



Policy Brief 7: Bangladesh Miracle: 50 Years of WASH in Bangladesh

Photo: World Vision



**BANGLADESH
MIRACLE**

CELEBRATING BANGLADESH'S
50 YEARS OF DEVELOPMENT
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This policy brief summarizes the discussion and recommendations from the webinar titled 'Bangladesh Miracle: 50 years of WASH in Bangladesh.' The webinar is part of the integrated development dialogue campaign 'Bangladesh Miracle' organized by Innovision Consulting in association with The Department of Economics North South University and The Financial Express along with mPower as ICT partner and Windmill Advertising, Printagraphy, Sarabangla, Colors Fm 101.6 and Young Economists' Forum (YEF) as event partners. Wateraid is the exclusive thematic partner of Bangladesh Miracle.

CONTEXT

Innovision Consulting Private limited conducted its seventh webinar of the “Bangladesh Miracle” campaign on 12th August 2021. This event was done in collaboration with WaterAid Bangladesh, Department of Economics, North South University, and The Financial Express.

The purpose of this webinar was to address the challenges of the water, sanitation, and hygiene sector in Bangladesh. Regarding this topic, the seminar mainly focused on the neglected sectors and talked about the pivotal events that helped shape Bangladesh’s WASH landscape over the span of 50 years.

The partners of Bangladesh Miracle campaigns are Windmill Advertising, Colors 101.6 FM, Sarabangla.net, YEF (Young Economist Forum) from North South University, CARE Bangladesh, Printagraphy, GAIN Bangladesh, ICCO Bangladesh, Pathao, Simprints Technology, mPower (ICT Partner), BIID, and NextgenEdu.

CRITICAL SUCCESSES

From the 90s to now, the behavior towards sanitation has changed a lot, in a positive way. The critical successes of Bangladesh in WASH that have significantly influenced the positive change, are listed below:

Prevention of Deadly waterborne diseases such as Cholera and Diarrhea: Diseases like cholera and diarrhea would affect the mass population in Bangladesh several years ago. At present, these diseases are declared Sporadic by WHO. V. cholerae O139 was first identified in Bangladesh in 1992.

The theme “50 years of WASH in Bangladesh” was deemed appropriate for this webinar as the objective was to discuss Bangladesh’s success and challenges, while recommending the way forward for the country.

Syeda Saima Ahmed, Elected Local Government Representative London Borough of Redbridge, UK was the moderator of the webinar. Dr. Md. Khairul Islam, the regional director of South Asia and WaterAid, acted as the keynote speaker. Rubaiyath Sarwar, the managing director of Innovation consulting Private limited conveyed the welcome address to the audience. The commended panelists included: Nazmun Nahar, Professor, North South University; Dr. Md. Mafizur Rahman, Professor, BUET; Safeeq Nayeem Khan, Project manager, Sanmarks; Rumanat Ashraf, Regional director, HappyTap,; Minhaz Chowdhury, CEO, Drinkwell; Rubaiyath Sarwar. Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman, PPRC conveyed the concluding remarks.

Diarrhea has also decreased substantially in the country, along with death from the disease. Mortality from diarrhea in Bangladesh decreased by 95% from the year 2003-2017. According to WHO, “diarrhea had killed more than 560 per million people in Bangladesh ” in 2003. The number dropped to 145 deaths per million patients in one decade. By 2017, the death rate became 3 per million people.

Mass vaccination against cholera and ensuring proper sanitation facilities for every citizen allowed Bangladesh to achieve success in preventing waterborne diseases.

Providing countrywide access to safe water sources and hygienic toilets: With the advent of deep tubewells in Bangladesh, the country ensured safe drinking water for everyone. The Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) helped achieve the tremendous success of providing 97% of the rural population with bacteriologically safe tubewell water.

Interestingly, DPHE conditioned the village people to install hygienic toilets in their homes while assuring installation of deep tubewells. In some cases, the facilitator organizations convinced the rural population to install hygienic toilets along

[1] “Cholera” World Health Organization (World Health Organization), accessed August 23, 2021,

[2] “Defeating Diarrhea in Bangladesh,” BORGEM, March 14, 2020,

with tubewells. This coordinated step ensured Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene for a large portion of the Bangladesh population.

Significant Reduction in Open Defecation Rate:

Bangladesh reduced its open defecation rate from 34% from 1990 to 0% in 2017, with the help of development partners, government organizations, and communities. As sanitation coverage increased in the country, the health quality of people increased along with their hygiene habits.

In Bangladesh, the basic service coverage is 64.4% nationally and safely managed sanitation coverage is 36.4% (estimated) for rural areas.

Expansion of Menstrual Hygiene Practices:

Initiatives like “WASH in school”, “Ritu Program”, “National hygiene promotion strategy”, and “MHM Strategy” by the government, NGOs, and other facilitating organizations have greatly increased MHM practices in Bangladesh.

The results of these initiatives are reflected in social and behavioral change of people. According to the national hygiene surveys of

2015 and 2018, 85% of all women used cloth pads during menstruation. As usage of sanitary pads increased by 2018, cloth pad usage decreased to 73% in three years only.

As more people are being educated about MHM, the rate is expected to decrease further.

Achieving title of global leader in water management issues:

The honourable prime minister of Bangladesh is one of the 12 members of the UN-World Bank jointly convened High Level Panel on Water (HLPW). The HLPW has endorsed an action plan for motivating effective action and advocating on financing. Bangladesh is regarded as a champion on WASH in the global scale, whose school level WASH programs and light house initiatives are setting examples for other countries.

[3] “[Arsenic Contamination and Mitigation in Bangladesh](#),” Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE), accessed August 23, 2021

[4] “The Crisis: Wateraid Bangladesh”, accessed August 23, 2021,

[5] “[Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019](#)” (UNICEF, December 2019),

[6] Ishtiaque Mahmud, “Awareness Building Still Key to Improving Menstrual Hygiene Management,” Dhakatribune, August 27, 2019.

[7] [Finance Minister's Meeting 2020](#),” Finance Minister's Meeting 2020 (blog) (sanitationandwaterforall.org, December 2, 2020),

[8] Authors: M. Snehalatha C. Fonseca M. Rahman R. Uddin M. Ahmed A. Joy Sharif, “School Wash Programmes in Bangladesh: How Much Does It Cost?,” UNICEF Global Development Commons, accessed August 23, 2021,

[9] “[Safer Sanitation and Hygiene](#),” UNICEF Bangladesh, accessed August 23, 2021,

[10] “Integrity for Wash in Schools in BANGLADESH: Win in Conversation WITH DORP,” WIN - Water Integrity Network, August 26, 2019,

[11] Bss, Dhaka, “30pc Teenage Girls Miss School during Period,” Thedailystar, June 9, 2019.

[12] “[Safer Sanitation and Hygiene](#),” UNICEF Bangladesh, accessed August 23, 2021

CHALLENGES

Poor Quality of WASH Services: Although Bangladesh is ensuring access to improved water to the majority of the population, there is a gap in quality. The access to improved water is 98.5%, on the other hand, safely managed drinking water service coverage is 42.6%; reflecting on the country's shortsightedness in implementation of some strategies.

Poor Sanitation facilities in Schools: According to Brac, around 30% of Bangladeshi schools have separate boys and girls toilets but the number of students per toilet varies between 50-76. The Bangladeshi standard is 1 toilet for 50 students, only 23% of the country's schools are maintaining that.

Additionally, only 41% of schools have handwashing facilities available with soap and water. Around 84% schools in Bangladesh have toilets, but only 24% of them are clean, and a whopping 45% are unlocked.

Schools are not equipped for Menstrual Hygiene Management: In Bangladesh, 95% of the schools are not equipped for menstrual hygiene; they do not have disposal and usage facilities for sanitary napkins or cloth pads, and sometimes no changing facilities as well.

According to the National Hygiene Survey of 2018, 30% adolescent girls miss school during their period, and 64% schoolgirls do not receive any menstrual health education at their school.

Poor Sewerage System: In Bangladesh, only the capital city Dhaka has a conventional sewerage system, and no other urban areas have any. Even in Dhaka, only one in five people are served by a sewer network.

Unhygienic Social Practices: Only 2 in 5 households in Bangladesh practice safe disposal of faeces, even though it causes illness and death of children. Additionally, 1 in 4 pit latrines is unsanitary and does not have a lid for sealing away faeces from the environment.

Period Poverty: The whole world is failing to ensure availability of sanitary napkins for women, and so is Bangladesh. Around 500 million women and girls are suffering from period poverty worldwide. According to SNV Bangladesh, more than 89% of Bangladeshi women use rags over sanitary napkins for lack of affordability.

[13] Iftekhar Ahmed Sakib, "Fighting Period Poverty," *Thefinancialexpress*, June 12, 2021.

[14] Ahnaf Ahsan, "Wash Allocation in Upcoming National Budget 2020-2021," *WaterAid Bangladesh*, accessed August 23, 2021,

[15] ahnafahsan, "Bangladesh - Facts and Statistics," *WaterAid Bangladesh*, accessed August 23, 2021,

[16] "Safer Sanitation and Hygiene," *UNICEF Bangladesh*, accessed August 23, 2021,

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering Urbanization for the Sanitation Planning in the next 50 years: The speakers recommended policymakers, facilitating organizations, and other stakeholders of sanitation to be foresighted. As mentioned in the challenges, the sewage system in Bangladesh is not taking urbanization into account. As more innovative and modern solutions are offered to the public in sanitation, making sure that they are streamlined properly and made available to all urban areas is indispensable.

Proper Budget Allocation for WASH: According to Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), the government has allocated BDT 106.97 billion to WASH, an increase of 11.6% from 2007-2008 when the allocation was BDT 25.63 Billion. But, during the fiscal year 2019-2020, Sanitation received the highest allocation, and hygiene was overlooked, while both the sectors required financing for battling COVID19.

Speakers recommended properly allocating the budget for reaping the best benefits.

Integration of All Sectors of WASH: One of the speakers said in the webinar "Without paying attention to water sanitation and hygiene, pure water can not be supplied". The speakers recommended integration of all sectors for proper implementation of strategies in the WASH sector, similarly as the Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) has done in rural areas of Bangladesh.

Mainstreaming of Community-Led Sanitation: In Bangladesh, out of every 85.6 million, one in two people do not have access to a decent toilet. The strategy of community-led sanitation began in northern Bangladesh, specifically the Mosmili village of Rajshahi district-around 21 years ago.

As the title suggests, the strategy is to invest in the community, and to educate the community about WASH for ensuring availability of clean drinking water, better sanitation and hygiene for the Bangladeshi population.

Proactive Integration of Private Sector In WASH: With the advent of SaTo Pan from PRAN RFL group, the WASH sector actors of Bangladesh realized the potential of Private sector in this sector. Several clean drinking water providers, sanitary product manufacturers, and MHM product manufacturers are working in the WASH sector at present.

It is recommended to integrate other companies from the private sector in WASH so that they can provide more innovative services to the development sector of Bangladesh.

Increasing access to Handwashing Facilities: Handwashing is one of the four focus areas of UNICEF for hygiene. The panel recommended making Handwashing facilities available for people of all levels. Introducing fountains in parks, ensuring availability of soap in public toilets, and keeping soap and water in popular public places like shopping malls, train stations, and bus stands will allow everyone to have better hygiene habits.

Fight Water Crisis Using Technology: Processes such as desalination and omni processor technology can be used for fighting the clean water crisis in Bangladesh. Speakers recommended to utilize the large water body of Bangladesh for fighting the drinking water crisis, using innovative technology.

Commercially Viable Models Should Be Introduced: In the development sector of Bangladesh, there is a prevalent practice of charity prone strategy implementation. Donation of WASH services and products sometimes cripple the receiver as many of these products and services are not commercially available or viable.

It is recommended to manufacture and distribute commercially available and viable products and services for the benefit of all stakeholders.

Increasing multi-stakeholders coordination: Several types of players are involved in the WASH sector of Bangladesh. Without harmony and communication between them, the processes become redundant and fruitless. The panel recommended water, sanitation, and hygiene stakeholders to work together.



Photo:Wateraid

Contact

Md. Rubaiyath Sarwar
Managing Director
Innovision Consulting Private Limited
E-mail: rubaiyath.sarwar@innovision-bd.com
Level 3 and 4, Plot 26, Road 6
Block J, Baridhara Pragati Sarani Dhaka 1212

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