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Max TapWater: Ensuring safe water in rural areas

Max TapWater builds and operates small-scale water grids in rural areas in Bangladesh. Each grid covers around 75 households, who pay a monthly fee for the upkeep and maintenance of the water supply service

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Safe water is one of the most effective ways to improve children's health and save lives. photo: Courtesy

Dibapur village in Patuakhali is home to around 60 families, including that of Umme Kulsum. Since time immemorial, they had been using canal water for daily tasks such as bathing, washing, etc. While they used tube well water for drinking, not all of them had tube wells of their own.

Umme Kulsum used to fetch drinking water from a nearby school. But the tube well water failed to meet the needs of the villagers. Often, in the dry season, the villagers would not get enough water.

On top of that, in recent years, the canal water had become filthy and foul-smelling. There had been some instances of skin diseases in Kulsum's family. In other families that used the river water even for drinking, diarrhoea among small children was prevalent.

Last year, Kulsum's family came to know about a water project through their local authority. They heard that an NGO would establish a water supply grid in their village and provide clean water to the village households. And all the families in her village got on board.

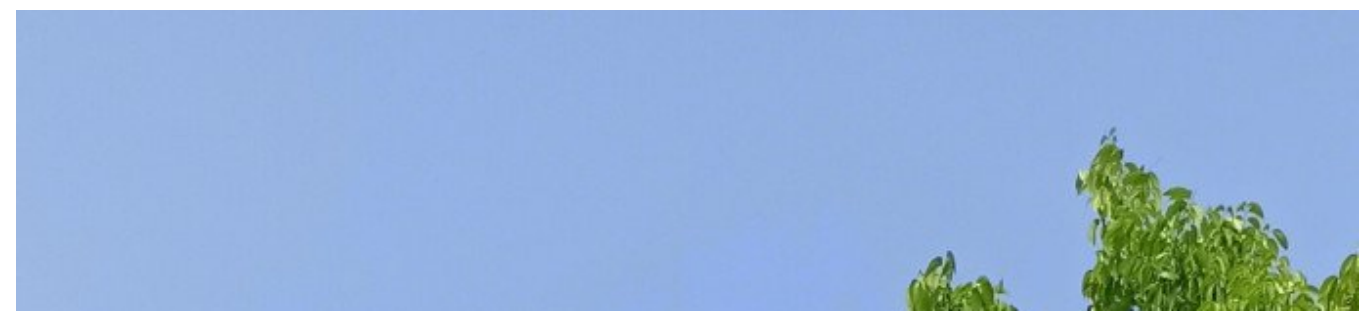
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The project was undertaken by Max TapWater, a social enterprise that works to ensure safe water. They build and operate small-scale water grids in rural areas in Bangladesh. Each grid covers around 75 households, who pay a monthly fee for the upkeep and maintenance of the water supply service.

"Max TapWater connects households to easy, safe and affordable water through piped water grids," said Saiful Islam, CEO of the enterprise, in an interview with The Business Standard.

"We are a social safe water enterprise: all our profits go towards maintenance and management of the piped water grids and towards building new grids in new communities so that we can serve more people with safe water," he added.





MAX TAP WATER SCHEME
Amkhola Bazar
Union: Amkhola, Upazilla: Gaurchiga
District: Patuakhali.

Height of Tank	17.5 ft	Water Pressure Length	1200 Meter
Capacity of Tank	2500	Tap Network Length	1800 Meter
Construction Cost	30%	Date of construction	Dec 2021
Construction Agency	MAX		

MAX TAP WATER



Max TapWater connects households to easy, safe and affordable water through piped water grids. Photo: Courtesy

The beginning

Max TapWater is working in partnership with an NGO named Max Foundation.

"We wanted to ensure safe water to all through a business approach, not through a charity approach," said Riad Imam Mahmud, co-founder and managing director, "to serve as an example to the private sector that social water business is possible."

The journey of Max TapWater began with a personal tragedy. In 2005, eight-month-old Max Le Poole died of a rare viral infectious disease in the Netherlands. His parents, Steven and Joke Le Poole, heartbroken, had decided to do something out of their grief.

"What I felt was that no parents should have to go through this. We wanted to save as many children's lives as possible," said Joke Le Poole, "Safe water is one of the most effective ways to improve children's health and save lives."

That is why Joke, together with Riad Imam Mahmud, decided to start a social water enterprise and name it after her son Max.



Photo: Courtesy

Beneficiaries

Umme Kulsum said that the introduction of Max Tapwater has significantly improved their lifestyle.

Even people who had a tube well in their homes had to pump a lot for only a little bit of water. "The tubewell water is not enough to meet the daily requirements. Sometimes, in the dry season, as the water level falls, it is difficult to get water.

After a few minutes of pumping, you would not get water. You would have to wait for a while. Moreover, there is iron in the water and some level of contamination," said another beneficiary named Abdul Selim.

Selim further added that water-related problems have been solved in their entire locality thanks to Max TapWater. He said that each family has to pay a small amount of monthly fee. The amount ranges from Tk200 to Tk300, depending on the household size.

Max TapWater serves communities mainly in the rural and peri-urban areas, where municipal water services are unavailable. As a result, people in these areas either have to use tube wells or canal water.



Photo: Courtesy

Benefits, goals and future plans

According to the CEO, so far, they have built 20 water grids. Around 1,100 households are benefiting from their services, taking the total number of beneficiaries to more than 5,000 villagers. Max TapWater consists of seven team members. However, the water grids also create local employment, because each grid is managed by an operator and it creates jobs for local plumbers, electricians etc.

"By the end of this year, we are planning to establish another 25 grids; we want to reach many more customers. Over the next five years, we have a plan to build 180 grids so that more than 13,000 people can have safe water every day," Saiful said.

Presently, the enterprise's activities involve Bangladesh's southern coastal regions. But they are also looking forward to expanding their activities to other areas of Bangladesh.

The demand for clean water in various climate vulnerable areas such as Bangladesh's coastal region is high. While the country has made progress in ensuring access to more water sources, access to safe drinking water sources is relatively low.

Environmental pollution, saltwater intrusion, groundwater abstraction are some of the main problems that affect water quality in the country. This is why Max TapWater sees market potential in many other areas of Bangladesh.



Photo: Courtesy

"We can efficiently provide safe water to the market via our model. Water needs are high everywhere, so we see a huge market in Bangladesh."

The company has a presence in Barishal's Patuakhali area. While the head office is located in Dhaka, there are two regional offices in Patuakhali Sadar and Golochipa Upazila.

The central team frequently visits the sites and does proper studies for site selection, acquisition and community engagement and then constructs the water grids. The construction is done with precision - drawing from the expert consultant engineer and supervision by experienced engineers. The local government also became a partner/advisor of this development.

"When we visit our customers' homes in remote communities, suddenly it feels like we're back in Dhaka. They now have an urban facility of piped water in their homes. But even more importantly, once they have the water connection, they invest in building beautiful lavatories and bathrooms.

One family even invested around Tk40,000 to build a bathroom so that their family members could bathe in private. This way, our company also supports local construction and sanitation businesses. Our customers now live a healthy life, and they tell us they are sick much less than before. It's easy for their kids now to wash their hands before dinner, so no more diarrhoea!" said Saiful.

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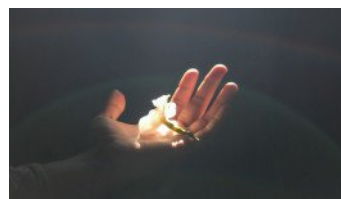
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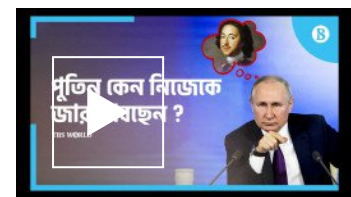
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Transmitting Electricity: Workers install an electricity transmission tower at Srinagar in Munshiganj. The Power Division took up a project of 400kV Double circuit transmission lines from Patuakhali (Payra) to Aminbazar (Dhaka) with a deadline of December 2020 for transmitting electricity from the Payra power plant, but Power Grid Company of Bangladesh failed to complete it due to difficulties in line building in the River Padma. Photo: Mumit M

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