

Arsenic Poisoning Prevention Program

MCC Bangladesh Alumni/SIM-Bangladesh Partnership

Expansion Project is Under Way!

Clean Drinking Water for All



Nardia is only 11, and yet she is already diagnosed by a medical doctor with early stages of arsenic poisoning. The good news is that drinking arsenic-free water at this stage can help flush the arsenic out of her system and help her stay healthy. SIM-Bangladesh's (SIM-BD's) arsenic project helps reach this goal.

Project Update

A new office has opened, in the expansion area of Bhanga. Educational sessions and filter distribution have begun! Bhanga is in the southern part of Faridpur district, southeast of where work has been going on for a number of years now. An experienced staff member from the northern area has relocated to Bhanga to provide day-to-day management for the project expansion. This will provide needed continuity and arsenic mitigation expertise for the new area. Additional staff will be hired and trained over the coming months.

There is great need in Banga for help with arsenic in the drinking water, which is mostly obtained from shallow wells. Many of these wells are contaminated with high levels of arsenic. Much of the local population are unsure of what their well arsenic levels are, as testing has not been done for years. There has also been little education or medical assistance. This project will provide, as it has done in prior areas, needed testing, education, medical assistance and most importantly safe water sources. If no safe wells are nearby, SIM-BD will provide a home filter at a subsidized cost, that will provide safe water for years.

Thank you for your interest and support in helping people in southern Bangladesh gain access to safe drinking water! The arsenic crisis in Bangladesh's drinking water has been identified as the largest mass poisoning in human history.

Stories

In this section, a story is given about people affected by arsenic and/or about different aspects of the SIM-BD arsenic project. The following story is from several years ago for the main project as opposed to the expansion project.

Village clinics

Towards the beginning of each calendar year, SIM-BD hires a local doctor and hits the road with them to see almost a thousand patients at about 40 makeshift clinics over the course of several weeks. Clinic season is a busy time and it requires a high degree of cooperative teamwork and synergy for the program staff to pull this off!

Each clinic may last anywhere between 20 minutes to 2 hours. During that time, the doctor examines pre-screened arsenicosis patients to assess what stage the disease is

at, and prescribes appropriate medications based on their diagnosis. A few weeks later SIM-BD field workers return to meet with each patient, bringing along the prescribed medicines. SIM-BD typically covers 75% of the medicine cost and asks the patients to cover 25% themselves. In this newsletter we'll share a story from a recent year's clinics.



Surab's condition



In one village, the doctor met a young man named Surab (pictured above). Unfortunately, Surab's physical condition was not good. You can visibly see severe arsenicosis symptoms on his feet and side. After examining him the doctor said that Surab is suffering from Stage 4 Arsenicosis (the final stage), and quite possibly gangrene and organ failure. In a case like

Surab's, the simple medicines the program offers likely won't be able to affect much positive change to his health, but if he starts to drink arsenic-free water and pursues more dramatic medical treatment then his symptoms may indeed be manageable. Sadly, up to this point he had been resistant to take health advice from program staff - though thankfully, on that day in the village, he seemed willing to listen. Ultimately, it's up to him whether or not he will take his physical health seriously enough to pursue treatment. Surab's story highlights a secondary reason why village clinics are so important each year; they are an excellent setting for raising community awareness about the effects of drinking arsenic-contaminated water, as people are gathered into larger groups and there is a doctor (highly-respected person) there to lend weight to staff words. This helps people like Surab to believe staff education sessions which communicate about the urgency and gravity of the public health crisis in their area.

Closing thoughts

We're glad to report that 715 patients were helped at that year's clinics, through provision of free and easy access to a doctor. Most of these people chose to accept their prescribed medicines and will continue to receive follow-up care in the future. The medicines distributed are indeed helpful in the fight against arsenicosis, but people are always reminded that, "***the very best medicine is to drink arsenic-free water***". It's a simple message, but one that needs frequent emphasis.

So, we expand this task of serving people in Faridpur District, including the new expansion area, to help them stay healthy in spite of severe arsenic contamination in so many wells. Our service is energized and motivated by the boundless and self-sacrificing love of Christ which endures in spite of everything. We are also encouraged by YOU and your partnership with us in this work. Those of you who read these letters and pray for us and give generously towards this project are witnesses to this same boundless and self-sacrificing love. We won't give up or lose hope!

Pray with Us

- Pray for the new office which has opened in Bhanga, and the people who are being served there.
- Pray for APPP **Field Workers** – that they would have endurance and skill in communicating about arsenic and health with thousands of villagers, many of whom are uneducated and more focused on short-term problems than on their long-term health.
- Pray for the **hundreds of patients** currently being served, that they will regularly take their medicines and that God would keep them healthy.

Making a Donation

To make future donations to this project, use the information below to give online or to contact your country's SIM office by phone or mail. Be sure to mention that you want to donate to Project #098335 expansion support (Bangladesh arsenic project).

- SIM USA: 704-588-4300; <https://www.simusa.org/give>; 114830 Choate Circle, Charlotte, NC 28273

- SIM Canada: 1-800-294-6918 ; <https://www.sim.ca/donate>; 10 Huntingdale Blvd., Scarborough, ON M1W 2S5