

Gender assessment study focusing on gender transformative WASH

WASH for Urban Poor, Phase II

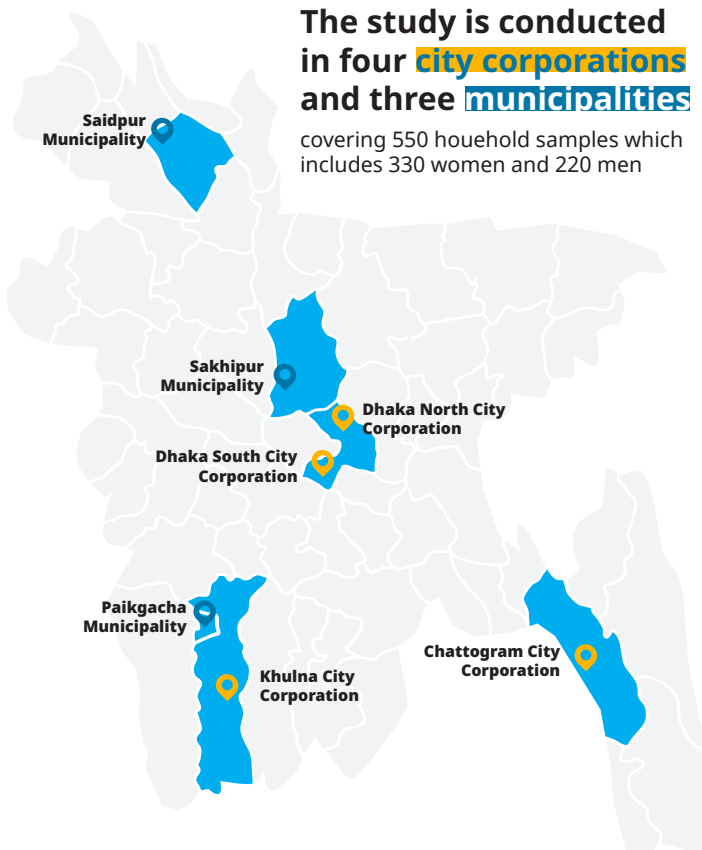
Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in the WASH sector and brought 99.5% improved safe drinking water access to its population (WHO-Unicef JMP, 2022). The country has been appraised by the international community for its progress in gender equality as highlighted in the Gender Gap Report 2022 published by the World Economic Forum. But gender equality in regards to progress of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) are not uniform. Women and girls belonging to the urban poor community bear the worst effect of gender inequality in WASH. Gender-responsive WASH services align with SDGs 5 and 6 and their link to SDGs 1, 3, 11, and 13 is crucial for sustainable development and gender-transformative change.

WaterAid Bangladesh, funded by the Embassy of Sweden, initiated the WASH for Urban Poor (WASH4UP) project in 2018, now in its second phase from 2023 to 2026. The project aims to reduce gender-based discriminations and inequalities in WASH intervention, enhance accountability of local governance to gender inclusive services, and strengthen national policies for climate-resilient and inclusive WASH services.

To accelerate gender-transformative change and sustainable development, commissioned a gender assessment for WASH4UP's second phase focuses on practical gender needs and strategic gender interests of the stakeholders of the project.

The study is conducted in four city corporations and three municipalities

covering 550 household samples which includes 330 women and 220 men



Study findings

Out of 550 surveyed respondents, 10.4% reported having family members with disabilities. About 20.55% of participants (18.55% women and 2.00% men) consider themselves as marginalised. The respondents who feel marginalised, highest considered gender-based discriminations of their marginalisation (61.9%) because of their gender identity. Additionally, 41.6% cited economic factors as the cause, highlighting issues related to economic inequalities, poverty, or limited opportunities. Where 7.1% mentioned disability as a reason, indicating challenges or discrimination related to their disabilities.

The assessment examined a range of thematic areas, i.e., gender-based WASH practices, inequality, discrimination, social norms, gender equality, women's empowerment, gender-based violence, awareness, power dynamics, resource access, and meaningful participation.

Theme 1: Gender Inequality and Discrimination

Women and girls bear the primary burden of water collection (72%) and household hygiene responsibilities (79%). Many lack access to gender-friendly toilet facilities (63%). Moreover, nearly all respondents (93%) reported a lack of menstrual hygiene management (MHM) facilities.

Theme 2: Barriers and Challenges

Challenges include limited access to nearby water sources (57.9%), distant water points hindering girls' school attendance (13.2%), and concerns about the affordability and availability of menstrual hygiene management (MHM) products.

Theme 3: Social Norms

Traditional gender roles prevail with women shouldering household chores and water collection (87%). The stigma around menstruation makes open discussions difficult, as nearly all respondents (96%) do not talk about menstrual issues with adult male family members.

Theme 4: Gender Equality and Women Empowerment

While both men and women make decisions, men's choices tend to take priority, revealing a gender disparity. Women's involvement in hygiene-related decisions at the community and school levels is limited.

Theme 5: Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a significant issue, with 66% reporting verbal abuse and 14% experiencing physical assault while collecting water. Shockingly, almost all GBV incidents (99.5%) go unreported.

Theme 6: Knowledge, Skills & Awareness

The majority of women respondents (75.46%) are aware of proper sanitation practices. However, they are not actively encouraged to take on leadership roles in hygiene awareness campaigns (60%).

Theme 7: Power Dynamics and Power Relations

Men predominantly control water resources (75%) and decision-making authority. This leads to issues of harassment and violence for women and limited access to hygiene resources (40%).



Theme 8: Access to and Control Over Resources

Unequal access to water resources is influenced by factors like distance, restrictions on women's movement, cultural norms, and poverty, affecting women's access.

Theme 9: Participation and Decision Making

Women's participation in water-related decision-making at the household and community levels is limited. Additionally, there is a lack of awareness about the involvement of women, adolescents, and persons with disabilities in WASH committees, and 48.36% reported the absence of such committees.

Considering the overall findings, the assessment identified the major gaps and challenges within the domain of gender transformative WASH agenda keeping in mind the SIDA's feminist principles and approach of gender mainstreaming. The major gaps emerged as intersectional approach is missing in WASH interventions, women are positioned as vulnerable rather an active change agent, challenging gender norms and practices, Gender bias role distribution leading to time poverty of women, limiting participation in the development and decision making processes, yet to engage men and boys as effective change agent, Gender based violence, abuse and harassment increase anxiety, Sense of exclusion, powerlessness and psychological trauma, lack of gender responsive project design, and gender responsive budgeting.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from this comprehensive assessment, we present action-oriented recommendations to enable gender transformative WASH strategies. The recommendations are drawn considering Policy framework, Institutional services and community level interventions Partner with NGOs, private organisations, and government agencies for comprehensive WASH initiatives.

- 01 Incorporating a comprehensive gender equality perspective into **national policies and frameworks**.
- 02 Strengthening and continuing **advocacy efforts** of WaterAid Bangladesh to support the effective implementation of policies related to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 and 6.
- 03 Enhancing collaboration with key agencies and stakeholders to promote **gender-responsive services and climate-resilient WASH** initiatives.
- 04 Providing technical support and **gender capacity orientation** to policymakers and staff of relevant institutions.
- 05 Setting annual milestones for **gender budget allocation** and creating flexibility for assessment and tracking.
- 06 Introducing **non-negotiable gender checklists** and guidelines for project design and implementation.
- 07 Conducting **periodic gender analyses** at service and community levels to inform decision-making and action.
- 08 Addressing **sexual harassment and abuse issues** in schools and communities.
- 09 Activating **community-based WASH committees** and **community watch groups** to support and protect against gender-based violence.
- 10 Introducing **gender-responsive markers** for community-based infrastructure.
- 11 Fostering collaboration among communities, local authorities, and stakeholders to **prioritise WASH sustainability**.
- 12 **Innovating low-cost sanitation solutions** targeting women and girls in reproductive age.

