



Strengthening mutual accountability and partnerships for WASH

Country brief, Bangladesh

Written by

*Syed, M. Abu (BCAS), Chowdhury (BCAS), Sidratun Nur and
Solomon Raj Gaddam (SaciWATERs)*

January 2021

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Recommendations	3
Introduction	4
Methodology	7
Findings.....	8
Multi-stakeholder collaboration in WASH.....	8
Accountability mechanisms in WASH	11
COVID and its impacts on collaboration and accountability in WASH.....	15
National engagement in the Sanitation and Water for All partnership	17
Conclusions and Recommendations	19
Annexes	20
Acknowledgements	20
References	22

Figures

Figure 1: Type of organisation participated in validation workshop	8
Figure 2: Effectiveness of accountability mechanisms.....	11
Figure 3: Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on accountability according to the survey.....	16
Figure 4: Awareness about SWA activities according to the survey	17

Tables

Table 1: WASH Services coverage in Bangladesh as of 2019	6
--	---

Executive Summary

The national Vision is to achieve universal access to safe & affordable drinking water for all and ensure access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene by 2030. Bangladesh aims to achieve this in three five-year phases. Phase-1: 2016 – 2020: Achieve universal coverage in a phased manner.

A comprehensive multi-stakeholder WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) Bottleneck analysis based on the SWA building blocks was conducted in 2018-2019 by the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperatives (MoLGRD&C) in collaboration with UNICEF in the eight divisions of Bangladesh to assess and priority gaps in urban and rural WASH services and institutional WASH delivery. Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS)-2018 survey indicates the need for working together towards elimination of sub national, Rural- urban, socio economic, geographical and gender inequalities and to ensure improved WASH services. In order to understand mutual accountability, a study “*Mutual Accountability Mechanisms (MAM) in the WASH sector Accountability between national WASH actors*” (2020) has been carried out to understand:

- National multi stakeholder process in WASH and identifying opportunities for strengthening mutual accountability between national level actors in WASH sector.
- How these mechanisms have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- How participation in the SWA MAM – as one of those mechanisms - contributing to mutual accountability.

Recommendations

- GOB (Government of Bangladesh) needs to formulate an implementation strategy and a road map to ensure mutual accountability between the main WASH stakeholders and the required institutional structure/framework with a clear and well-defined operational modalities, functional parameters, roles and responsibilities of all the stakeholders. CSO can be taken onboard to assist GOB. This institutional framework needs to include transparent and mutual accountability mechanism which incentivize and encourage the stakeholders to collaborate and ensure concerted efforts towards fostering mutual accountability.
- A common platform of GOB and CSO/NGOs need to be made functional through increased participation and active engagement of organisations to ensure SWA commitments and MAM. This would improve coordination among WASH stakeholders from administrative and social, sectors.
- Cross learning and sharing of information between SWA partners in Bangladesh and the CSO (Civil Society Organizations) and the Government needs to be ensured on a regular interval through various platforms discussing about commitments of stakeholders towards fostering mutual accountability and commitment of stakeholders while assessing and prioritizing the gaps in WASH services delivery.
- Mutual accountability at national and the sub-national levels requires coordinated and

collaborative actions to reinforce country-level multi-stakeholder planning and review processes, and it needs to be preceded by capacity building and knowledge sharing activities that needs to be organized by the GOB and CSO/NGOs taking on board all stakeholders.

- Functional monitoring system is needed for establishing mutual accountability to monitor the sectoral progress the commitments given by the stakeholders. For this, a separate monitoring agency or a regulatory body needs to be established by the GOB and CSO/NGOs.
- Common platform of GOB and CSO/NGOs such as the National forum for drinking water and sanitation needs to play an instrumental role in policy formulation process through to ensuring participation of all stakeholder organisations and taking their inputs especially the CSO and private sectors. They also need to have regular meetings, reporting and evidence-based decision making.
- SWA member organisations should promote SWA commitments and mutual accountability (MAM) between WASH stakeholders through seminars, webinars, or media to ensure better engagement and collaboration.

Introduction

Bangladesh lies in the north-eastern part of South Asia with an area of 147,570 sq. km and a population of around 168.108 million, having population density of 1,116 people/sq. km. Bangladesh is situated in the world's largest delta and is particularly exposed to impacts of climate change like sea-level rise, increasingly frequent and intense hydro-climatic hazards. The Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperatives (MoLGRD&C) has the statutory responsibility for ensuring access to water supply, sanitation and hygiene services.

In order to achieve continuity and improve equitable access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Services in response to COVID-19, The Government of Bangladesh aims to maximize WASH services. The Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (MoLGRD&C) has drafted a 'National WASH Sector Strategic paper 2020-22 for Response to COVID-19 Outbreak through Water.

There are established multi-stakeholder platforms functioning in the country from national to sub-district level. Mostly the Government, NGOs, CSO and research institutions participate in these platforms. The participation of the private sector is still relatively low. According to the participants the platforms are good for ensuring collaboration, coordination and transparency between stakeholders, but it still has work to do on ensuring accountability. For the WASH sector, Bangladesh has some accountability mechanisms to hold the service providers the government accountable for their actions. The participants expressed frustration that there is still no functional and systematic framework for accountability for the government or private entities working in WASH service delivery. The existing mechanisms have good potential but needs to work more to ensuring accountability. Towards ensuring more and effective participation at national and sub national levels, the CSO will pursue with the government to increase at least 10% CSO members

in the WASH related committees by 2021 and ensure participation of CSOs in the national level SDG tracking and implementation progress of SDGs.

The pandemic did not have significant impact on accountability though consultation with the community level people has decreased. In Bangladesh, the CSO and government constituencies are most active in policy making and implementation while NGOs are involved in the community or household level service provisions along with government institutions [DPHE (Department of Public Health Engineering), LGED (Local Government Engineering Department), City Corporations, Municipalities and WASAs (Water and Sewage Authorities). The CSO along with the network of networks are working towards the CSO commitments. The CSO are mainly working towards budget allocation and increasing WASH budget to meet the SDG-6 targets. During the recent SWA finance ministers meeting on 2nd December Bangladesh government has agreed to work towards the commitments they have submitted to SWA.

In the context of the SDGs (targets 6.1 and 6.2), in Bangladesh 98.5% of population has access water from improved water sources. However, only 42.6% population has access to safely managed drinking water services. Government of Bangladesh and the leadership of the sector has shown considerable progress in terms of planning and prioritizing the sector through enhancing allocations and establishment or strengthening of government led multi-stakeholder platforms and chairing the Local Consultative Group, and formulation of the National Action Plans for SDG. A budget and expenditure tracking platform have been piloted by the government of Bangladesh to strengthen accountability between stakeholders especially the implementers and provide evidence-based data to support sustainable financing strategies.

Towards strengthening the Institutional framework in the WASH sector in Bangladesh, the Government has taken several steps in the recent times including:

- Establishment of the Policy Support Branch (PSB) for WASH sector development, operationalizing the thematic groups.
- The Local Consultative Group (LCG) for the WASH Sector, Water Supply and Sanitation Forum coordination, monitoring, development, resource mobilization and technical support for the implementation of sector-wide strategies and approaches.
- The government also established water quality testing laboratories in every district to enhance the water quality, surveillance activity and tracking progress towards elimination of inequalities.
- An integrated management information system for the rural WASH sector with the support of development partners such as JICA, SIDA and UNICEF is being established.

Bangladesh has incorporated sustainable development goals into its 8th Five-year national plan (Hasan Z. 2020).

Table 1 reveals an overall scenario of national, urban and rural coverage of WASH services. The coverage scenarios postulate that safely managed drinking water services need to be improved. In terms of sanitation and hygiene rural coverage is less than urban coverage. This might be due to gaps in planning and implementation of development project in WASH sector with equitable and proportional distribution of resources to the regions where the WASH sector is lagging behind. These create insufficient resources (in terms funds, manpower or technologies) in these Areas.

Table 1: WASH Services coverage in Bangladesh as of 2019

	National coverage	Urban coverage	Rural coverage
People using safely managed drinking water services	47.9%	44.7%	48.8%
People using improved sanitation facilities	84.6%	90.6%	82.9%
People practicing a hand-washing facility with soap and water	74.8%	87%	71.4%

Source: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), BBS and UNICEF, 2019

For the implementation of the SDG targets the national government has assigned key lead/co-lead associate divisions with specific responsibilities to 169 targets of SDGs. The General economic division (GED) is responsible for gathering data on the indicators of all 169 targets (General Economic Division.2018). For SDG 6 data is readily available for 2 indicators 6.1.1 and 6.2.1, partially available for 2 (6.4.2, 6.a.1) and not available for 7(6.3.1, 6.3.2, 6.4.1, 6.5.1, 6.5.2, 6.6.1 and 6.b.1) indicators. The country has adopted 39+1 SDG National Priority Targets (NPT). This is to localize the SDG targets to ensure leave no one behind. The +1 gives local government the opportunity to give priority to the district which can be done with consultation with relevant stakeholders such as local authority, CSOs, citizens and other stakeholders to achieve SDGs (Hasan Z. 2020).

The government, non-governmental organisations, external support agencies are main group of actors in the WASH sector in Bangladesh. The private sector and research and learning agencies also play a role in the sector however, they are less involved in the policy development planning and monitoring processes in the WASH sector.

Some of the key governmental agencies are:

- Department of Public health and Engineering (DPHE).
- Local Government Division (LGD).
- Local Government Engineering Department (LGED).
- The Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA).
- The Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR).

There are many NGOs, INGOs, CSOs working in this sector from grass root level to national level. Some of the key national Non-governmental organisations are BRAC, NGO forum for public health, VERC, WaterAid, Action aid, Oxfam, etc. ESA include UNICEF, ADB, JICA, and IOM.

There are many platforms where actors from different stakeholder groups can coordinate with each other. Some are official platforms such as citizens' platform, Local consultative group (LCG), Wash alliance, FSM network, national policy review committee, Upazilla and union parishad meetings etc. Actors also coordinate on informal platforms such as organisational meetings where few stakeholders meet for a particular plan.

The government has issued a "Strategic Paper to Respond to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) issues during & after the COVID-19 Outbreak" which provides guidelines for COVID response in the WASH sector. Again, non-government organisations also have their own organisational guidelines for COVID response.

During the first months of lockdown ensuring coordination and accountability was very difficult as government restricted activities. Online meetings were a good platform for interaction. Though the frequency of some meetings increased their affectivity is still debatable for instance: The preventive measures that needs to be adopted by individuals and households, lack of awareness and the prevalence of shared facilities, including water points and toilets, amongst people in villages and densely populated slum areas pose a greater challenge in effective especially in Bangladesh's context.

In Bangladesh, the CSO and government constituencies are the most active SWA partners. The CSO along with the network of networks are working towards the CSO commitments to SWA. The CSO are mainly working towards budget allocation and increasing WASH budget to meet the SDG-6 targets. During the recent finance ministers meeting on 2nd December Bangladesh government has agreed to work towards the commitments they have submitted to SWA.

Methodology

The objective of this study is to understand the coordination mechanisms in place in the WASH sector of Bangladesh that encourage collaboration and accountability among the stakeholders to achieve SDG 6 and other appropriate national perspective plans and its targets.

The study also aims to National multi-stakeholder process in WASH and identifying opportunities for strengthening mutual accountability between national level actors in WASH sector. And also investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted mutual accountability in the sector. Finally, how participation in the SWA MAM – as one of those mechanisms - contributing to mutual accountability.

The methodology for the present study included a document review, an online survey and key informant interviews. 40 organisations from different stakeholder groups were identified and invited through an Email to participate in the survey questionnaire. We received 14 responses.

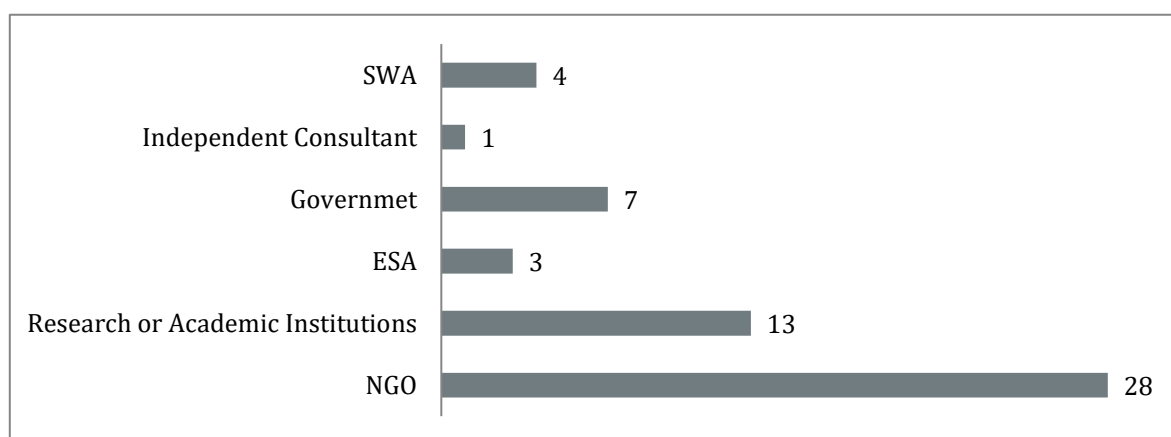
10 Key informant interviews were conducted. 4 (four) were from government organisations, 5 (five) were from NGOs and 1 (one) form External support organisations. Among them 6 were national

level stake holders and 4 (four) were from local level. And among them 3 (three) were SWA partners.

The preliminary results of the document review, survey and interviews were validated and further assessed during a validation and reflection meeting.

The validation workshop was attended by 56 individuals from different organisation who worked in WASH.

Figure 1: Type of organisation participated in validation workshop



There is an under representation of private sector and research organisations in the interviews and validation workshop. The possible reason for low response could be due to the nature of subject of the study (Mutual accountability Mechanism). WASH stakeholders know about accountability, but it was a bit difficult to understand, perceive mutual accountability mechanism and contextualise in WASH sector.

Findings

Multi-stakeholder collaboration in WASH

There are established multi-stakeholder platforms functioning in the country from national to sub-district level. Mostly the Government, NGOs, CSO and research institutions are members of these platforms. However, the affectivity of these bodies is subjected to lack of adequate funds and lack of adequate and skilled manpower which affect the performance and functionality of these platforms and collaborations.

Participants during the validation workshop indicated that accountability at local level needs to be strengthened. As local organisations, especially NGOs have difficulty in finding a platform to raise their voice and are often dominated by corrupt government officials who are seldom accountable for their work in the sector. In national platforms, the NGOs, CSOs, private sector have more opportunities to voice their opinions and concerns. Increase and timely WASH budget allocation especially in the hard to reach, hilly, coastal, tea garden, and arsenic prone area would be

instrumental in building mutual accountability at the larger scale. Steps taken by the government to eliminate inequalities include evidence generation for more precise targeting of the areas through increased budgetary allocations coupled with resource mobilization towards increased domestic private markets and commercial resources with a focus on more efficient use of allocated budgets towards eliminating regional disparity in WASH services.

The private sector is not much involved in the sector process such as policy making or planning. Civil society is committed to create enabling environment for the private sector and local entrepreneurs to provide WASH services and increase collaboration with Government, research organisations, academia and private sector which is clearly defined in Country Priorities and Commitments as included in the national WASH plans which also emphasizes the need for targeted, equitable, inclusive and innovative interventions focusing on women and pro-poor strategies in the Local Government Institutions (LGI) and their voice and demand reflected in the WASH budget of LGIs.

The coordination platforms like platform of GOB and CSO/NGOs in Bangladesh work for sharing knowledge regarding projects and new ideas, budget advocacy with government, influencing policies making, ensuring accountability and transparency, enhancing participation of the marginalized community and capacity development for the local community-based organisations. Some multi-stakeholder groups active in WASH in the country are:

Local Consultative Group (LCG): Is a multi-stakeholders forum for government, NGOs, CSO and ESAs. Some of the development partners are ADB, World Bank, JICA etc. The Chair of this forum is Local Government Division (LGD) in the ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives and co-chair is UNICEF. This LCG Forum serves at national level as technical and policy support group. All government related partners communicate through LCG. Different CSO partners are also involved but not all agencies participate. Decisions taken in this forum are then conveyed to the National forum for drinking water supply and sanitation where policy or strategies are form based on this. The meetings are not regular and more need based. The reports and meeting minutes are generated for limited circulation among the participants.

WSSCC-Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council: Is a network of multi-stakeholders of the WASH sector including civil society, government, research and learning, UN-partners, NGOs and others. The Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council is a UNOPS-hosted membership organisation. It is an externally funded platform. For Bangladesh, the national coordinator for WSSCC-B is Shah Md. Anowar Kamal, Executive Director of UST – a national level NGO in Bangladesh. WSSCC-B has worked with increase awareness regarding menstrual health and Hygiene and also helped in development of national policies such as the “Pro-Poor strategy for Water and Sanitation”. They play a role in sector coordination, hosting workshops, capacity building and crating dialogue between all WASH actors. They do generate activity reports and research on WASH.

Citizens Platform for SDG: Is a platform for 104 organisations across the country to work on the SDGs as Partners. The Secretariat of the Platform is being hosted by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD). The Platform provides an opportunity to track the progress of SDG delivery; sensitise policymakers towards challenges in implementation; bring transparency in the implementation process; and facilitate exchange of information and coordination among all those

working on the SDGs in Bangladesh. The platform mainly consists of NGOs, CSOs, Research organisations and private sector. According to the participants although this platform focuses on all targets of SDGs, recently it has been doing active work in SDG 6. But they still lack reports of their activities in this sector.

Freshwater Action Network Bangladesh: Is a global network people implementing and influencing water and sanitation policy and practice around the world. Many INGO, NGO and research organisations in Bangladesh are part of this network. FANSA in Bangladesh it aims to enhance capacities of civil society and community organisations for effective engagement with government to increase accountability and transparency in the WASH sector.

Bangladesh WASH Alliance (BWA): Is a consortium of fourteen Bangladeshi NGOs lead by a Dutch international NGO (Simavi). WASH Alliance partners are working together towards a society where all people are able to assert and realize their right to sustainable access to safe drinking water, adequate sanitation and hygienic living conditions. Bangladesh WASH Alliance aims at a sustainable WASH sector focusing on a multi-stakeholder approach involving the government, the private sector, the financial sector and civil society. To improve coordination, they have activated the coordination structure and worked to make it functional at municipality (Town level coordination committee (TLCC), Ward level coordination committee (WLCC), Multi Stakeholders coordination committee (MSCC) and Union Parishad (Union council) level Union Coordination committee, WATSAN, WASH & DRR standing committee etc. The private sector is also encouraged to participate by creating suitable business opportunities in the sector. They publish reports on their project activities.

Bangladesh Faecal Sludge Management Network (FSMN): Which is led by SNV and WaterAid is a common and collective platform for the sector actors to generate ideas, share views and create and focus on more attention on fecal sludge management. Influencing policy and practice, and raise a collective voice to meet the challenges of sanitation sector. This Network engages government agencies such as Department of Engineering, Dept. of agriculture extension, Dept. of Fisheries, Sustainable And Renewable Energy Development Authority (SREDA), relevant taskforces, networks and associations including National Sanitation Secretariat, National Forum for Water and Sanitation, Bangladesh Urban Forum (BUF), Municipal Association of Bangladesh (MAB), Fertilizers' Association Bangladesh, WASH Alliances, Urban knowledge Hub, manufacturers, fertilizer companies, Micro Finance institutions (MFIs), bank, etc. They hold annual conventions related to sanitation and organize policy dialogues.

There are also informal multi-stakeholder platforms such as meeting of different departments of the government, between one or two specific group of stakeholders etc. for example, according to an interview with a government official, they have had consultations with private sectors and NGOs regarding policy formulation for water supply and another with factory owners for industrial water management.

According to the participants the platforms are good for ensuring collaboration, coordination and transparency between stakeholders, but it still has work to do on ensuring accountability on account of lack of integrated needs-based plans and functional Operation and Maintenance strategies. A good evidence-based data driven accountability mechanism between stakeholders

is needed. Reports on activities and results should be published regularly. Accountability in terms of commitment realisation and in terms of monitoring needs to be ensured.

One of the major issues with some of these platforms are they have infrequent meetings. Some platforms are ad hoc based such as LCG. They usually have meetings if a specific issue arises. Again, getting time from specific stakeholders such as government officials to attend is usually difficult. Representatives from certain groups of stakeholders are not usually present in these meetings such as the private sector. And sometimes participants from different stakeholder groups do not actively participate through articulating their opinions and concerns. Inadequate budget allocations is also another limiting factor. Moreover, some of the platforms only discuss about water and sanitation. Subsectors such as Hygiene often get left out of discussions mainly from national platforms such as National forum for drinking water supply and sanitation. Collaboration needs to be ensured between implementing agencies so that services are not overlapping with each other. A central data base can also be helpful to keep track of the services provided by implementers. Area wise data management system can be helpful to keep track of the progress services delivery in WASH sector and beyond.

Despite these drawbacks the participants mentioned that these platforms play an important role for engaging stakeholder of different levels in the sector in policy formulation and in discussing various issues related to WASH. These platforms are helpful in maintaining transparency development planning, implementation, activities and results achieved through transparent processes of budgeting and expenditures with proper documentation. These are also useful for sharing knowledge between stakeholders about the budgets and expenditure. These platforms also help in developing of new policies, strategies and technologies. But more improvement is needed for enforcing accountability in terms of consequences or corrective measures and evaluation.

Accountability mechanisms in WASH

Accountability mechanisms in WASH aims to foster multi-stakeholder collaborations in WASH sector in the country and to what extent these collaborations act as enablers of accountability of stakeholders in the sector. The following figure gives an overall idea of which mechanisms are effective in the WASH sector for ensuring accountability.

Figure 2: Effectiveness of accountability mechanisms

National	
National Forum for Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation	Effective
National Sanitation Task Force	Not very effective
SDG Tracker	Effective
Citizen Platform	Effective
Local	
Open Budget Sessions	Effective
Citizen Charter	Not very effective
Public hearing	Effective
Upazilla/Union Parishad Meetings	Not very effective

Bangladesh has some accountability mechanisms in place to hold the service providers and the government accountable for their actions. According to the article, “*CSO Review of National Accountability Mechanisms for SDG 6, (2020)*” at national level mechanisms such as Local Consultative Group (LCG) for water and sanitation, Water Supply and Sanitation, National Sanitation Taskforce, the National Policy Review Committee, Citizen Platforms, SDG tracker are effective for ensuring accountability. The SDG implementation Review (SIR) is a high-level national committee under the Honorable Prime Minister’s office. SIR is headed by Principal Coordinator exclusively designated to monitor SDGs and facilitate development of national action plans for each goal including SDG6.

National Forum for Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation (DWSS) – one of the biggest national NGOs working on water and sanitation issues. NGO Forum is the apex WatSan body in Bangladesh. The Forum had been actively involved as the apex networking and service delivery body of NGOs, CBOs and private sector operators in the WASH sector of Bangladesh. This platform contributes to holding the implementers specially the government and NGOs accountable for their actions but do not contribute to promoting mutual accountability. There is opportunity for promoting mutual accountability in this platform but cooperation from the government is needed.

SDG Tracker is an active instrument that helps Governments and Stakeholders make sustainable development goals a reality by tracking the achievement through set of 39 indicators has been in progress under the instructions of SDG Working Committee of The Prime Minister’s Office.

The citizen’s platform is an active platform formed by group of individuals in Bangladesh during 2016 who have taken an initiative to set up a Citizen’s Platform for SDGs with the objective to contribute to the delivery of the SDGs and enhance accountability in the process. Platform also include 104 organisations from across the country working on SDGs as Partners. The Scope of work of the Platform will includes Prioritisation of goals/targets/indicators to be addressed by Bangladesh, tracking progress of the SDG delivery in the country and provide feedback to the implementing agencies (both government and NGOs).

These local forums are where the government shares their progress on WASH goals and the CSOs get to share their inputs concerning the progress made during the reporting period. Based on the inputs received from CSOs, the government considers the information and makes necessary arrangement to incorporate the concerns of CSOs, and government can take corrective measures according to the concerns of the CSOs. Some other mechanisms are Citizen Charter, Open budget sessions, SDG tracker, Public hearing. These mechanisms which are helpful to be used to keep the Government of Bangladesh accountable for their actions related to water and sanitation services that need to be ensured for the poor, marginalized women, slum people and socially excluded person in collaboration with government by 2021. The CSO are mainly working towards budget allocation and increasing WASH budget to meet the SDG-6 targets. Budget tracking in water, sanitation and hygiene is being conducted in different unions. This helps to understand how public budget is allocated and utilized to improve access to services for all. Through budget tracking the CSOs have managed to increase accountability and transparency among duty bearers and also increase participation of the communities (Hasan 2020).

Governance and quality expenditure for instance the composition and patterns of government spending of resources is one of the key areas of concern when it comes to accountability in

Bangladesh. If the required governance ethics like accountability and transparency in governance are not in practice, the resultant consequences impact the official authority that helps to hold the officials accountable. This is imperative to have provision to hold policy and decision makers and public officials of implementing agencies accountable. Without this they can avoid or ignore practices that help make the administrative systems transparent and decisions are usually made without consulting with all the stakeholders involved (Halachmi et al, 2011).

There are also gaps in the management of data. Information that is shared by the implementers with the public on WASH initiative sometimes has errors, especially the online platforms. For example, Dhaka WASA has a Management Information System (MIS) and Dhaka WASA official website (www.dwasa.org.bd). According to their report, there is mismanagement in MODs zone (Dhaka wasa administrative zone) wise manpower, service recipient list, area coverage and locations, information on pump-wise water production. These are not preserved in a combined manner managed through a central point. Also, audit reports, annual reports and other reports on the website are not being updated frequently (TIB, 2019).

Another issue is the lack of coordination among different governmental agencies in the water sector. In some cases, the responsibilities and work of different agencies are not clearly mentioned. This sometimes creates confusion and misinterpretation. This creates a gap in mutual accountability as no one is held accountable for poor performance.

Gaps in systematic monitoring and assessment is another drawback in the mechanisms. (O.CREEDS, 2019). Many accountability mechanisms do not perform to their full extent as decision-making in Bangladesh is highly centralized. There is a breach in long-term and systematic stakeholder engagement for transparent decision-making (Chan et al.2016). Furthermore, in current development strategies, the participation of Civil Society Organisations (CSO) plays a crucial part. The government has also acknowledged its importance in implementing WASH services. They play a vital role in holding the government accountable for their actions. But in Bangladesh, the CSOs do not have any legislative or constitutional provision or framework that supports the CSOs in engaging in the development planning and implementation process with the government. Therefore, its contributions are sometimes overlooked and ineffective (EquityBD, 2017). However, across national, regional and local levels CSOs are playing an important role in supporting the government in implementation and service delivery. The CSO, NGOs and other organisations are held accountable to the government or the donor organisations for their work in the sector.

Despite the above-mentioned gaps pertaining to legitimate space for CSOs and their practical engagement in the implementation of the accountability mechanisms there are positive experiences. Through the above-mentioned mechanisms, the CSOs and NGOs had an opportunity to convey the sector demands from grass root level to policymakers and the CSOs and along with Network of Networks have to actively pursue with the Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives Ministry and General Economic Division to ensure at least 70% of the poorest people including marginalized women, children, PWD, ethnic minority have access to safely managed WASH including proper menstrual hygiene management service by 2025.

These also created a scope for CSOs and NGOs to participate in formulating separate action plans for each target. Proactive engagement of CSOs and along with Network of Networks to conduct

pre and post budget advocacy with the government to create enabling environment for the private sector and local entrepreneurs to provide WASH services and the Micro Finance Institutions will increase 10% WASH loan by 2021 is a progressive move towards marching for mutual accountability as sustainability of WASH interventions remains a challenge. Inclusive microfinance support with innovative financial support for deprived communities will help sustain the hardware and safe practices after the grants.

NGOs also face accountability with their donors and beneficiaries. Donors sometimes include different beneficiary accountability mechanisms with a project as requirements of the proposal. According to Uddin et al, (2019) aid effectiveness is a top priority in for donors in projects of BRAC. NGOs usually submit various monitoring and evaluation reports to the donors on the implementation of the project. Donors sometimes send representatives to the fields to interact directly with beneficiaries to help raise their voices. Therefore, accountability to donors help promote accountability to beneficiaries (Uddin et al, 2019) as Donors have significant power and influence on NGOs which can be mobilized to facilitate beneficiary accountability. NGOs and private organisations also have formal mechanisms within their organisation such as code of conduct, performance reviews. Informal mechanisms include public hearings, interest groups, opinion polls and media. Though the country has its fair share of mechanisms towards accountability not all are effectively functioning. Halachmi et al, 2011 argues that organisational learning that is future oriented is more likely to contribute to long-term accountability, whereas performance measurement is usually geared to establish short-term accountability.

From the interview and surveys, we found that the National Forum for drinking water supply and sanitation is the highest forum for WASH in the country. Highest in the sense of importance in terms of inputs provided towards policy formulation. This is effective as various WASH policies and strategies are discussed here but this forum is agenda based and meets irregularly when any issues emerge that needs immediate attention. National Sanitation Task force is not very active now a day.

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), Statistics and Informatics Division (SID) in partnership with the Cabinet Division and the Prime Minister's Office- in collaboration with General Economics Division (GED) of Planning Commission has designed and developed SDG Tracker. The SDG tracker has been updated regularly with information on the indicators for SDG-6 so that everyone can monitor the progress of the achieving targets towards goals. More participation of CSOs in the national level SDG is required in tracking and implementation progress of SDG. NGOs also have the opportunity to state their concerns if there are any inconsistencies in the data. Citizen platform is another good platform for the NGOs to question the implementation services of WASH actors and to hold them accountable for their actions. Open budget sessions are becoming very effective in local areas as a platform for ensuring budget transparency between the beneficiaries and the actors. Citizen charter is more of one-way information sharing of project details with the citizens. In some cases, public hearing is an effective base for discussion and receiving feedback from the community and stakeholders. Again, Upazilla and Union Parishad meetings are more of information sharing between the government and stakeholders though the stakeholders have a few opportunities to give feedback.

The participants expressed frustration that there still no functional and systematic framework for accountability. These mechanisms have good potential but needs to work more on providing space and opportunity for all stakeholders towards ensuring accountability between multiple stakeholders. Regular evidenced based reporting and equal participation of all stakeholder groups can help to improve these mechanisms. Some of these mechanisms are not accessible by the grass root level organisations. These grass root level organisations and CSOs suffer most when it comes to stating their opinions or views to the government. The culture of the government being held accountable to other stakeholders is still not practiced well. This is more prominent in the local level. At national level the multi stakeholder platforms such as LCG, Citizens Platform, Fresh Water Action network, WSSCC and FSM-network play an important role in involving various groups of stakeholders in the implementation and policy formation process. But Bangladesh still lacks a platform where all stakeholders including private sectors, research and learning organisations, ESA, government, NGOs, CSOs can engage with each other. From our findings we can say the citizen platform, National forum for drinking water supply and sanitation has good potential for towards promoting accountability between stakeholders. But in order to be effective these platforms need to work more effectively towards providing required space and opportunity for all stakeholders.

Multi stakeholder engagement in WASH sector in Bangladesh is limited to project-based collaboration existing among few of the stakeholders mostly NGOs. During implementing projects collaboratively, they take support from Community Based organisations (CBOs), community people and government officials.

Existing mechanisms multi stakeholder collaborations and their effectiveness is limited due to various factors. Ever increasing urbanization, climate change impact in a context where in one-third of Bangladesh's landmass floods each year making it difficult to ensure WASH service effectively and often the context of accountability becomes less important. A structured, national level multi-stakeholder collaboration process spearheaded by the government in WASH sector can contribute towards improved WASH service delivery in the country.

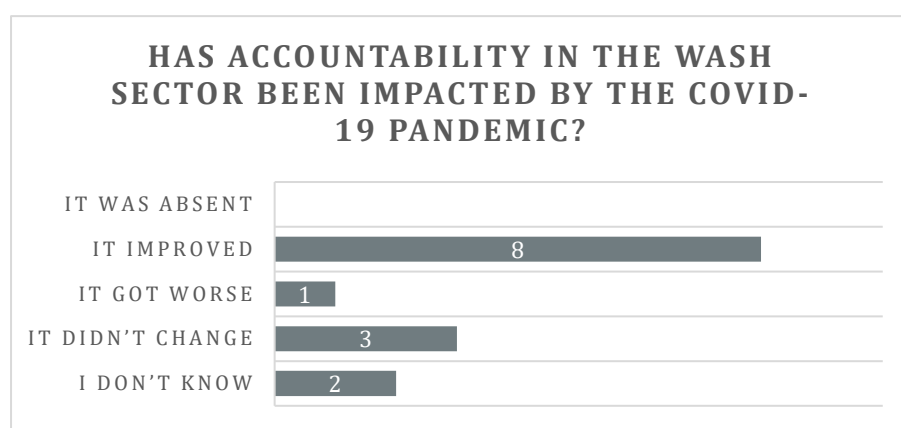
COVID and its impacts on collaboration and accountability in WASH

The pandemic has had profound impact on the activities of the WASH sector. During the first few months of lockdown (starting from March) there were very limited activities by the sector actors. No in person meetings were held. And limited number of staff was working in the field. To ensure maximum benefits from the WASH sector during the pandemic, the government has issued Bangladesh Strategic Paper to Respond to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) issues during & after the COVID-19 Outbreak. This WASH strategy was to address the immediate, interim and long-term responses by the WASH sector in Bangladesh to the COVID-19 emergency. The strategy also addresses guidelines related to accountability during the pandemic as the present situation of the pandemic of COVID-19 has also impacted the monitoring and accountability services in WASH. While the Government of Bangladesh aims to maximize WASH services to lower the immediate impact of the pandemic and seeks to achieve continuity through improving equitable access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Services in response to COVID-19. The

instructed different public and private entities to develop their respective WASH Sector guidelines for the pandemic period with necessary instructions and guidance to ensure the quality of the service provided. The government have established web based/distant monitoring systems to ensure accountability such as virtual meetings convened by the concerned authority of the department. The DPHE established a task force for COVID-19 to monitor the WASH activities provided for immediate corrective action if any issues arise. Though there has not been any documentation of the effectiveness of these guidelines (DPHE, 2020).

According to the inferences derived from the participants, during the course of study, the impact of COVID-19 has been minimal.

Figure 3: Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on accountability according to the survey



Though the survey response says that accountability has increased. But according to the KII it has not been impacted much. Consultation has been possible with senior level authorities but with community level workers and citizens it has been difficult as they are not very familiar with online platforms. The participants have said due to platforms such as Zoom, Skype and Google meet they meet frequently for discussion, but these meetings are less effective than in person meetings. Not everyone actively participates in online meetings, issues in internet connectivity disrupt many meetings and it took some time to get used to these technologies. Before the pandemic if they needed to meet once in person for coming to a decision, now they have to meet two or three times. Most meetings with government for the last few months are being held in person while maintaining proper guidelines. So there has not been much change or impact on the meetings.

Safely managed water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services are an essential part of preventing and protecting human health during current COVID-19 pandemic. The proactive engagement and commitment of the Government of Bangladesh is reflected in the form of focusing on ensuring continuity and expanded accessibility of WASH services, with Improved water quality and water supply systems which were instrumental in protecting human health through Ensuring continuity of water and sanitation services and expand water coverage in areas at high risk and are most vulnerable in Bangladesh.

During COVID-19, the government of Bangladesh ensured to Expand water coverage in areas at high risk and are most vulnerable in Bangladesh and Testing of wastewater is considered as a potential monitoring tool for the spread of pandemic.

During COVID-19, the government ensured required Sectoral Coordination and Monitoring: Though Physical movement from the central level to the local level is less and less advisable. However, inter-sectoral coordination, vertical and horizontal communication of executive decisions ensured uninterrupted WASH services in the country at large. The needed virtual platforms and digital tools were used effectively to ensure dynamic sector coordination and monitoring.

National engagement in the Sanitation and Water for All partnership

In Bangladesh SWA partners include WaterAid Bangladesh, Water.Org VERC, DORP, Simavi, UNICEF Ministry of LGRD&C. Activities of SWA are known among the national level organisation in our country. However, during our KII and survey it was revealed only SWA partners are fully aware of the activities of SWA and rest stakeholders are not much aware of SWA processes.

Figure 4: Awareness about SWA activities according to the survey



According to the results of the survey we see that 6 out of the 15 actors state to have good knowledge about SWA. However, from the validation workshop and the KII we see a different picture. Local organisations both NGOs and Governments agencies other than Departments Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE), Local Government Division (LGD) are not much aware about SWA and the SWA mutual accountability mechanism (MAM). In Bangladesh, the SWA CSO and government partners are most active. The CSO along with the network of networks are working towards the SWA MAM commitments (2019) that includes:

- Ensuring 50 people/water point by 2023 using surface water.
- Harness local resources to sustain open defecation free status.
- Develop and adopt Hand Hygiene for all.
- Implement targeted, equitable, inclusive and innovative interventions.

The CSO organisations such as WAI, FANSA-BD, WSSCC-B, NDBUS, Simavi, Water.org and WaterAid come together to discuss and refine the CSO commitments for SWA link SWA Finance Minister Meeting. Multi stakeholder dialogues were also organized to support the CSO and government commitments of SWA consisting of members of the government, NGO, CSO, private sector, Research and learning and the media.

During the recent finance ministers meeting on 2nd December 2020, the Bangladesh government has agreed to work towards the commitments they have submitted to SWA.

The CSO and along with Network of Networks committed to organize workshops and meetings with the Local Government Division at National Level for issuing circular to increase meaningful participation of the women and excluded groups in the Local Government Institutions (LGIs) meetings by 2022, so that their voices and demands are reflected in the WASH budget of LGIs. This would improve development planning and implementation activities while mutual accountability may also improve due to the process.

According to the SWA partners the MAM approach is a very good initiative as it is a collaborative, participatory approach and a suitable mechanism to ensure accountability among stakeholders. They understand that accountability between stakeholders is important also the stakeholders have well defined duties in implementation of SWA commitments, so it is easier to carry them out.

But we should focus on developing a good accountability mechanism that has a good systematic framework for holding stakeholders accountable for their service. To ensure more participation of organisations in SWA, capacity building and knowledge sharing workshops can be arranged by the member organisations of SWA. SWA and the commitments also have to be discussed frequently in various platforms so that the actors become more aware and take actions to implement them. SWA partners including BCAS (Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies), C4RE Foundation in collaboration with DPHE/LGD/LGIs may take the lead in the process.

Amidst of range of challenges ranging from Climate change impact and the rapid pace of urbanization, Government of Bangladesh's long-term Perspective Plan (2010-21) attaches a high priority on ensuring access to drinking water, sanitation and good hygiene practice for all. Ministry of Local Government Rural Developments and Cooperatives (MoLGRD&C), in consultation with various stakeholders, formulated the National Strategy for Water Supply and Sanitation.

National governments are focused towards ensuring multi stakeholder engagement in ensuring stakeholder in the Sanitation and Water for all towards ensuring continuity and making water, sanitation and hygiene services made available focusing on eliminating inequalities.

Improve resilience, safety and water quality of water supply systems in the country. Ensuring water and sanitation systems are resilient and sustainable in order to protect public health and support national health systems through Hygiene promotion, awareness and behaviour change and institutionalise WASH in healthcare facilities (HCF).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Government has taken several critical steps like Strengthen institutional capacity building and sustainability of service delivery system creating an enabling environment for private sector engagement to lead the delivery of sustainable solutions. However, in order to strengthen multi stakeholders' engagement and fostering accountability in WASH sector, functional Operation and Maintenance strategies at the sub-national are essential. Development of National operation and maintenance guidelines/strategies for both urban and rural context including WASH in Institutes as recommended on priority basis.

Government led multi stakeholder engagement processes and accountability frameworks needs to leverage the national and global partnerships with stakeholders such as International Training Network UNICEF, WHO, Development Banks and NGOs. Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) has a greater role to play catalysing mutual accountability in WASH sector.

SWA can play an instrumental role in promoting mutual accountability. SWA engagement in the country so far has been limited to national level engagements with government and the major's players such as UNICEF, Water Aid, Verc etc. Perhaps in the coming years, SWA can continue to engage with stakeholders at local/district level through potential partnerships which will prove to be effective in promoting and improving mutual accountability in the sector. As many WASH stakeholders in the country are unaware of SWA and its activities, The SWA partner organisations can hold seminars webinars to promote SWA-MAM and the commitments in the country.

Multi-stakeholders engagement is essential in Developing an area-wise needs-based planning, Monitoring and Review to capture and cater to the specific and diverse needs of the vulnerable population in the urban slums.

Recommendations

A strategy to promote mutual accountability mechanism needs to be formulated clearly defining the institutional structure, functional parameters, Roles and responsibilities of all the stakeholders at National, regional and local levels. A functional monitoring system is needed to support mutual accountability. For this, a separate monitoring agency or regulatory body can be established by the government of Bangladesh and the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperatives (MoLGRD&C) with the support of development partners such as JICA, SIDA and UNICEF. If not existing practices of accountability need to be re-examined to make them more effective. Participation of all stakeholder organisations in formulating policies for the sector is crucial for mutual accountability that paves a way for effective collaboration and contributes towards transparency to ensure mutual accountability.

GOB (Government of Bangladesh) needs to formulate an implementation strategy and a road map to ensure mutual accountability between the main WASH stakeholders and the required institutional structure/framework with a clear and well-defined operational modalities, functional parameters, roles and responsibilities of all the stakeholders. CSO can be taken onboard to assist GOB. This institutional framework needs to include transparent and mutual accountability

mechanism which incentivize and encourage the stakeholders to collaborate and ensure concerted efforts towards fostering mutual accountability.

Cross learning and sharing of information between SWA partners in Bangladesh and the CSO (Civil Society Organizations) and the Government needs to be ensured on a regular interval through various platforms discussing about commitments of stakeholders towards fostering mutual accountability and commitment of stakeholders while assessing and prioritizing the gaps in WASH services delivery.

Capacity building and knowledge sharing activities need to be organized by the GOB and CSO/NGOs taking on board all stakeholders. A common platform of GOB and CSO/NGOs need to be made functional through increased ore participation and active engagement of organisations to ensure SWA commitments and MAM. This would improve coordination among WASH stakeholders from administrative and social, sectors.

Functional monitoring system is needed for establishing mutual accountability to monitor the sectoral progress and the commitments given by the stakeholders. For this, a separate monitoring agency or a regulatory body needs to be established by the GOB and CSO/NGOs.

Common platform of GOB and CSO/NGOs such as the National forum for drinking water and sanitation needs to play an instrumental role in policy formulation process through to ensuring participation of all stakeholder organisations and taking their inputs especially the CSO and private sectors. They also need to have regular meetings, reporting and evidence-based decision making.

SWA member organisations can promote SWA commitments and MAM between WASH stakeholders through seminars, webinars, or media to ensure better engagement and collaboration.

Annexes

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the Local Government Division is a Bangladesh government is a government division under the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operative (MoLGRDC), Bangladesh. This is the focal ministry for WASH and attaining SWA commitments. It has been instrumental in ensuring WASH services through its Sectoral Departments Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) and Local Government Engineering Department (LGED). Proactive collaboration from and participation its officials had been encouraging for this study. We thank all of our colleagues at the MoLGRDC.

The report “Study on Mutual Accountability Mechanisms (MAM) in the WASH sector: Accountability between national WASH actors: Country brief, Bangladesh (SWA-MAM Study)” was developed by a core team from the Bangladesh Center of Advanced Studies (BCAS). BCAS authority likes to appreciate the hard work undertaken by Dr. Abu Syed, Ms. Sidratun Nur, Ms. Sabakun Nahar and Mr. Fahim Hoque. Here, Dr. Syed lead the whole study, Ms. Sidratun who had been working round the clock to complete all required preparation and conducting analysis in consultation with Dr. Syed and coordination with other colleagues at BCAS and SWA MAM

network. Mr. Fahim had been arranging much of logistics and financial matters for smooth running of the study. The BCAS likes to thank Dr. Syed and his team. The report is based on invaluable contributions of colleagues from collaborating institutions. Dr Dwijen Mallick, Director and Dr. Atiq Rahman, Executive Director, have been advising the team throughout the process and conducting stakeholder consultation events.

Accountability is a common process that exists, and mutual accountability is relatively a new engagement. Bangladesh Centre for Advanced studies (BCAS) extends sincere thanks to the IRC team who coordinated and provided guidance in the case country studies, including Bangladesh and those who made this study with their constant support, encouragement and inputs. Appreciation to the crew at IRC, you all have epitomized strong mutual accountability. This study would not have been possible without your support. Truly it has been an enriching experience to be part of the study. Our special thanks to Dr. Solomon Raj – SaciWATERS from India, who introduced us to the IRC team and provided support in implementation of the study.

The report benefitted greatly from observation, comments and suggestion made by participants from different institutions. BCAS value their contribution greatly and consider avoid naming institutions which may not correctly reflect all of its contribution. The report benefitted from invaluable guidance and suggestions of many stakeholders who participated in two consultation workshops (physical and virtual), and separate consultation meetings throughout the process. The list of stakeholders who took part in the consultation and provided valuable feedback is provided at the end of this report. The team also wishes to thank all stakeholders who shared their views in qualitative interviews conducted during the report.

Country level collaborators, participants and the fraternity of NGOs and CSOs are appreciated for adding immense value to the WAHS sector and accountability processes through playing their role in the study through providing inputs, contributions to the study. We thank every participant in the survey and all key informants who have provided valuable inputs to the study, we couldn't have done it without you.

Citation of this report

Syed, A.M., Chowdhury, Sidratun Nur and Gaddam, Solomon Raj (2020). Study on Mutual Accountability Mechanisms (MAM) in the WASH sector: Accountability between national WASH actors: Country Brief, Bangladesh, Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS), Gulshan 1, Dhaka, 1212, Bangladesh.

In text citation

Syed et al., 2020.

References

1. BBS and UNICEF (2019). *Bangladesh Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019*, Progotir Pathay: Final Report, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and United Nations Children Fund, Dhaka
2. Chan, N.W., Roy, R. and Chaffin, B.C. (2016). *Water governance in Bangladesh: An evaluation of institutional and political context*. Water, 8(9), p.403.
3. DPHE (2020). *Bangladesh Strategic Paper to Respond to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) issues during & after the COVID-19 Outbreak*.
4. EquityBD (2017). *SDGs and country process in Bangladesh: The Missing Links and where Assistance is an Obligation of International Community especially in Climate Compensation and Stopping Illicit Flow*.
5. General Economic Division (2018). *Monitoring and Evaluation Framework of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Bangladesh Perspective*.
6. Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. (2014) *National Strategy for Water Supply and Sanitation*. Available at <http://www.who.int/globalchange/resources/wash-toolkit/national-strategy-for-water-supply-and-sanitation-bangladesh.pdf>.
7. Halachmi, A., Greiling, D., &Huque, A. S. (2011). *Accountability and governance: strengthening extra-bureaucratic mechanisms in Bangladesh*. International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management.
8. Hasan (2020) *Bangladesh Country Report: CSO Review of National Accountability Mechanisms For SDG 6*. DORP.
9. Hasan (2020). *How CSOs are influencing pro-poor budgets in Bangladesh* [Online] Available at <https://www.sanitationandwaterforall.org/news/civil-society-finance-ministers-ensure-budget-processes-are-inclusive-and-transparent>. (Accessed 10 December 2020).
10. Muhammad Ibrahim (2020) People's Republic of Bangladesh Country Overview - Finance ministers meeting – 2020, https://www.sanitationandwaterforall.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/2020_Country-Overview_Bangladesh.pdf.
11. ONUSHANDHANI CREEDS (O.CREEDS). (2019). *Water Aid Landscape of WASH in IWRM in Bangladesh*. Available at <https://www.wateraid.org/bd/sites/g/files/jkxoof236/files/landscape-of-wash-in-iwrm-in-bangladesh.pdf>.
12. Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB).(2019) *Dhaka WASA: Governance Challenges and Way forward*.
13. Uddin, M. M. & Belal, A. R. (2019) *Donors' influence strategies and beneficiary accountability: an NGO case study*. In Accounting Forum (Vol. 43, No. 1, pp. 113-134). Routledge.