# Shahjahan Bibi: A Waste Management Champion and a Great Motivator for the Cleanliness of her Community

WASH Diaries DI06/2023

### **SUMMARY**

Living circumstances of refugees in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh have led to a lack of proper solid waste management in most refugee camps, in return causing environmental and public health issues. In Hakim Para Camp 14, UNICEF with its implementing partner BRAC initiated solid waste management activities through community engagement. This WASH Diary reflects the experiences of Shahjahan Bibi, a refugee woman and housewife whose support to the implementing teams was key to ensuring effective community engagement in hygiene-related behavioural practices in Suf Sutra Kora Sobai (Everybody is involved in cleaning).

## Background

Bangladesh received a vast number of Rohingya refugees fleeing Myanmar in August 2017. In 2022, the Rohingya refugee camp 14 in ward no 5, Hakim Para of Ukhiya Upazila (sub-district) provided shelter to 6,816 families. Improper solid waste management in the camps poses environmental and public health threats as it creates a breeding ground for disease vectors. Crowded living conditions combined with the regular distribution of Non-Food Items (NFIs) generated a significant amount of waste, which caused an adverse impact on the environment, leading the side drains to block and obstruct wastewater flow. This in turn provided the breeding ground for disease-causing vectors. These problems resulted in an urgent need to manage solid waste.

UNICEF together with its implementing partner BRAC initiated solid waste management activities

(SWM) in the camp in 2017, the first to implement these activities in the camp. Behaviour change and communication activities have been implemented at the camp by BRAC and the community directly. Community engagement is one of the approaches used as it has proven to be effective, when in 2018, the community leaders, were involved in promoting proper waste management and had significant influence over their community.

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Shahjahan Bibi is a 28-year-old woman residing in the camp as a Rohingya refugee and lives with her husband and three children, who works as a daily waged laborer in the camp. Following the conflict, she fled to Bangladesh from Myanmar five years ago on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August 2017. Shahjahan Bibi recounts her experience as follows: "*I walked through the muddy path to reach Bangladesh. After coming to Bangladesh, we took shelter in one of our uncle's house at Kanjor para, Teknaf Upazila,* 

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*Cox's Bazar district.* Upon her uncle's suggestion, she went to Hakim Para in Ukhiya, a new settlement area, in which she could get emergency support i.e., food, shelter, and access to primary health care services. Camp life had been very tough at the beginning as the family was living in a temporary shelter made of bamboo and tarpaulin.

There are 66 SWM and 70 Hygiene Promotion (HP) volunteers engaged in the community. The SWM volunteers are involved in collecting solid

#### BOX 1

I was inspired by the BRAC team and for the last 3 years, I have been working with BRAC as a community-based volunteer. Every day I visit some households in my community. I encourage and motivate my community to ensure people-oriented WASH services, particularly the segregation of organic and inorganic waste at the household level. I distribute household (HH) & communal bins for easy access to solid waste while needed.

#### Shahjahan Bibi

waste from communal bins and transfer it to a Material Recovery Facility (MRF) whereas, HP volunteers conduct awareness-raising activities to motivate the community to change their behaviour and to segregate waste and dispose of it in colorcoded bins, which were provided initially by UNICEF. A MRF is a waste segregation and management site where the wastes are segregated as per their nature and resources are recovered. Organic waste is transferred for composting, recyclable waste is transferred to the recycling plant, scraps to dealers and the remaining for landfilling. Paid Solid Waste Management Volunteers collect the waste every day from the communal bins.

UNICEF/BRAC assessed the number of volunteers required for SWM, which was then approved by the Camp in-Charge (CiC), a government representative providing administrative and security related support in the camps. The volunteers were selected based on their coordination and rapport-building skills with the community and their commitment to work, along with their prior knowledge of waste management.

Since the beginning of 2018, the selected volunteers have been supporting individual households in proper solid waste management through household visits, awareness-raising activities, mass orientation, following doer and non-doer households, and community mobilization by Majhee & Imam.

### Bibi's inspiring story

"When we lived in Myanmar, we used to dispose kitchen waste (organic) next to the house and sometimes away from the house, as the houses are far from each other. But here in camps, we live in a very congested environment. In the beginning, people disposed their kitchen waste, menstrual cloth, or pads beside houses, inside the drain, or buried haphazardly. No agencies paid much attention to solid waste management as most were focused on emergency services only. Temporary latrine and bathing spaces were built of tarpaulin and bamboo. People sometimes defecated in open, resulting in unhygienic environment. Many children under 5 suffered from water and vector-borne diseases like diarrhea, dysentery, cholera, and skin diseases. Choosing a site for latrine construction had been another challenge because of the uneven topography of the camp." reports Shahjahan Bibi.

Apart from the installation of latrines, bathing cubicles, and tube wells, BRAC also took initiatives in promoting safe sanitation, including waste management, menstrual hygiene management, and safe water and food safety issues. BRAC volunteers visited door to door and raised awareness in the community to ensure effective & efficient solid waste management.

#### BOX 2

"Different organizations started WASH activities (SUF SUTRA) in early 2018 and day by day they installed latrines & bathing cubicles & tube well at our camp. So far after one year, BRAC provided a communal bin (120 liters), but Rohingya people didn't use it properly. Besides this few other organizations also started WASH activities along with BRAC. At that time, we had no proper knowledge about organic & inorganic waste segregation.

Shahjahan Bibi

SWM was not a priority at the beginning, however, as time passed, SWM became a significant issue within the camp as BRAC, UNICEF's implementing partner realized during several focused group discussions (FGD) with the community. The FGD revealed that the community wanted to manage the waste properly. However, they didn't have the relevant knowledge or capacity on waste management yet. Then UNICEF/BRAC started waste segregation and MRF sites.

### Action

Following in the footsteps of BRAC's teams, Shahjahan Bibi helped to ensure effective community engagement in hygiene behavioral practices in Suf Sutra Kora Sobai. She has been a key actor in implementing the Clean Camp Campaign - People Led Total Hygiene approach (<u>CCC-PLTH</u>). Under this campaign, she facilitated the distribution of one pair of waste bins (red for inorganic waste and Green for organic waste) for each household in her community.

The Clean Camp Campaign (CCC) is a peopleled total hygiene (PLTH) approach aiming to promote comprehensive WASH practices through evidence-based behavior change techniques. It uses participatory learning and action techniques to facilitate collective action. This approach facilitates the process to influence the target community to observe, learn, communicate, and collectively carry out decision-making for the improvement of hygiene conditions and practices at the household and community level<sup>1</sup>.

People got orientation on behavior change through the CCC-PLTH approach. This helped them understand the consequences of improper solid waste management on the environment and public health. Organizing awareness campaigns frequently and monitoring people's practices brought positive impact in the community. This can be said as the community segregates organic waste (kitchen waste, stale food & homestead waste) in the green bin and inorganic waste (plastic, bottles, containers & packets) in the red bin inside their own household. Family members, preferably adult members, carry the waste from the household to the communal bin and dispose of the waste in the same color-coded bins. Paid Solid Waste Management volunteers manage the waste in and from communal bins and transport it to the MRF for further management.

# Figure 1: Logbook of solid waste collection and segregation.



Source: BRAC

<sup>1.</sup> Clean Camp Campaign- People-led total hygiene (CCC-PLTH), booklet, UNICEF.

#### BOX 3

## Shahjahan - Community is now more aware about solid waste management than before.

"I am constantly reaching out to community members to motivate them to use colorcoded bins to segregate waste. Now, the community is aware of the segregation procedure. People used to throw the waste in 36 communal waste dumping pits. They used to throw waste generated from the market as well".

Now, people don't throw daily waste in those communal waste pits. It was possible because of Camp Cleaning Campaign at the community level. This helped to improve cleanliness in the area and there aren't as many flies as possible in the area anymore.

Apart from household cleaning, she motivates her community to keep clean the community and marketplaces through community engagement. Her responsibility as a paid volunteer also includes interacting with shop-owners and making them aware about the segregated wastes in colorcoded bins.

The SUF SUTRA worker (cleaning volunteers) carry the segregated waste from communal bins to the MRF in block A, sub-block A3 by tricycles and sometimes on their shoulders, which carries a great risk for their physical health. They are involved in the transportation of collected waste in communal bins and the re-segregation of solid waste at MRF. As a community volunteer, Shahjahan Bibi further guides waste segregating workers at the MRF to segregate organic waste from other (non) recyclable wastes and throws organic waste into compost chambers in the MRF. As the weight of segregated waste is measured and recorded in logbook, it was found that on average 60 per cent of the total waste collected at MRF is organic waste (food/rice, paper, vegetables/peel, etc.). Organic waste is collected in the composting chamber where vertical

perforated pipes are installed to ensure proper aeration for the composting process. The waste is then mixed or shuffled every two weeks using shovels to maintain aeration and consistency of decomposition of the pile. It takes around 45 to 60 days to prepare compost, which can be applied to the soil. Compost is distributed to the agriculture team or site management sector (SMS) of the respective camps for home-state gardening and agricultural use. Non-compostable, but recyclable residual waste (plastic, glass, polyethene bag, etc.) is supplied to scrap dealers free of cost. There are 66 cleaning volunteers throughout the camp. These volunteers are assigned as one volunteer for 500 inhabitants.

### Conclusions

Shahjahan's commitment and knowledge about sanitation made her a sanitation icon in the camp. The community is deeply impressed with her dedication to keeping the camp clean. She says with a smiling face "*If I call a meeting, then community members come to listen to me regardless of their other business. They like me so much*".

Shahjahan Bibi is a role model and a familiar face in the neighborhood. "Every day when I leave the house, people look for me. My words are valuable to them. I enjoy this role very much and would like to thank the BRAC WASH team for creating opportunities for me and people in need."

The cleanliness in the camp has visibly improved. The SWM/cleaning volunteers transfer waste from communal pits more frequently than before. Community members are more aware and trained on the importance of waste segregation and community structure members<sup>2</sup> regularly monitor activities, which started with door-to-door awareness campaigns. The SWM/cleaning volunteers' selection was facilitated by community structures as appropriate. Using segregated waste bins to collect waste rather than throwing

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Committee structures were established by BRAC, which included WASH committee, CCC-PLTH monitoring group,

latrine-bathing user group, child leader group, MHM facilitator group, etc.

them in communal pits is being practiced. Increased use of communal bins reflects the community's awareness of waste segregation, which has been successful through community mobilization. To ensure the sustainability and continuity of these practices, BRAC conducted capacity-building activities for community structures and groups. Therefore, in future, the community leader and groups will continue to follow up and monitor the practices. There are other community structures formed to ensure the sustainability of such activities.

### References

Clean Camp Campaign- People-led total hygiene (CCC-PLTH), booklet,

# **Photo Credits**

Imran Hossain, BRAC

# Acknowledgements

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