

# GLOBAL HANDWASHING DAY SEMINAR

## *Let's Stay Safe with Handwashing*



The Global Handwashing Day, 15 October, is observed to advocate for proper handwashing with soap as an easy, effective, and affordable way to prevent diseases and save lives. Handwashing is a simple act that pays in dividends when it comes to keeping ourselves healthy and safe. Now more than ever as we embrace the new normal and live with COVID-19, hand hygiene needs to become an integral part of our daily routine and our lives. The learnings from the COVID-19 have emphasized the need for collective action to address the historic neglect of hand hygiene investments, policies, and programs once and for all. Centering the theme of the Global Handwashing Day 2021 *Our Future is at Hand—Let's Move Forward Together* FANSA–Bangladesh along with the networking body in the WASH sector i.e. SWA, BAWIN, FSM Network, MHM Platform, IWA–BD Chapter, and WaterAid Bangladesh organized a virtual Seminar on **Let's Stay Safe with Handwashing** on 31 October 2021.

Dr. Tanvir Ahmed, Professor, Department of Civil Engineering, BUET & Director, ITN-BUET presided over and moderated the Seminar. Mr. Partha Hefaz Shaikh, Director–Policy and Advocacy, WaterAid Bangladesh, made a comprehensive presentation covering the directions in National Hygiene Strategy and the current handwashing status in Bangladesh. Dr. Imrul Kayes Muniruzzaman, Deputy Chief Executive, SKS Foundation; Md. Shofiqul Alam, WASH Specialist, WASH Section, UNICEF Bangladesh, Dr. Md. Mahbubur Rahman, Project Coordinator, Emerging Infections, ICDDR,B; Dr. Dibalok Singha, Executive Director, Dushtha Shasthya Kendra (DSK); Khondaker Rebaka Sun Yat, Executive Director, Coalition for Urban Poor (CUP); Salma Mahbub, General Secretary, Bangladesh Society for the Change & Advocacy Nexus (B-SCAN) enriched the Seminar as the Panel Discussants.

WASH & hygiene specialists and representatives from the government, UN bodies, development partners, national and international organizations, academia, and respective stakeholders from the civil society attended the Seminar and shared their views on the importance of handwashing. The speakers outlined in their speeches that there is markable progress in terms of WASH coverage. But the contextual disparities and gaps in the availability & affordability of handwashing facilities between the poor & rich remain high that is impeding the handwashing practice across the country.



**Partha Hefaz Shaikh**  
 Director- Policy and Advocacy  
 WaterAid Bangladesh

*“There are large disparities in the availability of handwashing facilities at home between the poorest and richest in Bangladesh. Also, handwashing facilities with soap and water are more prevalent in urban than in rural areas. According to a survey, 107 million people in Bangladesh do not have basic handwashing facilities with soap & water at home. Furthermore, there is a lack of budget allocation for the hard-to-reach areas. The National Hygiene Survey 2018 indicated only 40% of people knew 5 critical handwashing times and 55% of people*

*knew about proper handwashing after defecation. There are disparities in knowledge, attitude and practice level of handwashing. The poor and poorest are left behind in handwashing habits (national average 55%, of which the poorest is 38%). Concerning the Health Care Facilities (HCF), there is the availability of basin 46%, taps 42%, water 98%, soap or detergent 77% in the Healthcare Centers. At the school level, even the knowledge level is low. The situation at restaurants is more vulnerable as 63% do not wash their hands while food serving and processing, and the street food vendors hardly wash their hands. However, COVID-19 has given a big momentum to handwashing. So, we can hope the rate of handwashing has been increased from the status. Whatever could not be achieved in the years, COVID-19 has boosted to achieve that. There is also a political commitment of the Government of Bangladesh to ensure handwashing 75% by 2022, 85% by 2025, and 100% by 2030.”*



**Dr. Imrul Kayes Muniruzzaman**  
 Deputy Chief Executive  
 SKS Foundation

“Handwashing is a very important issue, but it has got late and less attention compared to other development issues.

Handwashing has been accelerated just after COVID-19 emergence when it has been highly advised to prevent the virus. In this issue, the big weakness is, the institutional arrangement and policy environment are not yet adequate. So, we have an opportunity to emphasize the very important issue, handwashing, which we have been neglecting. Only GOs & NGOs can't change the scenarios of handwashing. If we want to achieve the overall objective of handwashing, the engagement, involvement, and investment of the private sector have to be built up that will add value to this sector. Any development solution will be sustainable, if the private sector takes account of this, can make a profit from it, and make it available in the market with reasonable price and accessibility. So, we need to formulate a comprehensive policy thereon the availability and cost of handwashing devices and engagement of private organizations in WASH sector will be incorporated.”



**Dr. Dibalok Singha**  
 Executive Director  
 Dushtha Shasthya Kendra (DSK)

“There is a gap between rich and poor on handwashing knowledge and practice. We can't achieve the main

objective of handwashing until the community engagement and movement in this issue. Since poor people, a lion's share, remain out of this process, it will be very difficult to get into the roadmap of handwashing. So, we need to work to fill the gap working with the disadvantaged groups.”

**Khondaker Rebaka Sun Yat**  
 Executive Director  
 Coalition for Urban Poor (CUP)



“Water is the prerequisite of handwashing, and we just need to ensure the availability of safe water before promoting handwashing.

Sadly, we could not ensure the availability of water for all yet. The slum people remain out of water service. This unavailability of water facilities in slums or poor areas has made the handwashing practice difficult for the poorest people whereas they even do not get adequate water they need for drinking, cooking, and bathing. So, ensuring water supply should get priority aside from promoting handwashing. The existing water policy needed to be reviewed. The water supply in the slum areas needed to be legal and the tariff needs to be down. Then, we can make handwashing compulsory, and we will succeed in this sector, I believe.”

**Baharam Khan**  
 Project Coordinator  
 REECALL- 2021 Project  
 SKS Foundation



“Working at the ground in the community, I have seen there are positive changes

in water and sanitation but hygiene practice remains a challenge. Although NGOs are working on changing the hygiene habits of community people by building awareness and setting handwashing devices, the price of handwashing devices remains high. Now, the community people get a handwashing device at around BDT. 400 that cost poor people harshly. But the price can be reduced by negotiating with the private sector. Then it can be promoted to the poor easily.”



**Dr. Md. Mahbubur Rahman**  
Project Coordinator  
Emerging Infections, ICDDR,B

“Hospitals are one of the public places where many attendants with their patients go in and come out everyday.

Unfortunately, handwashing facilities & practices are absent in most hospitals for these attendants who can be carriers of diseases carrying diseases to & from the hospitals. So, the lack of handwashing facilities & practices at hospitals for patient attendants has become the hotspots of diseases. Concerning this, if we want to promote handwashing practice at hospitals, we need adequate water, soap, and other arrangements of handwashing. People, furthermore, think handwashing is only acted on diarrhea forgetting lack there of causes other diseases too. Therefore, people neglect handwashing as the prevalence of diarrhea has reduced. Even though there is a lot of evidence in support of handwashing. Handwashing is an investment, we still could not convince the investors of the multifaceted health benefits of handwashing, and the investors do not envisage handwashing a pay off of their investment. So, if we want to promote handwashing, we need to ensure water supply, low-cost soap, and the right perception towards handwashing.”



**Salma Mahub**  
General Secretary  
Bangladesh Society for the Change & Advocacy Nexus (B-SCAN)

“A big portion of the population is still out of the availability of the handwashing facilities because of their physical limitations,

the barrier of designing facilities, and the distance of the water reservoir. Amid the COVID-19, persons with disabilities struggled to get help from others due to maintaining social distance or fearing getting infected. Nowadays, much discussion is taking place on WASH, but the inclusion of persons with disabilities into WASH facilities is not getting enough attention as it’s needed. Even in the WASH policies, there is not much written about persons with disabilities. Alongside the infrastructural barrier, we need to focus on the limitation of information accessible to persons with disabilities. Even, handwashing messages are not reaching them particularly persons with visual and hearing impairments and we can’t leave them behind to achieve SDG. Those who are working in the WASH sector, and the network or the organizations for persons with disabilities, need more involvement and engagement in this process. Concerning this, we need to conduct research and study more to figure out appropriate inclusive WASH facilities at affordable prices.”



**Md. Shofiqul Alam**  
WASH Specialist  
WASH Section, UNICEF Bangladesh

“Handwashing should begin at our homes and workplaces as it is said charity begins at home. In this point, I emphasize our schools because school children are our next generation. If we can teach and inculcate handwashing habits into them, they will teach their children, and it will continue through generations. So, we need to invest in students. Alongside, the scenario of the WASH sector including handwashing would be better if we could bring the private sector in and show them profit. Targeting to prevent COVID-19 infection, we have set many handwashing devices in public places. But those have now been unused and most of them have got damaged as the prevalence of the COVID-19 lessened. It’s a big challenge. If we can keep the handwashing devices functioning, it will be the achievement of the whole nation.”



**Most. Lovely Begum**  
CBO Leader  
Dakhshin Gobindi, Saghata, Gaibandha

“Extreme poverty is blamed for keeping *char* people away from handwashing. Handwashing is not only related to behavioral habits but also related to the financial ability of people. In the *char* communities, many know the handwashing steps and times, but they can’t apply the knowledge buying soap over meeting their other basic needs. However, many people still don’t know the health benefit of handwashing. We need to keep awareness building at *char* areas.”



**Shyamal Chandra Sarker**  
Deputy Director  
Mahideb Jubo Somaj Kallayan Somity  
(MJSKS), Kurigram

“Since the Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) is a government agency, responsible for providing and maintaining water and sanitation in the country, the DPHE can play a more interactive role in promoting handwashing practice and setting up facilities besides distribution of latrines and Tube-wells.”



**Most. Hasina Parvin**  
District Coordinator  
SHOMOTA Project  
SKS Foundation, Gaibandha

“Flood and river erosion in the *char* areas damages the settled handwashing facilities. It’s a big challenge for the local community for retaining them in handwashing practice. On the other hand, monitoring is important to continue this. Menstrual hygiene could be included in this and it’s important too.”



### Mohammad Zobair Hasan

Deputy Executive Director  
Development Organization of the Rural Poor- DORP

“We used to call it Water Supply & Sanitation Sector, there was nothing about hygiene. Now, we have renamed the sector WASH. Hygiene is integrated into the WASH sector. So, the country strategies like *National Hygiene Promotion Strategy for Water Supply and Sanitation Sector in Bangladesh 2012*, *National Strategy for Water Supply and Sanitation (Revised and Updated Edition 2021)*, *National Menstrual Hygiene Management Strategy 2021*, *Response to COVID-19 Outbreak Through Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Interventions–Bangladesh Strategy Paper 2020-2023* are needed to discuss and follow-up the progress in hygiene issue periodically rather than once a year. We have the government commitment, political will, policy support, so we have to work together to ensure 100% handwashing practice within the timeframe.”



### Morshed Badrunnessa Bithi

Project Director  
Solidarity, Kurigram

“Although the Global Handwashing Day has been observed since it was established in 2008, the importance of handwashing had not got much attention till the COVID-19 has struck recently. Still, our practice level is low. And the sanitation condition of the majority of Health Care Facilities (HCF) is indecent. The absence of water & soap deteriorates the hospital situation. So, first, we need to focus on HCF.”



### Dr. Tanvir Ahmed

Professor  
Department of Civil Engineering,  
BUET & Director, ITN-BUET

“There are direct and indirect health benefits of handwashing. But we often neglect and forget it. Therefore, we end with the enormous loss of our money, labor, and lives. We must bear in mind that prevention is better than cure. So, if we allocate sufficient resources at the prevention level means in handwashing, then we may save lives with a minimum resource allocation than maximum resource allocation in the treatment of diseases. So, we must ensure handwashing for all in all places to minimize the health cost and save lives. Unfortunately, we see incoherence regarding handwashing ensuring access to water, soap, facilities and other arrangements like knowledge and practice. Taking all the interrelated issues into consideration, we must ensure and compel handwashing everywhere for the greater health benefit of the nation.”

### Md. Shafiqul Islam

Project Manager, Max NutriWASH Project  
SKS Foundation, Satkhira



“The coastal people preserve rainwater for drinking. Many a time even the poor people buy and drink water. So, where in drinking water is insufficient therein handwashing with freshwater is not thinkable. Coastal people wash their hands and faces in pond water that is open and contaminated. For the coastal belt, we need to make a comprehensive policy to make freshwater available first before promoting handwashing.”

### Mahfuzur Rahman

Program Officer  
Bangladesh Society for the Change & Advocacy Nexus (B-SCAN)



“Including mothers in school handwashing campaign can bring full-benefit for the whole family, because the mother plays an influential role in our families initiating handwashing practice. For this, the handwashing campaign should not be confined to the defined day or month.”

### Joseph Halder

Director- Advocacy & Communication  
SKS Foundation, and  
Convener, FANSA-BD



“There are striking challenges at the ground level there of we could not achieve the expected level of hygiene habits. Handwashing, an important means of hygiene habits, is still not practiced up to the expected mark. We need to work together so that mass people can practice handwashing with their proper knowledge. Targeting to prevent the COVID-19 infection, handwashing at critical times & regular intervals needs to be a mandatory means and necessary directions should be derived from the policy level concerning this.”



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