

## Impact of Social Business: A Project Analysis of Grameen Veolia Water Ltd.

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*Abstract: The purpose of this study is to explore the way of conducting social business concept in Bangladesh with reference to Veolia water project which is a social business. Additionally, this study also examines the problems faced by the entrepreneurs when adopting this concept. Both primary and secondary data were used for this study and data were collected from Veolia water project and Yunus center. Data collected were analyzed using focus group interview, observations and other qualitative tools relevant to statistical data analysis. Finally, the study provides some suggestions as guidelines which will be beneficial for concerned people for adopting social business concept.*

*Keywords: Impact, Social Business, Project Analysis, Grameen Veolia Water Ltd.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Social business has been defined by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Prof. Muhammad Yunus and was described in his various books viz., *Creating a world without poverty—Social Business and the future of capitalism* and *Building Social Business—The new kind of capitalism that serves humanity's most pressing needs*. Philosophically, Social Business is based on what Yunus identifies as the two basic motives of human beings: Selfishness and Selflessness. Selfishly, people do seek profit through business; further, Social Business is also based on the latter motive where in people do philanthropic services, like establishing churches, mosques, synagogues, art museums, public parks, health clinics or community centers. According to Yunus, the profits made through a Social Business's operations are less important than the beneficial effects it has on society [1]. Muhammad Yunus has more recently founded **Yunus Social Business (YSB)** to study, support, and invest by young in social businesses [2]. Against this backdrop let us point out the concept of social business as has been described by Yunus.

Yunus has defined a Social Business as a business that:

- Created and designed to address a social problem
- A non-loss, non-dividend company, i.e.

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1. It is financially self-sustainable and
2. Profits realized by the business are reinvested in the business itself (or used to start other social businesses), with the aim of increasing social impact, such as expanding the company's reach, improving the products or services or in other ways subsidizing the social mission [3].

Unlike a profit-maximizing business, the prime aim of a Social Business is not to maximize profits (although generating profits is desired). Furthermore, business owners are not receiving any dividend out of the business profits, if any.

On the other hand, unlike a non-profit, a Social Business is not dependent on donations or on private or public grants to survive and to work, because, as any other business, it is self-sustainable. Furthermore, unlike a non-profit, where funds are spent only once on the field, funds in a Social Business are invested to increase and improve the business' operations on the field on an indefinite basis. In this context the quote of Yunus as a backdrop of social business is worth pointing out: "A charity dollar has only one life; a Social Business dollar can be invested over and over again [4]".

A Social Business is sometimes used interchangeably or in comparison to a Social Enterprise - some have described this as a spectrum, ranging from profit-first corporations to non-profits or charities, with Social Enterprises closer to non-profits and Social Businesses closer to for-profits [4].

Social business is a new phenomenon and has attracted world attention. In this context, it is worth study. To this end, this study wants to explore the potentiality of social business in Bangladesh and its future prospect in our economic development which try to remove our poverty. Bangladesh can be benefited by social business. Prof. Yunus thus rightly pointed out:

*"We will create a poverty museum by 2030. We will start with Bangladesh".*

## **2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study aims at reviewing the concepts of social business and will critically examine the impact of social business concept in a project. The specific objectives of this research are-

- To study the existing theoretical concepts of social business and identify the theoretical debates;
- To indicate the applicability of social business concept in Veolia water ltd.
- To focus on the present situation of the project.
- To provide some suggestions for adopting social business concept in the project successfully.

## **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

With the backdrop outlined above, "Social Business" is a specific version of what is more broadly described as Social Entrepreneurship in the research literature.

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Daniel Bornstein's 1996 *The Price of a Dream: The Story of the Grameen Bank and the Idea That is Helping the Poor to Change their Lives* is a primary resource that traces the history of the origin of social business and the Grameen organization. This book written by a journalist is an inside look at the history and development of the Grameen Bank based on a series of observations and interviews over two different 6-months time periods in the 1990s. Bornstein traces the theoretical development of Yunus' ideas to Schumpeter's theories on creative

destruction and entrepreneurship. In a reversal of the Reaganomics trickledown theory, Yunus came up with the theory of "Bubble up Economics," wherein economic improvement rises from the bottom for the benefit of all. The author pointed out five major Yunus themes repeated throughout the history of Grameen: credit should be accepted as a fundamental human right; self-employment is preferred over wage employment; women should be a focus; the concept of development should be redefined as focused on the poorest 50 % of a given population; and the conceptual vagueness of development theorists should be replaced by specific actions against poverty.

The primary source for information on the notion of Social Business comes from Yunus himself through his different books and many speeches and interviews. Early works by Yunus include a group of essays written while he was a Professor of Economics at Chittagong University (1976). At that point, his focus was on research about approaches to economic development. But one can see, even then, his emerging thinking on the kind of organizational transformation he had in mind: "Development planning involves selectively discarding old institutions, germinating new ones, grafting new institutions to the old ones to guide the society from one level of economic existence to another level, from one set of social coordinates to another set" [5]. In this hand-typed collection he presented ideas on a strategy for educational reform in Bangladesh; economic development; a description of the Rural Economic Research Programs; discussion of self-reliance in Bangladesh; and a note on village planning. His facility with words and skill in conceptualizing the problems of addressing extreme poverty is clear throughout this work: "Between the bulk of inputs on the one side of the production process and the output on the other side, there is a fascinating human story where Time, Nature, Bureaucracy, Greed, Ignorance, and many more elements come into play" [5]. In the 1991 *Jorimon and Others: Faces of Poverty*, the interviews and observations made in the 1980s during the early years of the Grameen Bank Project in Tangail, Yunus stressed on the moving studies, focused to a large extent on the plight of women, a theme that becomes a constant in Yunus' work. As he notes in the introduction, "one must look through the experienced of a woman to find out the true color of our society. All the deformities and perversions of our society are bound to show up very distinctly if you see them as a woman does; particularly if the woman happens to be a poor woman" [6].

In creating a World without Poverty: Social Business and the Future of Capitalism [5] Yunus' second popular book, focus was given first to recounting of the story of

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microcredit, and then a discussion of social business theory was followed. Specific cases discussed included the French food giant Danone's partnership to market yogurt in Bangladesh, along with other businesses that work under the Grameen banner. He distinguished between Type I and Type II social businesses. Type I is the model described thus far in this chapter. Type II is a profit-maximizing company, still focused on a social need, but owned by its beneficiaries (who are poor or otherwise disadvantaged) or by a trust dedicated to improving the lives of the poor [5]. One of Yunus's clearest statements on social business came in a 2009 through an article entitled, "Economic Security for a World in Crisis," where he describe capitalism as a half-built system: "The present theory of capitalism holds that the marketplace is uniquely for those who are interested in profit only." Whereas Adam Smith envisioned a moral function and universal sympathy for others that could be supported through the capitalist system, Yunus sees this urge towards sympathy expressed in charity. However, such organizations do not have the ability to innovate and expand the way businesses do. Thus, Yunus argues for the need for a third sector along the free market and government. The key distinction with social businesses is that no profit is generated for investors, except in the case of those which are owned by the poor as with the Grameen Bank (Type II).

A common criticism of socially minded models is that they ignore human nature, which is innately self-interested. Yunus confronts directly this assumption about the match between human nature and profit-maximization models; he does so in most every piece he has written about social business, indicating the centrality to his theory of his ideas about human nature [7] [8] [9]. He argues that the application of capitalist theory in today's world suffers from "the failure to capture the essence of a human being" [8] writing in 2011, Yunus argues that Adam Smith himself recognized the multi-dimensional nature of human beings, not only selfish but also selfless. The theory of capitalism that has come to dominate makes "no room for the selfless dimension of people" [8]. He argues that there will always be people willing to create and invest in social businesses even though they are not maximizing the financial profit; they instead reap other kinds of profits. Elaborating on the urgency of excluding the pursuit of profit, or payment of dividends to social business owners, Yunus provides three reasons. First one relates to a moral argument – Yunus believes that it is immoral to make a profit from the poor [9]. He asserts on the second reason which is a pragmatic one: "in times of stress, profit will always trump the other 'bottom lines'" [9] The third reason is what he calls a systemic one: there must be a clear third alternative to business and charity, "in order to change mindsets, reshape economic structures, and encourage new forms of thinking" [9]. In fact one reaction to learn about the social business idea is that it will be hard if not impossible to find investors, because while the initial investment is paid back, investors must give up interest on their funds. There is in fact a financial cost to investors. Yunus' idea about the other side of human nature is relevant in a rebuttal – there will be those willing to pay this cost because of the other dividends they reap.

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Further, the focus on the amelioration of social problems entails not only finding measures to assess the extent to which the focus issue is being solved but also the prior understanding of the target social issue. Consider the list of issue areas Yunus provides in his Seven Principles (see above): education, health, technology access, and environment. From these broad areas many additional areas relevant to familiar social issues can be derived viz., nutrition, clean water, homelessness, etc. If social business entrepreneurs are to design in an effective social businesses, there must have an educational background that is relevant to grasping the causes and contexts of the target issues. In one our depending on the issue, they might draw on sociology, political science, geography, economics, biology, computer science, information technology, and/or psychology, Alongside, from these areas can also offer background on the country or locality in which the social business is proposed to operate. What works in one place may not work in another and that in cultural and political contexts play a role in the business planning and outcomes of their operations.

As to effect like operation relevant to social business and entrepreneurship the concerned literature reveal that, thinking of outcomes and impact, social business entrepreneurs one should be conscious of the potential political impact of their work, this kind of impact has been highlighted by Kreutzer and Mauksch. Success may involve the transformation of the systems that create or allow social problems to exist. Existing ways of thinking about the problems may shift. Lawrence derived this challenge from the work of social innovators; they pointed out: we believe it applies especially well to the social business-focused subset of those: the nature of this work is inherently political. “Social systems, even those that underpin significant and obvious social problems, are always tied to entrenched interests and distributions of advantage and disadvantage.” In this context, it is noticed that the recent troubles that Prof. Yunus has experienced in Bangladesh, with the government’s successful effort to force Yunus off of the board of the Grameen Bank. It is most likely an example of Government’s reaction to the changes that lead change in the bank, exceeding the work of its own government in addressing social ills (Schneiderman 2011; also, see Rashid 2012 for a study of Grameen and politics in Bangladesh). Indeed, the work of the social business entrepreneur can expose “injustice and inequity in ways that can force the redistribution of privilege.” In such a context, those engaged in this work have to be “both creative problem solvers and skilled politicians – overcoming resistance from residential communities, government agencies, political factions, and corporate actors” [10].

#### **4. METHODOLOGY /DATA COLLECTION PROCESS**

A method involves a process or techniques in which various stages or steps of collection data, information are explained & the analytical techniques are defined. According to the dictionary of social services, “Methodology is the systematic and logical study of the principles guiding scientific investigation.”

This study is a desk-based one. Firstly, an extensive survey of existing literature was made. Then data collected through primary and secondary sources were

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collected and analyzed. In fact, the information uses in this study basically collected through conducting a qualitative research. In social science research, one of the basic instruments for collecting data is to study the documents. The data collection process of this study can be classified in the following ways:

**Primary Sources:** Information uses in this study basically collected through conducting a qualitative research such as: interviews from the organizations conducting social business, focus group interview and in-depth interview. Besides these, data were collected from Veolia Water project, YSB, Yunus Centre and various projects which practices social business concept.

**Secondary Data:** Secondary data relevant to this study were also collected and analyzed to achieve the objective of the study. Secondary data collected were facilitated by going through the available secondary data sources like published documents and web based materials. The sources were: documents focusing on Social Business, Social Business Model, and Social Enterprise related issues and the available research reports of Veolia water ltd.

While selecting the documents from where data was to be extracted, this study considered the relevancy of issues to the research focus. Therefore, the study traced out the relevant literature, reviewed those, analyzed the literature, synthesized the debates, and analyzed primary and secondary data. Information thus revealed has been presented in an analytical form.

### 5. CONCEPT OF THE STUDY RELEVANT TO SAMPLE:

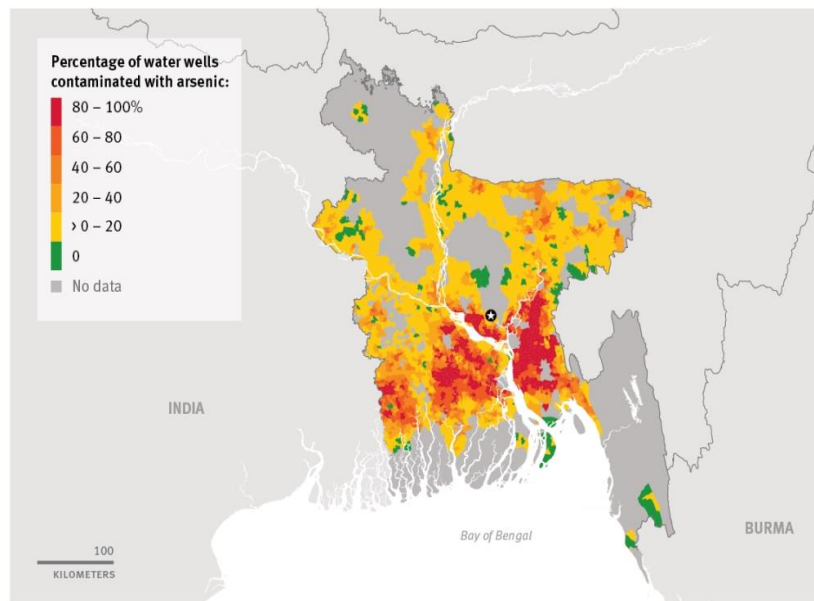
Social business, along with solving social problem is an environmental friendly one. It is well recognized that our environment is in serious crisis. As sea level continues to rise due to global warming, Bangladesh in such a context faces an existential threat. In this backdrop it is rightly asserted that social businesses must be engaged along with the existing models that are in place to save our environment. In doing so, not only will we be able to save our environment, we will also be able to enrich it. Thus we must act now. We must act to create a livable, survivable, and safe environment. And we have a potent weapon at our disposal to combat the crisis -- social business.

Nobel Laureate Dr. Yunus stresses on the potential benefits of social business to remove many social ills that we face today. He asserts that the younger generation has the talent, capabilities, and technological know-how to effectively change the world. "We must use young people to harness the power of social business," says Dr. Yunus.

In the context of social business in Bangladesh relevant to environmental friendly and safe guarding environment Veolia Water Ltd. is an exemplar effort. In this regard it is necessary to note that in the 1970's and 80's, millions of shallow tube wells were installed throughout Bangladesh to supply bacteria-free water to rural

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populations [11]. But the crux of the problem was that in the 1990's, the first analysis of such an operation revealed a high concentration of arsenic naturally present in the groundwater provided by the tube wells. The regular intake of arsenic contaminated water can lead to a range of health issues problems which include skin discoloration, cardiovascular and neurological complications, various types of cancer and sometimes can lead to death [12]. Many solutions to solve this problem have been tried, such as digging deeper wells and removing arsenic from the groundwater with filters, but none of them showed sufficient reliability to be considered as safe long term solutions. In 2010, the Health Effects of Arsenic Longitudinal Study (HEALS) assessed that 34 to 77 million of Bangladeshis present a risk of illness due to water arsenic contamination.



To fight arsenic contamination of water in Bangladesh, Veolia and Grameen Health Care Services Ltd have formed a joint venture company in 2008: Grameen Veolia Water Ltd., a company built upon on social business principles. The two companies combined their skills to deliver safe drinking water to the underprivileged inhabitants of rural Bangladesh, using state-of-the-art water treatment techniques.

## 6. SHORT PROFILE OF THE GRAMEEN VEOLIA WATER LTD: ESTABLISHMENT AND GOALS

### 6.1 Background of Grameen Veolia

Every day in Bangladesh, millions of people consume water that contains arsenic. This toxin is naturally present in the ground water in many parts of the country and has led to skin lesions and cancers for 30 to 80 million Bangladeshis. Many solutions to this problem have been tried, such as digging deeper wells and removing arsenic from the groundwater, but none have been able to meet the problem satisfactorily and the needs of local people.[13] In such a situation, Grameen and Veolia Water decided to join forces to provide clean and safe water to some of the poorest people in Bangladesh, using a water treatment method based on traditional filtration methods.

To provide clean water, Bangladesh has undertaken the world's first social business initiative. A partnership called Grameen-Veolia Water Ltd was created in

2008 to provide clean water for the poor in Bangladesh. GrameenVeolia Water Ltd further partnered with Grameen Healthcare Services and Veolia Water AMI Ltd to distribute purified water to one lakh people in Bangladesh in 2012. The world today faces grim environment problems. The elimination of forests, global warming, loss of animal lives, and carbon pollution continue to threaten our existence. Bangladesh faces the adverse effects of these perilous environmental pollution and threats.

### 6.2 Goals of this project:

The main objectives and goals of the project are to:

- Prove that our approach is supported by as many as possible and that it has a strong social and health impact.
- Complete the business model and prove its rent ability on short term.

*Antoine Frérot, CEO of Veolia in this context rightly pronounced that: "Veolia Water's commitment to finding solutions for people who do not have access to safe drinking water is at the heart of our business strategy".*

The background of establishing GVW is closely related to serve society and provide solution to socio-economic problems prevailing in society. It is to be noted that the goal of a social business is to provide solutions to real-world problems and to improve people's lives. Social businesses are self-sustaining in the long term and use market mechanisms to pursue social goals first. Although owners and investors gradually recoup the money they have invested, social businesses do not aim at providing dividend rather its profits are reinvested to expand and widen business and social benefits. This is what makes social business sustainable; they are self-financing and therefore very different to corporate philanthropy [14].



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GVW is a social business in the perspective of about mentioned criteria. Grameen Veolia Water came about following a meeting between Professor Muhammad Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank and recipient of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize and Antoine Frérot, CEO of Veolia Environment. Together they decided to create the Grameen Veolia Water Joint Venture. This Joint Venture is operating at 'No Loss, No Dividend' policy. It helps at operating to achieve the social goal of providing access to clean, safe drinking water to 100,000 people [15].

#### **6.3 Goalmari and Padua Union: The project target area**

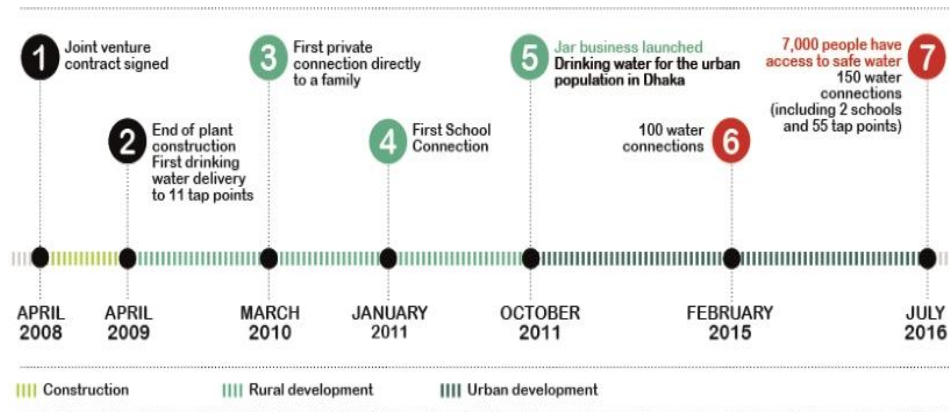
Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world and prone to flooding, natural disasters and has poor infrastructure. The project was set up in the villages of Goalmari Union and Padua Union, located in a rural area at 50km from the capital city of Dhaka. Goalmari Union and Padua Union make up a group of villages with a combined population of 40,000 inhabitants. Each year, monsoon rains flood two thirds of the villages' surface area for three months of the year. The river next to the village is used for washing and disposing of waste and sewage, so its water is not fit for drinking. As 83% of the groundwater was contaminated by arsenic, Grameen Veolia Water chose to build its water treatment plant in this area.

#### **6.4 Focus of the Project**

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world and prone to natural disasters. Goalmari Union and Padua Union make up a group of villages with a combined population of 40,000 inhabitants. Each year, monsoon rains flood two thirds of the villages' surface area for three months of the year. The river next to the village is used for washing and disposing of waste and sewage, so its water is not fit for drinking. Between the 1960s and 1980s, millions of wells were dug in Bangladesh. Today these wells provide 90% of the water used for drinking and cooking by Bangladesh's 160 million people, but since the wells were dug, it has been found that much of Bangladesh's groundwater contains high levels of naturally occurring arsenic, which washes down from the Himalayas. This arsenic is slowly poisoning around half of Bangladesh's people. The Goalmari area is one of the worst affected by arsenic poisoning in groundwater, the Bangladeshi government estimates that around 83% of its wells are contaminated [16].

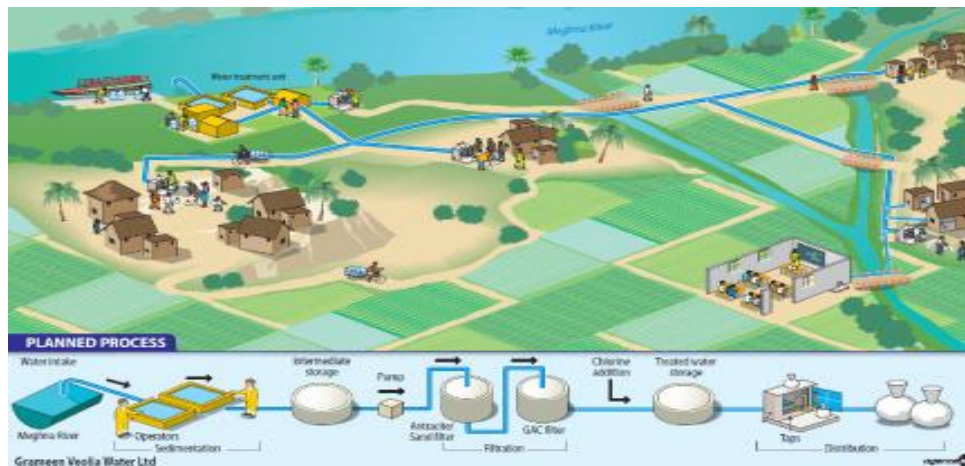
#### **Safe Drinking water to local residents**

The main function of this project is to make arrangement of safe drinking water to people of the project area. It endures to provide the local people to have access to drinking water that doesn't make them ill. From the start, the engineering and technical aspects of the plant worked perfectly to achieve the goal but the construction phase was just the beginning of the challenges facing the project. The initiation and operation of the project can be seen from the diagram that follows:



**6.5 Project Timeline**

Phase 1 of the project began in 2009 with the beginning of clean water distribution. Initially, the plant was connected to a network of 11 water taps bringing drinking water within 70 meters of homes, providing water for 1,500 of Goalmari Union’s residents. In 2010, in the second stage of the project, the network was extended to the neighboring villages of Padua Union, bringing the total number of people with access to drinking water to 2,600. The next stage of the project will bring water to a greater number of Goalmari and Padua Union residents, as well as the surrounding villages providing 4,000 people with access to drinking water. Following chart provides an eye view to the project area and operation:



**Project Management Through Action Research Approach**


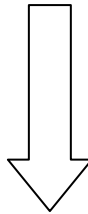
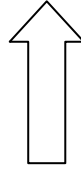


The GVW action research project is jointly led by Veolia Water and ESSEC IIES as part of IIES research program dedicated to Base of the Pyramid (BoP) / Social Business (SB) approaches.

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Action research is research carried out “with” and not “on” a company or field initiative. The company learns from its experience and adapts the way it does things as the project goes on, it can then in turn apply this knowledge to other projects. This was the case for Veolia Water in Tanger, Morocco, where the company has so far connected around 6,000 families to public water networks using the same 'action research' model and making use of its knowledge and experience gained elsewhere.[17]

**6.6 Action research agenda**

ESSEC IIES Sustainable Enterprise team is applying hypothesis and methodological approaches such as participative process and community-based approach, sustainable and disruptive innovations, market co-creation approaches, pro-poor / Base of the Pyramid (BoP) innovative practices (in terms of strategies, organizations, services) in an iterative approach following progressive steps

Action Research Steering and Governance					
Step 1.	Step 2.	Step 3.	Step 4.	Step 5.	Step 6.
Collecting and organizing data and available knowledge	Understanding and building problem, producing new knowledge and analysis	Complementary knowledge, topics and issues	Action plan	Building a reporting/assessment framework  Sustainability and strategic assessment	Modeling and out scaling->other Water Social Businesses
Business data Technical data Social data Economic data, livelihood, landowning Institutional data Health (arsenic) data Public Policy 	First infield research mission First analysis report First recommendations 	Anthropological study (Drishti Research Center, Th Blanchet, Dhaka) Environmental health analysis Social capital and leadership assessment	Business management  Sanitary communication Institutional design 	Multi Stakeholders, multi-criteriatop-“down/bottom-up” and deliberative method Assess the project impact 	Functional Analysis Generic functions Contextual diagnosis Resource analysis Modeling 
<b>Iterative (re)framing of the problem with “knowledge” and new topics, alongside the business evolution</b>					
<b>Collaboration with GVW business management: business model, communication, participatory process and institutional organization</b>					
<b>Agenda of the action research project</b>					

**6.7 Programs Relevant to Problems, Solutions and Enhancement of Sale**

The GVW initiated some actions to face problem and enhance sale. These are as follows:

**1) Initiative for the changing habits**

Within a few days of the plant being operational, the Grameen Veolia Water team realised that the initial enthusiasm shown by local residents was not translating into desired sales of water. In such case, to find out why, the company enlisted the help of anthropologist -Thérèse Blanchet and the Drishti Research-Center to spend six months working with local people.

The company also tried promoting its water using songs, posters and by encouraging respected members of the community to pass on the message about the dangers of drinking water contaminated with arsenic.

**2) The jar business**

In 2010, the water treatment plant was able to produce more than enough drinking water to meet demand in Goalmari and Padua. Professor Yunus suggested that in order to increase the company's profitability, additional water could be sold in urban areas. Profits generated from this new branch of the social business would be invested in rural infrastructure, such as network extension and new tap points. After analyzing the water distribution market in Dhaka City, GVW decided to launch its 20L 'Jar Business'. The water sold is produced in the same water treatment plant, as well as in another production site in Dhaka. It then undergoes an additional process for conservation purposes. This water is tested on a daily basis by GVW chemists in our own laboratory, and in trusted external laboratories in Bangladesh (ICDDR, B, BUET).The drinking water is delivered every day to about 300 customers including offices, universities and embassies. The customers of the Jar Business enjoy one of the highest qualities of drinking water available in Bangladesh [18].

Grameen Veolia Water Ltd operates and maintains a water treatment plant that provides safe drinking water to nearly 7000 people in the villages of Goalmari Union and Padua Union, where the groundwater is naturally contaminated by arsenic. Grameen Veolia Water Ltd. distributes drinking water through a 13 km network of standpipes with 55 tap points being set up in different locations in the villages. At each of these taps, a lady dealer is in charge of selling the treated water at the rate of Bangladeshi Taka 2.5 (approximately USD 0,03) per 10 liters [19].

Over the years, households who could afford it asked Grameen Veolia Water Ltd. to get a private connection in their homes. Today, 90 House connections are

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delivering the water to these families. Grameen Veolia Water Ltd. is also serving two schools in Goalmari and building awareness programs with the teachers [20]. Like Grameen Veolia, others initiative must be operated in Bangladesh for removing social related problems by adopting social business principles.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

There is great potentiality to initiate and expand social business extensively throughout the country. Poor people are by far the largest victims of environmental pollution and they need to be protected. To this end, business communities can come forward and adopt social business. Here it may be noted that large businesses have the financial resources to undertake social business initiatives more easily than the smaller businesses. They can enter social business without any significant market barrier in Bangladesh. Through social business, they will be able to earn profit and, most importantly, empower lives. But not all small businesses have the necessary economy of scale to enter into a social business. They need assistance for which concerned agencies can come forward.

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