

Tainted Waters, Unyielding Spirits

Advancing Clean Water Through City-Wide Inclusive Sanitation



Lives and
Livelihoods
Fund



Gates Foundation



In Bangladesh, rivers have historically served as vital lifelines, sustaining human habitats and natural ecosystems. However, many now face environmental pressures from pollution. Industrial activities release untreated effluents, including chemicals and residues, into waterways, while naturally occurring arsenic affects groundwater wells, threatening millions dependent on them.

While over 98% of Bangladesh's population has access to water, nearly half of these sources are compromised by harmful chemicals. Additionally, coastal salinity is increasingly impacting inland areas, creating challenges for agriculture and drinking water quality.



MURKY REFLECTIONS: LIFE AT JALAR KALLER PUKUR LAKE

In Cumilla - one of the priority towns in Bangladesh - Jalar Kaller Pukur Pond sits like a weary elder, its waters a murky mirror to the struggles of those who depend on it. This pond, nestled in the heart of a bustling community, was once a vibrant hub - its banks alive with chatter, its surface rippling under the touch of rain. Now, it's a shadow of that memory, choked by pollution that paints its waters a sickly brown.

Plastic bags bob alongside oily slicks, while untreated sewage seep into its depths. The air carries a faint stench, a mix of decay and despair, as the pond bears the weight of a town's neglect.

Yet, for many in Cumilla, Jalar Kaller Pukur Pond is no choice but necessity. Men wade in at dawn, their bare torsos glistening as they splash water over their faces, ignoring the grit that clings to their skin. Women, balancing pots and pans, crouch at the edges, scrubbing utensils with fierce determination. Their saris trail in the filth, but they press on. Water, even dirty water, is too precious to waste.

Some come to bathe, their eyes scanning the surface for debris, their hands cupping water to rinse away the day's sweat. No one lingers longer than needed; the pond's embrace is a grim ritual.



For now, its dirty waters bind the community in a shared struggle, each bath and scrub a defiant act against a tide of contamination.



Ensuring healthy lives and
stable livelihoods for
1.4 million people
by reducing waterborne
diseases
and protecting the
environment with
safe sanitation and
hygiene.

Hope glimmers through efforts like the Lives and Livelihoods Fund, which supports Bangladesh’s Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) sector via the City-Wide Inclusive Sanitation (CWIS) approach.

The LLF-funded *Inclusive and Integrated Sanitation & Hygiene (InSanH)*

Project in 10 Priority Towns aims to deliver equitable, sustainable sanitation as a public service, targeting vulnerable urban areas like Cumilla.

In the selected priority towns, the project is building climate-resilient facilities, strengthening local governance, and engaging communities to end reliance on polluted sources like Jalar Kaller Pukur Pond.

“The lack of water has held us back, but now, with the pump, we’re reclaiming our livelihoods.”

Sanjay Chandra Sarkar
Resident Cumilla Town



“I’m around 60, maybe 62, and my body’s failing me. My leg’s weak, I can’t put weight on it, and my hand’s powerless.

Before the water tap, fetching water from the tube well was torture.

It was far, and pumping took strength I didn’t have. I’d limp there, exhausted, just to get a drink.

Now, with the tap nearby, it’s a blessing. Water’s easy to reach, and I can finally drink without pain.”

Ramiz Sahab





The project approach emphasizes inclusive infrastructure, including, sewage systems, fecal sludge management, and safe water points, all designed to serve everyone, especially women and marginalized groups.

By fostering public-private partnerships and behavior change campaigns, the LLF empowers residents, offering a path to dignity and health where dirty water once ruled.

BUILDING A FUTURE: POWER OF COMMUNITY-BASED WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

In Bangladesh's water-stressed towns, clean water is a dream too often out of reach.

However, the LLF's investment in WASH sector is a symbol of progress. By installing 2,150 house connections, 65 tube wells, and 258 street hydrants, this initiative is rewriting the story of water access, bringing health, dignity, and opportunity to communities long burdened by scarcity.

Rooted in public service ethos, this project tackles waterborne diseases, environmental degradation, and systemic inequity, while building resilient communities for generations.



These community-based water systems aren't just pipes; they're bold, powerful solutions, delivering clean water to empower lives in low-income and remote areas.





"The community washroom in our slum is barely usable. It's too small to sit in, the tank is broken, and there's no water inside. We have to fetch it from far away.

The stench of waste is overwhelming. With so many families sharing one toilet, we're forced to stand and wait, sometimes for hours, just to use it.

Cleaning it is another ordeal.

Three or four of us women do it together, wrapping our hands in paper to avoid touching the filth, often at night to escape judgment.

We can't afford a cleaner. Every 'taka' (Bengali currency) goes to food. We suffer, but what choice do we have?"

Basanti Rani

In low-income urban slums and rural villages across Bangladesh, clean water and safe toilets remain elusive for many. The sanitation system in these toilets is equally grim. Only 25% of the low-income families in urban settlements have improved toilets. Shared latrines, often overflowing or distant, endanger women and girls, especially at night.

LLF will construct and maintain 63 community toilets, equipped with durable, climate-resilient latrines to withstand floods and monsoons, a critical need in coastal zones like Bangladesh. These shared sanitary spaces will be tailored to serve and prioritize the needs of women and girls.

The toilets are poised to deliver immediate and long-term impacts.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a red and white patterned sari, is crouched on a paved ground. She is using a white plastic jug to fill a large, round, silver metal pot. To her left, there are several smaller metal pots and bowls, some containing water. In the background, there are more pots and a small pile of debris. The scene is set in what appears to be a public water supply area in a slum.

In Bangladesh's crowded slums and bustling villages, where Basanti once waited by a broken toilet and Ramiz strained for a sip of water, a new story is unfolding.

Provision of Water Supply System technologies, infrastructure and equipment is changing lives.

Women stand taller, freed from shame, their days no longer lost to endless lines. Sanjay works without worry, his family fed by steady wages.

These small-scale community-based water supplies are bringing health and pride to thousands.

As clean water flows and dignity takes root, a brighter future blooms: one where every person, from the youngest to the eldest, thrives in the light of possibility.