

The Secondary School WASH Facility Improvement Circular painted on the walls of a school in southern Bangladesh. Photo by DORP.

INTEGRITY MAKES WASH IN SCHOOLS WORK!

Enabling schools and communities to improve WASH through integrity

WATER AND SANITATION IN SCHOOLS IN BANGLADESH

Dirty and locked toilets are leaving students behind

Lack of access to adequate Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities in schools increases the prevalence of water-borne disease and absenteeism in school-age children and may increase infant mortality in younger siblings.¹ Girls are most affected by the state of WASH facilities in schools. Overall, this is a major concern for development, education, health, safety, and gender equality.


Data from 2018 on Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene in schools shows that while 74% of schools have basic drinking water, only 59% have basic sanitation facilities, and only 44% are equipped for basic hygiene.² A National Hygiene Baseline Survey in 2014 found that the average school had **one toilet for every 187 students.**³

Even where there are toilets, inadequate facilities, unhygienic conditions, and locked doors contribute to low usage. The National Hygiene Baseline Survey found that **six out of every ten latrines in primary schools are actually locked, and only a quarter of them are clean.**⁴ Frequently, there is no maintenance plan, no cleaning schedule, and no specific responsible person to hold accountable. The prevalent taboo around menstrual health often makes the situation difficult to assess and act on.

The development and maintenance of WASH facilities remains low priority and students are persistently underserved, despite the clear national guidelines of the [Secondary School WASH Facility Improvement Circular \(School WASH Circular\)](#) released by the Ministry of Education of Bangladesh in 2015⁵ and despite Bangladesh's commitment to meet the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 6 on access to water and sanitation.

Female students from 30 schools in 2 administrative units of Bangladesh were interviewed for an assessment on school WASH on Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) issues they face. The results show that only 19% reported that school attendance is unaffected by menstruation: 8% reported that girls do not usually come to school when they are menstruating and a further 73% that girls leave school earlier during that time.

Extract from the pre-analysis phase of ongoing research on integrity in WASH in schools by DORP, WIN, NGO Forum, and Stockholm University



1 UNICEF. 2012. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in Schools. https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/CFS_WASH_E_web.pdf

2 UNICEF and WHO. 2018. Drinking water, sanitation and hygiene in schools: global baseline report 2018. New York: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization. Accessed on 11.19 at <https://www.unicef.org/media/47671/file/JMP-WASH-in-Schools-ENG.pdf>

3 WaterAid Bangladesh. 2015. Bangladesh National Hygiene Baseline Survey.

4 Ibid.

5 Accessed on 11.2019 at <http://washinschoolsmapping.com/wengine/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Bangladesh-Government-Circular-WASH-Facilities-in-Schools-2.pdf>

It's not just about the money or infrastructure; poor integrity exacerbates WASH issues

The poor state of WASH facilities in schools cannot only be attributed to limited resources. It is also due to a lack of awareness and poor accountability and participation. Legal responsibilities and obligations are not always well understood. There is also limited transparency on funding and few or poorly functioning channels for complaints. There is a risk that money for building or maintaining toilets is siphoned off or used for other purposes because of corruption.

This means a more holistic approach is needed to improve WASH services in schools. Promoting integrity is such an approach. It aims for transparent, accountable, and inclusive decision-making by water stakeholders, for equity and sustainability in water and sanitation management.

DEFINITIONS

What is WASH?

WASH stands for “Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene”. Universal, affordable and sustainable access to WASH is a key public health issue in international development and is the focus of Sustainable Development Goal 6.

What is integrity?

Integrity in the context of WASH stands for honest, transparent, accountable, and inclusive decision-making by water stakeholders, aiming for equity and sustainability in water and sanitation management.



Photo: Carmen Fernández Fernández for WIN

PROMOTING CHANGE: THE INTEGRITY FOR WASH IN SCHOOLS PROJECT

Since 2017, the Development Organization of the Rural Poor (DORP) and the Water Integrity Network (WIN) have been working together to understand if and how integrity issues affect WASH services in Bangladesh's schools, using the Annotated Water Integrity Scan (AWIS) tool. Based on this work, WIN and DORP are now advocating for changes in policies and practices within government agencies (including the department of Education) and schools to improve WASH facilities.

Assessing integrity in school WASH in 30 schools in Bangladesh, using AWIS

AWIS is a participatory dialogue and assessment tool to gather and disseminate information on integrity in a specific context. Stakeholders directly assess levels of Transparency, Accountability, and Participation (TAP) in specific WASH governance risk areas and agree on key issues and priority actions needed to improve.

DORP and WIN adapted the AWIS integrity assessment tool for WASH in schools in Bangladesh using the School WASH Circular as a framework. In 2018, they used the tool in a series of workshops with over 600 participants (students, parents, school administrations, community members) for 30 schools in two hard-to-reach sub-districts (*upazilas*) in the south of the country: **Bhola Sadar** and **Ramgati**.



Methodology



In a series of AWIS workshops at each school, participants were invited to score and collectively discuss the levels of Transparency, Accountability, and Participation (TAP) of five risk areas based on the directives in the Secondary School WASH Facility Improvement Circular:

1. cleanliness,
2. gender separation,
3. menstrual hygiene management,
4. inclusion,
5. financial planning.

Participants included teachers, students, parents, school management committee members and social leaders, civil society representatives, journalists, retired school teachers, entrepreneurs, village doctors, local imams/priests, and local political leaders.

The AWIS workshops were complemented with a desktop review of the legal and institutional framework governing School WASH, consultation meetings with WASH experts, Focus Discussion Groups (FDGs) with parents, and field observations of school facilities.

More information on the AWIS tool is available at: <https://waterintegrity.net/awis>

TAP gaps in WASH service provision: limited budget information, unclear responsibilities, limited discussion, and nowhere to complain

The AWIS exercises pointed to significant Transparency, Accountability, and Participation (TAP) gaps that affect WASH service provision in schools. Most workshop participants were **dissatisfied with the school WASH facilities, particularly in relation to menstrual hygiene management.** Participants discussed the fact that schools are primarily concerned with the success ratio of students clearing their examinations, as this informs the level of subsidies they receive. They confessed **that they had never thought of the impact of poor WASH facilities on students' health, school attendance rate, and success.** Overall, there was a general lack of understanding of the school governance systems and functioning.

Participants at AWIS workshops discussed these main concerns on Transparency, Accountability, and Participation in risk areas for school WASH:

TRANSPARENCY

Is information available and accessible? Are responsibilities clear?

- Most schools have neither written directives nor clear responsibilities assigned on any aspect related to School WASH
- WASH budget and expenditure lacks clarity in most cases
- No budget is specifically allocated for sanitation.
- The current manual accounting procedures are not reliable

ACCOUNTABILITY

Are schools fulfilling their responsibilities?

- Toilets are rarely clean or equipped with cleaning material
- Toilets are not adapted to the special needs of girls and students with disabilities
- There is poor implementation of financial plans
- Accounting procedures are not observed
- There is poor oversight and irregular execution of financial audits

PARTICIPATION

Are all affected stakeholders listened to?

- Students and parents are not involved in discussions on sanitation management
- Most workshop participants admit that they had never thought about the possibility of initiating a dialogue with schools.
- Parents and students were surprised to realize that they can influence in decision-making regarding school sanitation.

Next step: clean up

Many workshop participants had not been aware of the state of the facilities in school before the project was launched. After the workshops and the presentation of results, they concluded that quality of sanitation facilities needed urgent attention, also for menstrual hygiene management. They agreed that the first priority actions they should collectively take as a result of the workshops are:

- Setting up an emergency sanitary pad corner and providing for proper disposal of sanitary pads.
- Ensuring accessibility of toilets for disabled students
- Ensuring cleanliness and adequate supply of soap and tissues in toilets.
- Establishing a running water facility and adequate ventilation in toilets.
- Ensuring access to safe drinking water in all classrooms.
- Increasing number of toilets for both boys and girls in the schools.
- Increasing awareness around menstrual hygiene management in the classes and training at least one female teacher on menstrual hygiene management.
- Monitoring the School Management Committee, teachers, guardians and government duty bearers who are responsible and increasing coordination to improve WASH facilities in schools.
- Establishing a WASH committee or team of students in schools.

MOVING FORWARD WITH SECTOR REFORM: EMBEDDING INTEGRITY IN WASH POLICY AND PRACTICE TO ACHIEVE SDGs

Conclusions from the DORP and WIN project and assessment of facilities in schools show critical integrity gaps that affect the overall quality and sustainability of WASH in schools. These WASH in schools issues have downstream impacts on the education and the health of students, especially girls. It is necessary to highlight the importance of linkages between WASH facilities and health, education, society and culture and it is crucial to focus beyond just infrastructure, technology, or even financing. Bangladesh also needs to create a societal and cultural framework where stakeholders, and students in particular, not only learn the importance of WASH and WASH facilities in schools, but also the importance of participation and voicing their concerns.

To ensure the water and education sectors do not fall behind in working towards the SDGs, integrity must be embedded in policy and programmes.

Recommendations for governments

- Health and water policies should be revised to ensure no one is left behind. For example, the specific needs of girls and children with disabilities, must be taken into account.
- More focus needs to be placed on Menstrual Hygiene Management in policy and practice. Progress is possible by providing more visibility to the topic, and training teachers and students (also boys) on the basics of Menstrual Hygiene Management.
- The School WASH Circular of 2015 should be revised to ensure alignment with the national commitments for SDG6 and to put in a place a single point of responsibility for budget allocation to schools.
- The School WASH Circular has to be coupled with a concrete implementation plan and budget to facilitate uptake and compliance by the Education department. The 2011 National Water Safety Framework, or the 2012 and the revised 2018 National Strategy for Water supply and Sanitation which is aligned with SDGs for hard-to-reach areas, could provide this anchorage. It should be made clear that the implementation of the Circular should be a shared responsibility of the government and school committees.
- School WASH investment plans should be compiled and published for each upazila to increase transparency on budget allocations.
- More AWIS workshops on WASH in schools should be organized in other regions, including in towns and cities, to build data and evidence, and identify the different types of integrity challenges in the subsector.
- School Management Committees should be able to participate in school WASH budgeting and annual planning, and be held accountable. When School Management Committees are less involved or less able to voice their needs for WASH operations and maintenance, budgets tend to prioritize investments in infrastructure only. Joint ownership would enable solution building and improve WASH implementation.
- A clear mapping of school WASH duty bearers and service providers would help. In the current context, roles and responsibilities are fragmented and unclear to many stakeholders.

Recommendations for civil society

- CSOs, Community Based Organizations and local leaders can act as catalysts to hold schools and other duty bearers accountable for WASH services. They can support and monitor action planning and subsequent implementation. Budget tracking is a particularly useful social accountability tool that could be used in the school WASH context. It can be used to build an evidence base for advocacy on issues related to budget or budget inadequacies.
- Civil society can influence sub-district Education Officers and Upazila Health and Family Planning Officers to provide training on WASH issues to schools, particularly training for teachers on Menstrual Hygiene Management.
- Parents may request discussions of WASH issues in school meetings and push the School Management Committees and teachers to provide more information on WASH management to hold them accountable.

Recommendations for schools

- School Management Committee should coordinate action planning and implementation for school WASH, making sure that WASH issues are discussed in school meetings with parents, teachers, and students.
- Schools need to ensure that there is a separate budget for the maintenance of toilets.
- Teachers should actively discuss WASH issues with students, listen to their needs, and make sure these are taken into account by the School Management Committee.
- -Students can share information on their needs on particular WASH issues that they experience with their parents, teachers and School Management Committee. They can create groups to monitor toilet cleanliness and availability of soap, water, and light in the facilities.



Photo: Carmen Fernández Fernández for WIN

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The Water Integrity Network (WIN) supports and connects an open network of partner individuals, organizations, and governments promoting water integrity to reduce corruption, and improve water sector performance worldwide. www.waterintegritynetwork.net

Development Organisation of the Rural Poor (DORP) is a national Bangladeshi NGO established in 1987. It carries out action-oriented research with active participation of rural people as programme partners, to guide programmes related to water and sanitation, health, nutrition, and development. www.dorpbd.org

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