We make change happen through our strategic aims.

Our values define our culture and demonstrate who we are, what we do and how we do it.

- Courage
- Accountability
- Integrity
- Respect
- Collaboration
- Innovation
The end of one journey, the beginning of another

Bangladesh is a country of possibilities. Despite considerable challenges relating to political fragmentation, institutional weaknesses and growing environmental threats, the country has made remarkable progress on a number of fronts. Across poverty, health, education, and women’s empowerment, Bangladesh has built an impressive record against difficult odds, achieving a number of Millennium Development Goals. The country also attained lower-middle income status in 2015, signaling a new chapter in its development.

These successes owe much to the improvements in water, sanitation and hygiene behaviour that have taken place in the last few decades. Access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene have contributed to the reduction of waterborne diseases and significant drops in maternal and child mortality. The availability of water and sanitation facilities, especially at the household level, have increased time for productive activities and enhanced people’s dignity and well-being.

The declaration by UNICEF and WHO in the Joint Monitoring Programme Report of 2015 of an open defecation rate of 1% is a testimonial to the nation’s success. However, the end of open defecation only signals the beginning of a longer journey – to achieve water, sanitation and hygiene for everyone, everywhere by 2030.
Emerging challenges

Even as Bangladesh nears the end of open defecation, complex social, environmental and technological challenges are emerging against a shifting national and global landscape. Arsenic contamination, saline intrusion and pollution of water bodies present persistent barriers to safe water supply. According to the Sector Development Plan (SDP) 2011-2025, about 20 million people drink water with arsenic more than 0.05 mg/L, and 50 million more than 0.01 mg/L\(^1\).

Alongside, groundwater resources are being rapidly depleted due to over-extraction, with the water table falling 50-100cm/year in Bangladesh on average\(^2\). Discharge of domestic wastewater and seepage of onsite sanitation facilities remain very real threats, with unimproved sanitation, unfavourable soil conditions and small distances between pit latrines and tubewells in many rural areas compromising water quality.

The near absence of faecal sludge management services threaten to reverse decades of progress on containing faecal contamination. Only 2% of urban faecal sludge is managed through sewerage systems and treated appropriately.
Despite Bangladesh’s population density and the concentration of people in public places, public sanitation is woefully inadequate, with even the capital city having only 69 public toilets to serve 5.5 million commuters. Hygiene behaviour remains worryingly related low despite widespread awareness about the need for handwashing, even in institutional spaces such as schools and hospitals.

These challenges are playing out against a backdrop of rising inequality, rapid urbanisation, and accelerating climate change. While an enabling policy environment exists for the large part, with sufficient strategic guidance across many of the emerging challenges, there is little implementation. With responsibilities for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), particularly hygiene, being ill-defined and spread across a multitude of institutions, institutional capacity is low, with virtually no way to monitor policy compliance.

Globally, the shift from the MDGs to the Sustainable Development Goals places WASH as one of the foremost concerns of international development, as well as an important contributor to a number of other areas such as health and well-being, nutrition, education, etc. Global Goal 6 also establishes WASH as a wide-ranging issue, involving the management, efficiency and quality of resources and protection of ecosystems alongside goals related to access.

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1 The recommended safe limit according to World Health Organisation (WHO)
2 Institute of Water Modelling and Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (2009), “Surface Water Resources Assessment for Developing Irrigation”.
Our role in a changing landscape

Drawing on our knowledge of the country and sector, as well as in-depth analyses of social, political and economic trends, we have identified six key areas where urgent action is needed:

Adequate and equitable sanitation
The prevalence of unimproved latrines, lack of faecal sludge management, and absence of public sanitation facilities threaten people’s health and dignity, particularly in hard-to-reach areas and for disadvantaged groups and individuals.

WASH in institutions
The lack of inclusive facilities and improved hygiene measures in schools and clinics affects the educational attainment of students, and place staff and patients in healthcare facilities at risk of disease outbreaks.

Water safety and quality
This is sub-par in many regions, due particularly to arsenic contamination, microbiological contamination and salinity amongst other reasons. Surface water is contaminated due to chemical and industrial pollutants and sanitation seepage, while groundwater is heavily over-extracted leading to a falling water table.
Hygiene
Lack of improved hygiene behaviour compromises the quality of both water and sanitation services, with little initiative yet being taken to monitor and implement the National Hygiene Promotion Strategy.

WASH as a human right
While Bangladesh recognises the human right to WASH, this is yet to be ratified nationally, and duty-bearers from the national to the local level lack awareness of the implications of this for hard-to-reach areas, groups and individuals.

Capacity building of the local government and civil society
The lack of capacity at the local government level leads to failure in delivering quality services to grassroots communities in many cases. The capacity of local government and civil society needs to be enhanced for bringing systemic change at all the stages of WASH development process.
What we aim to achieve

Inadequate and inequitable WASH services are often symptomatic of the deeper issue of a neglect of WASH as a human right. Our Theory of Change therefore focuses on creating the conditions that will enable us to achieve our desired change: Right to WASH, especially of vulnerable populations, is secured in all domains of life with effective, inclusive and sustainable WASH provisions and access.

Keeping pace with developmental dynamics, we will continue our tradition of social mobilisation, impactful advocacy and technological innovation to elevate WASH rights as an issue of critical national importance, while bring effective solutions grounded in local realities to hard-to-reach areas and populations.

**Strategic objectives**

- Promote effective and inclusive WASH solutions with special focus on the poor and excluded.
- Improve WASH visibility and importance in public domain, institutional setup and in other sectoral development plans and operations.

**Contributes to**

Reduce inequality

- WASH coverage in intervention areas increased
- Resource allocation in national budget for hard-to-reach areas and disadvantaged communities increased

WASH integration

- Inclusive and functional WASH facilities - including MHM - at schools, healthcare facilities and public places increased
- Budget allocation and utilisation for WASH in health and education sector increased

**Hallmark of success**
To realise our goal, we have set four strategic objectives for WaterAid Bangladesh over the next five years. Whilst our objectives are ambitious, our history of leadership in the sector, continued support from allies in the sector and beyond, and growing experience and knowledge provide strong foundations for the next five years.

Building on these foundations, we will grow to become the leading organisation in the sector in knowledge, innovation and influence across critical issues including hygiene, faecal sludge management (FSM), rainwater harvesting, water safety, etc. We will develop ourselves as a champion and sector resource on the human rights based approach (HRBA) and equity and inclusion, and continue our pioneering role in bringing together WASH actors from civil society, development partners, government and research organisations around sectoral issues.

**Strategic objectives**

**Contributes to**

**Hallmark of success**

**Enhance institutional capacity and quality of hygiene interventions to influence effective behaviour change.**

**Improving hygiene**

- Hand-washing practice with soap at household and institutional level increased
- Hygiene promotion knowledge of the frontline government field workers increased

**Sustain source, quality, pro-poor focus and disaster resilience in WASH service delivery.**

**Sustainable service**

- Water quality at household and institutional level improved
- WASH facilities and communities perform better in disasters
- Pro-poor WASH provisions, including O&M, in local budgets by LGIs increased
Our programmatic approach

Our overarching programmatic approach will comprise of several components which address different aspects of programme and advocacy. Each programme will enact a unique composition of these components in order to ensure we are designing more holistic interventions that have the capacity and features needed to achieve our desired changes.
From strategy to action

Achieving this transformed context will require programmes and approaches that prioritise integration, collaboration and learning. Drawing on lessons from the past and anticipating future demands, we will follow a comprehensive set of programmatic approaches to design more holistic interventions that will achieve our strategic objectives.

Keeping the issue of WASH rights front and centre, we will seek to integrate the rights-based approach across all programmes. At the operational level, we will implement the District Wide Approach, targeting upazilas (sub-districts) in rural areas, and city corporations or municipalities in urban areas. Given our scale of programmes, we will focus on the most hard-to-reach areas, partnering with Union Parishads or local government institutions while promoting good practices, inclusive facilities and equitable development with district, upazila and city/town administrations, and building local capacity and demand for replication. This is our ‘delivering to some, influencing the rest’ strategy.

We will pursue greater integration across the multiple dimensions of WASH, involving sectors such as health, nutrition and education. We will also explore partnerships with a diverse set of entities that include women’s groups, disabled people’s organisations, youth groups, private sector actors and the media.

To ensure sustained impact and wider replication, we will prioritise plans for sustainability and knowledge generation into project design. In terms of implementation this will mean a much stronger focus on operations and maintenance issues, as well as on learning and documentation. We will develop and strengthen systems of local governance, community development and WASH markets to embed intervention activities and impact in local systems for the long run. Adopting these approaches, four programmes—Urban, Rural, Climate Resilience, and Influencing and Enabling (I&E)—will be implemented in close coordination between teams.

The Rural and Urban programmes will continue to address the challenges of rapid urbanisation and WASH deprivation of millions of poor and marginalised people living in hard-to-reach areas. The Climate Resilience programme will intervene in the climate change vulnerable coastal zone, while also strengthening the climate change and disaster risk reduction (DRR) components of Rural and Urban programmes. I&E will act as both a cross-cutting element and standalone programme to enable us to influence necessary policy development and reform of WASH agenda, from the community to the national level. All teams will work in close internal collaboration to deliver on cross-cutting issues that span multiple programmes, such as WASH in schools and in health facilities.
Our programmes

**Rural WASH**
We will continue to work in hard-to-reach areas including chars, haors and hill tracts, engaging the rural administrative structure and their constituencies to facilitate dialogue between citizens and duty-bearers on WASH issues. Alongside, we will target key points of service across the community, focusing particularly on schools and healthcare centres, and work with communities to improve institutional governance systems so WASH entitlements are fulfilled.

**Urban WASH**
Considering the rapid urbanisation and prevailing inequity, urban WASH need not only continue, but grow as a programme to adopt the city/municipality-wide approach, putting local government institutions and communities in the centre. The focus of the programme will be on the capacity development of local government institutions (LGIs), service bearers and informal service providers. The programme will continue working in the major cities of Bangladesh, including Dhaka, Chittagong and Khulna, tackling emerging challenges of environmental sanitation, waste management, faecal sludge management and poor hygienic behaviour through creating evidence and replicable models.

**Influencing and Enabling**
We will work to influence sector capacity development; necessary policy development, change and enforcement; knowledge generation; and reformulation of national WASH agenda. We will advocate for more equitable WASH programmes and resource allocation, build concept and capacity on WASH as a basic right at all levels, and influence the country’s development discourse towards universal access to WASH.

A major focus of our work will be to work with Local Government Division, Planning Commission, and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHPW) of the Government of Bangladesh to contribute and influence different policy and strategy documents. We will engage with government and civil society to ensure WASH rights of the poor and marginalised by generating policy discussions on the Global Goals and the integration of WASH with the health and education sectors.
Climate Resilience

Across Bangladesh, the effects of climate change are already being felt in various ways, including growing salinity and water scarcity in coastal areas, drying up of natural springs in hilly areas, and decreasing rainfall and a declining water table in the Barind tract. Alongside, the threat of natural disasters loom large, with the effects of Cyclone Aila from 2009 still clear in the ravaged water and sanitation systems of coastal districts. Given the intensification of these effects in coming days, we need to actively engage with risk reduction and resilience building in climate change hotspots.

We will work with communities and local government to introduce participatory methods of assessing vulnerability to climate change and disasters. Building on indigenous knowledge and local coping strategies, we will innovate disaster-resilient technologies that are cost-effective and widely adaptable. We will emphasise integrating sectors beyond WASH, including health, livelihood, and education – promoting cohesive solutions at the local level. Alongside, we will work with local government and concerned government departments to promote the practices of vulnerability assessments and adaptive planning, and advocate for more equitable resource allocation.
Measuring progress

As an organisation, we strive to be always accountable, transparent and demonstrate integrity in our work. Our planning, monitoring evaluation and review framework will support objective assessments against well-defined indicators that help us keep track of performance against the four strategic objectives. Our Programme Management Information System (PMIS) will be modified to reflect the greater emphasis on results and processes in this strategic period, and we will expand the coverage of our mobile-based PMIS.

Supporting a strong data collection system will be a series of internal learning processes, including Post-Implementation Monitoring Surveys, which evaluate project impact in phased-out areas. We will develop stronger mechanisms for sharing our findings from project assessments, PIIMS and relevant research initiatives through annual review sharing meetings, dissemination meetings and the development of a comprehensive online archive.
A thriving organisation

Underpinning the strategic vision for the next five years is an organisation that shows leadership in work systems and procedures, values and culture, the practice of ethical behaviour and the development of high performing teams. We will maximise our impact by creating an enabling environment where everyone is valued and motivated to deliver their best. We will emphasise gender balance and diversity in our workforce, and foster a culture of leadership and team building.

We will strengthen our position in fundraising, continuing a successful record to diversify and explore non-traditional development partnerships. We will be resourceful in seeking opportunities for growth, but we will not compromise with our values as we concentrate on delivering quality projects for the most vulnerable.
This document is based on years of long experience in the field that used learning from the community where WaterAid and its partners work. Contribution of frontline staffs, programme managers and officials of different agencies of the Government, NGOs and INGOs active in WASH and beyond, bilateral and multilateral agencies made this STRATEGY practical and worthy. Debate, discussion and constructive criticism at WaterAid level helped a lot to shape it equitable and pro-people. Critical assessment on sector challenges and issues done by in-house and external researchers enriched it further. A wide range of civil society organisations within the WASH sector and beyond helped enhance this document through their invaluable contribution during consultation.

We thank everyone instrumental in the process.
WaterAid transforms the lives of the poorest and most marginalised people by improving access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene.

Find out more at wateraid.org/bd