



Learnings from the WASH SDG WAI sub-programme in Bangladesh (2018 – 2024)

Pro-Poor Strategy for the Water and
Sanitation Sector of Bangladesh 2020:
roll-out and way forward

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Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Background

The WASH SDG Programme (the Programme) was a five-plus year programme funded by the Dutch Government through the Inclusive Green Growth Department (IGG) within the Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from July 2018 to March 2024, including a costed extension. Simavi was overall lead of the WASH SDG consortium. In Bangladesh, the programme included two sub-programmes implemented by the WASH Alliance International (WAI) and SNV. WAI targets twenty Unions and seven Municipalities in its sub-programme. The twenty Unions are spread over five subdistricts: Barguna Sadar, Satkhira Sadar, Tala, Betagi and Sreemangal. The Municipalities are Satkhira, Kalaroa, Barguna, Amtali, Betagi, Patharghata and Kalapara. The WAI sub-programme was implemented by consortium members from Bangladesh and the Netherlands. Local partners are: Development Organisation for the Rural Poor (DORP), Hope for the Poorest (HP), Practical Action (PA), Stichting Landontwikkelingsproject Bangladesh (SLOPB), WaterAid Bangladesh-WAB (and its partner IDEA, and Uttaran (and its partner Dalit). Simavi is the overall lead partner. WASTE, IRC, Akvo, RAIN, RUAF/Hivos, and PRACTICA were the Dutch partners.

The programme’s overarching goal was to improve access to WASH services for all, especially targeting marginalised communities, including those in urban slums and remote areas. It used an integrated approach, aiming for sustainable, climate-resilient, gender-sensitive, and socially inclusive water and sanitation services with improved hygiene practices.

This note describes the approach followed to assist Local Government Institutions (LGI) of Bangladesh in improving service levels for people living in hard-to-reach areas and in (extreme) poverty.

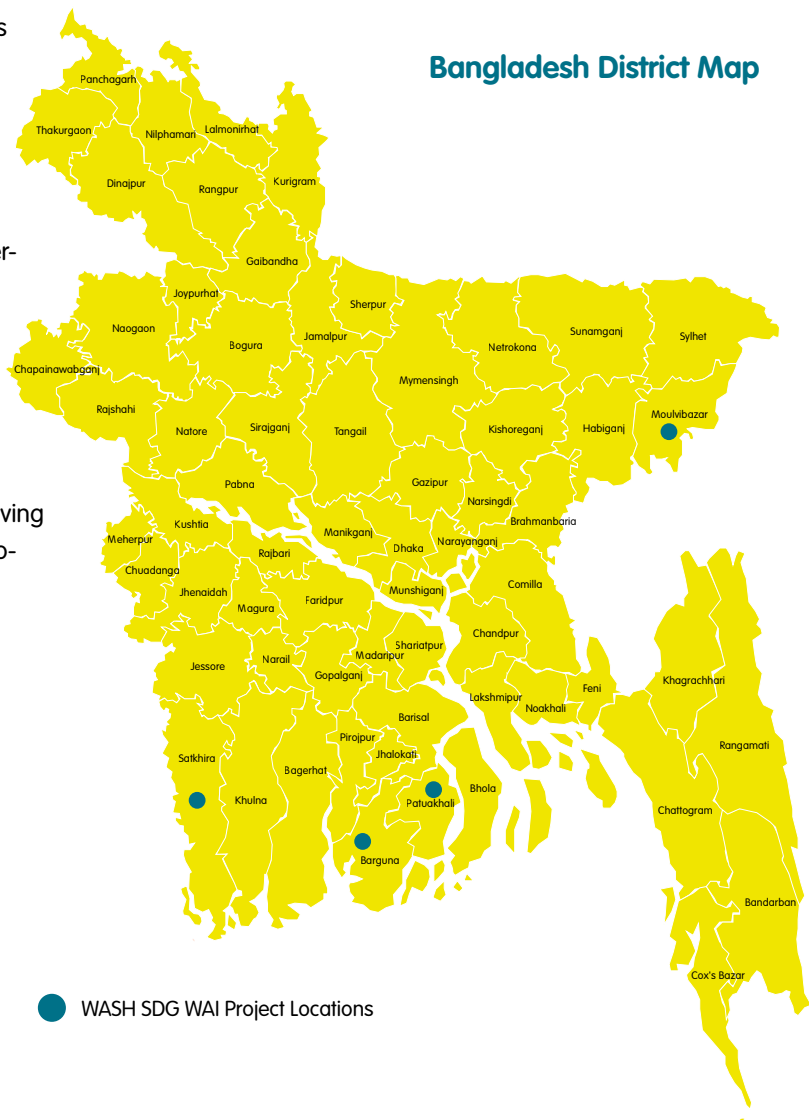


Figure 1: WASH SDG WAI sub-programme locations

Pro-Poor strategy for the Water and Sanitation Sector in Bangladesh

There is a clear gap between the rich and the poor in terms of getting WASH services in Bangladesh with gender inequality as additional challenge ([JMP 2020](#)). The gap is more evident in hard-to-reach areas. According to the 2020 JMP report, the rate of access to basic sanitation services is 72% among the rich and only 47% among the hardcore poor. In case of drinking water, the situation is somewhat better, the rate is about 100% among the rich and 94% among the hardcore poor.

In order to remove this disparity, the government of Bangladesh formulated the Pro-Poor Strategy for the Water and Sanitation Sector of Bangladesh¹ first in 2005 and revised it in 2020 to align the strategy with SDG's 'Leaving No One Behind' mandate. In this revision, development partners and civil society organisations (CSOs) have played a crucial role. In November 2019, the National Forum for Water Supply and Sanitation (NFWSS) formally recommended the approval of the revision of the Pro-Poor Strategy for the Water Supply and Sanitation Sector in Bangladesh. The NFWSS is the highest forum for decision making on water and sanitation in Bangladesh. Prior to this recommendation, a National Working Committee was formed by the Local Government Division (LGD) to review and update the Strategy. WaterAid Bangladesh initiated this process by writing to the senior secretary of the LGD requesting that the Strategy be reviewed and aligned with SDG 6. WaterAid Bangladesh also facilitated the entire process and discussions between LGD and local CSOs. They held consultations on the Strategy with WASH networks and CSOs. Simavi also contributed to the review of the Strategy and was a member of the National Working Committee. During the national level consultation, representatives from CSOs, local government institutions and other stakeholders provided feedback and recommendations to help finalise the Strategy. The Strategy was then submitted to the NFWSS for approval. The revised Strategy was approved in June 2020 and made publicly available².

The Strategy is in line with the pledge to leave no one behind as stated in the SDGs and includes the provision of a 100% subsidy for WASH services for the poorest and most marginalised (the previous version of the strategy had a provision of 90% subsidy, the rest of the 10% was supposed to come from the household/community as cost share). The new version of the Strategy includes four key points:

1. Operational definition of hardcore poor households
2. Definition of basic minimum water and sanitation service levels
3. Identification and organisation of the poor households for subsidies
4. Development of a mechanism for administering subsidies

The revision process created space for CSOs and WASH networks to actively participate and provide recommendations based on their experiences and the reality on the ground. Including public comments on the official website encouraged healthy and inclusive dialogue with citizens. For the first time, citizens were aware of the national consultations and given the opportunity to share their views.

1. [Strategy for WSS 2019_Bangla_ & English_Final.pdf \(ircwash.org\)](#)

2. [Watershed Annual Report 2020](#)

Supporting the government in implementing the Strategy

Approval of the Strategy was just the first step in the implementation. In order for people to actually benefit from the Strategy, the WASH SDG WAI sub-programme started pushing the roll-out. As part of the process, in 2021, IRC, WaterAid and Simavi jointly developed a guideline for the staff of the Bangladesh WAI sub-programme³. This guideline was created to inform Local Government Institutes about the Strategy and to adopt action plans to implement the strategy. The following initiatives have been undertaken for this:

- WASH SDG WAI local partners and a number of LGI representatives received training on the Pro-Poor Strategy using the guideline developed by the WASH SDG WAI sub-programme.
- Local partners organised awareness raising workshops with the LGIs, DPHE representatives and other relevant stakeholders to orient them about the Strategy and their responsibilities to roll it out at Upazila (sub-district), Municipality and Union level.
- Local partners have also discussed the Pro-Poor Strategy at other relevant occasions to raise awareness with the LGIs, such as at open budgeting sessions.
- Local partners assisted the LGIs in developing location specific roadmaps to implement the Strategy.
- LGIs with assistance from local partners identified poor and hard-core poor households within their jurisdiction.
- While preparing the LGI budget, local partners assisted LGIs to ensure adequate WASH budget for the poor and socially excluded.

Photo: Awareness raising at Satkhira Sadar upazila level multi-stakeholder coordination meeting



3. [guideline_for_rolling_out_pro-poor_strategy.pdf](#) (ircwash.org)

As per the LGI act 2009 (and its operation manual), WASH Standing Committees at Union level (rural areas) are responsible for planning and monitoring WASH services. However, in reality, WASH Standing Committees were not formed in many Union Parishads since WASH is not considered a priority. With the Pro-poor Strategy, the WASH Standing Committees were given the responsibility to identify hard-core poor households. WASH SDG WAI local partners used this to form or revive WASH Standing Committees at Union level. While in WAI working areas all WASH related Standing Committees are formed and functional, in the country context many LGs do not yet have such a committee.

It has been observed that national strategies often fail to reach Municipalities and Union Parishads located on the outskirts. Therefore, at the national level, partners of the WASH SDG WAI initiative, particularly WaterAid and Simavi, have advocated to the Local Government Division (LGD) – being the line Ministry for Local Government Institutions - to develop a circular for LGIs to adopt the Strategy. This process is currently underway. Thanks to the advocacy efforts of civil society organisations, the urban department of the LGD has been tasked by the National Forum for Water Supply and Sanitation to establish WASH Standing Committees at the City Corporation and Municipality levels. This initiative is expected to facilitate the implementation of the Strategy in the future.

The efforts of local partners have significantly influenced the increase in funding for WASH projects in the intervention areas. For example, in Sreemangal sub-district, all three Unions within the project areas saw an increase in the budget allocated for WASH during the financial year 2022-2023 compared to 2021-2022.

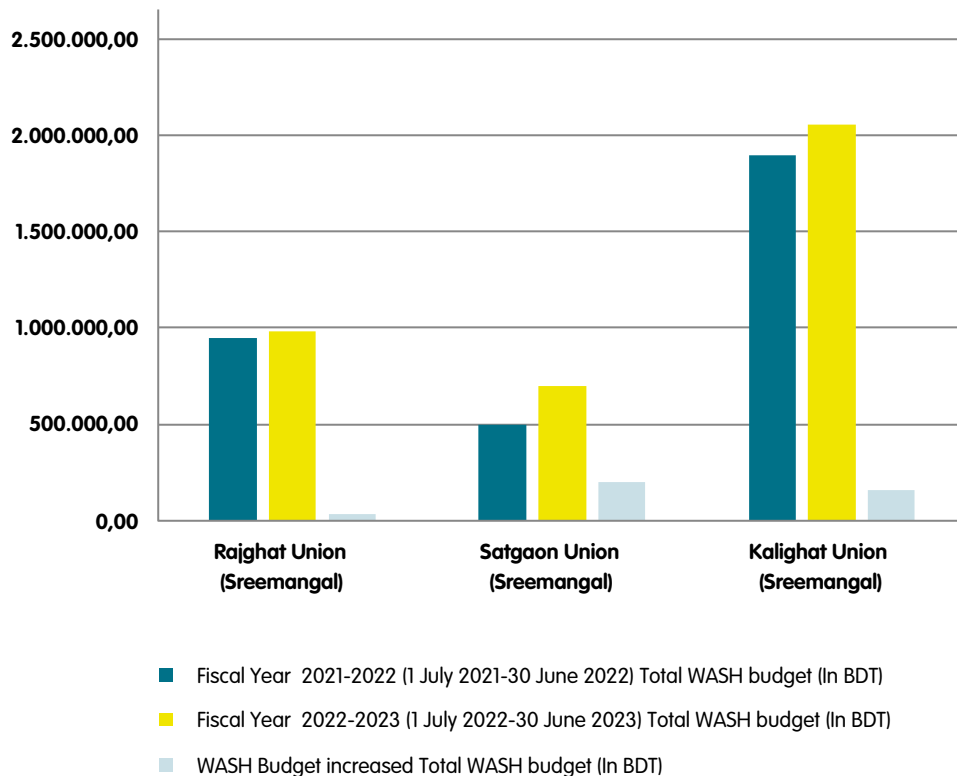


Figure 2: WASH budget increase in three WAI sub-programme unions of Sreemangal Upazila

Identified bottlenecks (regulatory, institutional capacity, finance)

- Commissioning the strategy does not ensure its effective implementation. Local Government Institutions (LGIs) require proper orientation and capacity building to successfully execute the Strategy.
- Allocation of resources to local government to plan and implement is not sufficient. Currently, LGIs have limited revenue income and primarily rely on national allocations for development projects. Without proper guidance, LGIs may prioritise other areas for spending the national allocation.
- Even when (limited) resources are available, timely disbursement of Annual Development Plan funds and expenditure efficiency of LGIs are also restricting access to available finance.
- The process of allocating subsidies does not align with the Union Parishad Act. The Department of Public Health Engineering Department (DPHE) is still not following the 2009 Union Parishad Act. DPHE is disbursing the subsidy using its own WATSAN Committee mechanism (following its circular published in 2007). For example, the World Bank initiated the Rural WASH for Human Capital Development project shortly after the Strategy was approved. However, WASH Standing Committees were not involved in the process as it was implemented by the Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) and DPHE. Efforts by the National Forum for Water Supply and Sanitation aimed to address this gap by revisiting the circular for the WATSAN committee and the WASH standing committee⁴.
- At the subnational level, WASH Standing Committees are responsible for selecting poor households for eligibility under the Pro-Poor Strategy. However, it is uncertain whether the committee members possess the necessary skills and resources to fulfil their duties. To date, no training or resources have been provided to these committees.
- Standing Committees lack access to information regarding households without access to drinking water and sanitation services. Such information is not readily available at the subnational level. Without monitoring data, there is a risk of nepotism and bias among elected LGI representatives when allocating subsidies.

Way forward / Recommendations for scaling up implementation of the Strategy

- Sensitisation of LGIs is important to ensure successful implementation of different national policies and strategies including the Pro-Poor Strategy for the Water Supply and Sanitation Sector in Bangladesh, 2020. It is recommended that the Local Government Division considers issuing a letter, instruction, or circular to all Municipalities and Union Parishads along with Upazila and District Authorities encouraging them to initiate the proper implementation of the Pro-Poor Strategy by the local authorities. Separate allocation for this can be considered to accelerate the process.
- It is suggested that DPHE updates or revises its 2007 circular to ensure alignment of the allocation/subsidy process with both the Union Parishad Act of 2009 and the Pro-Poor Strategy of 2020. This would particularly help clarify the roles of the WATSAN Committees and the WASH Standing Committees.
- It is recommended to establish a clear monitoring mechanism for the Municipality and Union WASH Standing Committees to identify hard-core poor households that are eligible for WASH subsidy, as they currently lack essential data for informed decisions.
- Local Government Institutes currently face challenges in terms of technical and financial resources to effectively plan, implement, and monitor the process. There are also limitations regarding human resources. Therefore, it is suggested that the Local Government Division and the National Institute of Local Government-NILG (capacity building unit of LGD for LGIs) address specific capacity building needs in their Annual Performance Agreement, and that NILG follows this in their Annual Plan. Once LGIs have enhanced capacity to plan and implement the subsidy mechanism, they may consider allocating resources for subsidies from their own revenue or advocate to the national government for increased allocation.

