money into the rural economy has been slowed down as most of the organizations have become bound to stop their microfinance activities. As a result, various income generating activities in rural areas have come to a standstill. People had spent the money earned from trade and daily wages and become capital less. This has appeared as a difficult situation both for the program participants and SKS Foundation itself. However, as per Directive from the Government, SKS Foundation has resumed its program intervention from 1 June 2020. Taking the corona crisis into proper consideration, SKS has started supporting its program participants in line with its revised plan centering COVID-19 pandemic. In relation to this, SKS is guiding the small & marginal farmers and entrepreneurs especially small traders to take feasible income generating option for recovering their loss and regenerating their livelihoods while SKS will disburse Tk. 50 crore; disbursing a seasonal loan of Tk. 15 crore covering next 6 months for crop production, cow rearing and beef fattening; returning the savings back to the program participants for meeting their basic needs i.e. children’s education, hygiene & medical expenses, etc; providing health awareness & hygiene maintenance support to the program participants and staff members so that they can run the program staying safe; and controlling the operational cost and maintain that under an effective budget for the year 2020-’21.

Poor Talented Students Received Scholarship Money

SKS Foundation distributed the education scholarship money among the poor talented students in partnership with PKSF. On 9 May 2020, a total of 86 HSC students in different upazilas of Gaibandha received their scholarship check being present at SKS School & College, Gaibandha. The checks equivalent to Tk. 1,332,000 were distributed among these students while each student got Tk. 12,000. Mr. Khoton Kumar Kundu, Director—Finance along with other senior officials of SKS Foundation distributed the cheques.

Amphan Damaged WASH Facilities in the South-west Coast

The ‘super cyclone’ Amphan made its worst impact in the South-west coast especially in Satkhira and Khulna as the storm hit accompanied by tidal surge. Cyclone Amphan affected the WASH infrastructure most in Satkhira, Bagerhat, Khulna, Jashore, Bhaola, Patuakhali, Barguna, and Pirojpur. Due to the flash flood, storm, storm surge and collapse of embankments, water sources such as ponds were damaged, inundated or contaminated. Many water points and sanitation facilities were either fully damaged and uprooted or, partially damaged. Coastal areas experienced up to 4m high tidal surge waves with collapse of embankments, which led to contamination and destruction of surface water sources. Shallow Tube-wells were damaged & contaminated with saline water. Pond Sand Filters and Rain-water Harvesting Systems were also damaged.

DPHE identified 8 districts affected most while 18,235 water points and 40,894 latrines got damaged. A total of 550 Health Care Facilities and 1,175 shelters (schools) incurred damage in their WASH facilities. Approximately, 14% of total affected population became vulnerable without access to safe drinking water. Water supply facilities of 62% unions, most of them in Satkhira and Khulna, got affected by the cyclone. Approximately, 12% of total affected population got out of access to safe sanitation facilities. Satkhira district is the most affected, with 38% unions faced substantial damages to sanitation services.

Under SKS’ WASH intervention in 17 unions of Satkhira, Kalraoo, Tala, Assasuni, Abhaynagar, Keshabpur & Monirampur upazilas in partnership with Max Foundation, WASH facilities got damaged significantly. As many as 169 Tube-wells and 18,160 latrines got damaged and in turn created problems to safe hygiene practice. Alongside, 129 Women Bathing Center, 3,381 Basins & Handwash Devices got damaged by Amphan. The damage of WASH infrastructure thereby affecting especially women who are traditionally responsible for water collection and children who disproportionately suffer from water-borne diseases. Thus, the post cyclone situation has appeared as major barrier to maintaining safe hygiene practices.
SKS News

SKS’ Measures to Combat COVID-19 Crisis

(From page 1) Featuring measures to prevent Coronavirus, SKS has displayed & distributed Festoons, Banners, Billboards, Leaflets, etc in relation to make the mass people aware on their hygiene habits and social norms.

Hygiene Kits for the Low-income Families

A total of 1,000 families accommodating around 5,000 people were provided with Hygiene Kit package in 4 unions including Kamarjami & Mollahar under Sadar upazila, and Banagram & Jamalpur under Sadullapur upazila of Gaibandha district. With support from the Start Fund Bangladesh, each Package contained 1 Top-attached Bucket, 1 Mug, Soap-1,250 gm, Detergent Powder-1 kg, Surgical Mask-50 pieces, Sanitary Napkin-8 pieces and a Leaflet with hygiene messages. The poor, day labor, elderly & women-headed families & other low-income families received the Package at their door-step in collaboration with the respective Union Parishad.

The Community Radio Sarabela FM 98.8, a sister concern of SKS Foundation, has been airing precautionary messages while the Dainik Madhukar has been publishing hygiene awareness messages and other relevant issues on COVID-19.

In partnership with a number of development partners, SKS Foundation has stood beside the marginalized in the remote char & mainland in supporting them with food package to combat the crisis the people have been facing due to lockdown and other challenges created by the pandemic.

Humanitarian Support for the Poor & Ethnic Minorities

SKS Foundation, in partnership with ANDHERI HILFE, Germany, provided food package support to 770 poor & distressed families during lockdown situation. The food package for each family included: Rice-20kg, Lentil-3kg, Potato-10kg, Salt-1kg and Soybean Oil- 2 liters. A total of 350 ethnic minority and other poor families in ‘Katbari’ and Kamdia union of ‘Gobindaganj upazila and 420 families of Saghata and Muktinagar union of Saghata upazila under Gaibandha were covered. The food package distribution took place on 3 May 2020 at the respective community areas following the social distancing in presence of local administration & UP representatives.

SKS Foundation has been helping the poor people to cope with the situation since the pandemic started. To this continuation, under COVID-19 Response in Gaibandha, SKS distributed cash money among the poor households to enable them buy food during lockdown situation.

Cash Support to Low-income Families during Lockdown

SKS Foundation distributed cash money among the low-income families of Saghata, Jumbari and Holdia union of Saghata upazila, Gaibandha on 21 May 2020 in partnership with Oxfam in Bangladesh. SKS distributed hard cash of Tk. 3,000 each to 485 poor households to enable them buy food during lockdown. The hard-hit people of coronavirus particularly disable, aged, abandoned, widow & day-laborers received this cash support. The cash assistance supported them to cope with the dire situation during lockdown and celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr.

While serving the marginalized to survive during the COVID-19 pandemic, development partners like ActionAid Bangladesh, Andheri HILFE-Bonn, Care-Bangladesh, Manusher Jonno Foundation, Oxfam in Bangladesh, Save the Children, Start Fund Bangladesh have come forward and supported SKS’ mission. Through this untiring & challenging effort amid COVID-19 pandemic, SKS Foundation has so far covered around 568,500 destitute people of 36,852 families with spending of Tk. 55,979,997 adding grants from development partners with SKS’ own fund.

SKS Renovated Mujibnagar Upazila Health Complex’s WASH Facilities

In observance of the Mujib Barsha marking the centennial birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, SKS Foundation has renovated WASH facilities of the Mujibnagar Upazila Health Complex. The renovation work has been done in consultation with the Upazila Health & Family Planning Office (UH&FPO) having proper consent from the Civil Surgeon Office, Meherpur. SKS has done this work under its LGI-led WASH in Health project implementation in partnership with WaterAid Bangladesh.

The renovation works covered modification of 15 WASH Blocks & 13 single Toilets, cleaning of 4 Water Tanks, 2 Septic Tanks while 1 Water Filter with reserve facility was newly constructed with spending of Tk. 1,000,000. This renovation has ensured full-time safe drinking water facilities and improved sanitation & handwashing facilities in the Hospital. The improved facilities have revived the hygienic environment of the UHC and are open for all the visitors, doctors, nurses, and UHIC staff. The improved facilities have revived the hygienic environment of the UHC while the facilities are open for all the visitors, doctors, nurses and UHIC staff. Around 1.5 lac people are getting benefits from the improved services.
Nat’l Budget 2020-’21 Falls Short of Prioritizing Hygiene as Key to Prevent COVID-19

COVID-19 has vividly embodied the necessity of required national budget to meet the challenges in health and WASH sector. It has created a strong urge to improve the country’s water, sanitation, and hygiene situation but the proposed budget hasn’t considered a robust allocation and mechanism to meet the need. Based on an analysis, WaterAid, UNICEF, PPRC, FANSA-BD, WSSCC, B, FSM Network, Sanitation and Water for All, and WASH Alliance pin-pointed that insufficient allocation for hygiene sub-sector which remains a key priority to fight COVID-19 and maintain progress towards the SDGs that will otherwise be hindered. The analysis was shared with the media in a Virtual Press Conference on 28 June 2020. SKS Foundation participated in the process as a collaborative partner.

WASH allocation in proposed National Budget 2020-2021

The analysis upheld that since the country is tackling the coronavirus pandemic, budget formulation in the face of declining rates of GDP growth, revenues, international trade and external remittance make it a challenge to support the growing demand for healthcare and hygiene awareness activities in order to fight COVID-19. An upfront and realistic budget reflecting economic and financial costs of the pandemic is needed, reflecting the government's approach to not only fight the virus but also contain the loss of lives and livelihoods. The proposed National budget 2020-21 is falling short in meeting the ground level realities.

The study reflected a steady growth and upward trend in WASH budget allocation which is praiseworthy with 122.27 billion Taka allocated in FY 2020-21 from 107.96 billion last year. Following the legacy of previous years, the low attention in hygiene is also notable in FY 2020-21 with less than 5% allocation in Hygiene sub-sector of the WASH budget.

Spatial inequities between urban and rural areas, the 4 WASAs and 11 city corporations remain constant as cities and towns continue to receive most of the funding at the expense of rural, char and hard-to-reach areas, despite acute needs. The analysis reflected the gap of deliveries between urban & rural areas widening over the years, revealing that in 5-year period there happened to be almost no change in shares of urban (80%-83%) and rural (20%-17%) allocation.

SKS Hospital Remains in Service during COVID-19

SKS Hospital, upholding its mission, has been providing necessary health services while extreme fear among the health providers has resulted in lack of general health services across Bangladesh due to COVID-19 pandemic. SKS Hospital is remaining in service for 24 hours a day as per the government guidelines. The Hospital is providing general health services, conducting all sorts of diagnostic services with regular presence of 10 Specialist Doctors and 5 Medical Officers.

We have taken all kinds of precautions to give you a healthy stay @ SKS Inn, Gaibandha.
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A.K.M. Idris Ali, the District Relief and Rehabilitation Officer, Gaibandha was the Guest of Honor in the CSO Platform Meeting held on 18 May 2020 at SKS Foundation’s Conference Hall, Gaibandha. Organized by SKS Foundation, in partnership with Start Fund Bangladesh, representatives from Friendship, RDRS, BRAC, BDRCs, Udbod Foundation, OBOLOMBA, GRDF, SDRS, SMS, Gaibandha Government College, SKS Foundation as well as local journalists attended the Meeting.

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