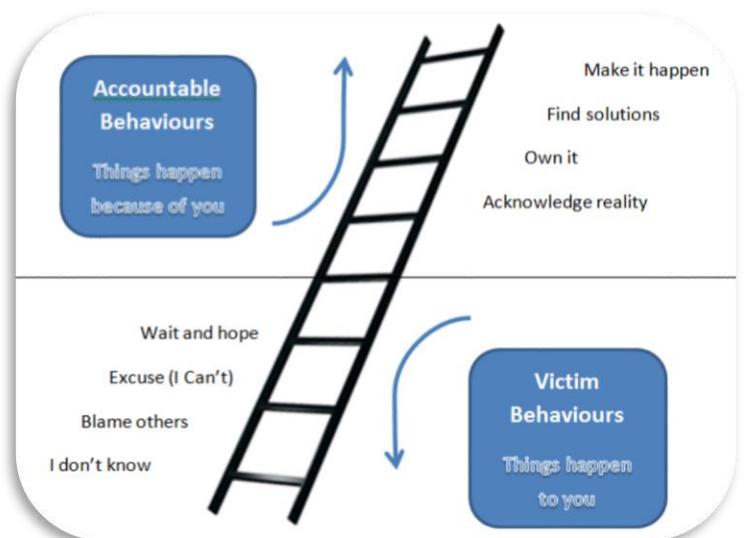Position paper
Accountability mechanisms

At national level, as well as at Bhola, in the southern coastal part of Bangladesh, there is currently no systematic and efficient accountability mechanism for holding GoB accountable for progressing towards achieving SDG 6, and the human rights to water and sanitation. However, various platforms have been created for civil society organisations (CSOs) to raise concerns regarding the government's accountability, and at local level, the opportunity for engagement exists in current local government processes. This document uses the Bhola context to demonstrate the existing opportunities on accountability in Bangladesh.

In the context of the *Watershed – Empowering Citizens* programme in Bhola, an **accountability mechanism** refers to a mechanism which offers citizens and stakeholders the opportunity to engage in current local government processes, such as open budget sessions, standing committees, citizen scoring, in order to give feedback on the WASH services received, and monitor the progress made. Downward accountability is the demand placed on actors to be accountable for the people for whom they provide services to and support that is being established gradually at Bhola.

Accountability ladder

As part of the programme, Water, Sanitation Hygiene (WASH) and Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) committees at Union Parishad and Upazila Parishad are responsible for including CSOs in formal mechanisms like standing committees. The local citizens committee was coached on lobby and advocacy to enable them to influence decision-making, and contribute to strengthening accountability mechanisms. Water Management Citizen Committee, a CSO in Bhola, took the initiative to be a member of these committees and participate in their meetings. These

meetings are not only information sharing platforms for disseminating government plans and good practices, but they also provide space for sector actors to give critical inputs and influence government decisions. The issues are mainly Financing and Accountability in the context of decentralized services, Citizen Participation, and Leadership of Government. Based on the findings from the consultations held with WASH and IWRM stakeholders (including committees and CSOs), it became clear that the involvement of community people specially women in decision-making is very significant for overall improvement of WASH and IWRM situation, as people are willing to cooperate if they are aware of the situation and have a platform.

Accountability mechanisms in Bhola

In Bhola, various activities have been introduced to establish accountability mechanisms, as presented here:

CSOs members of the IWRM and WASH committees at Union and Upazila Parishad: CSOs can share the needs of marginalised people and monitor the implementation of the commitments taken towards them

CSOs become member of standing committee of WASH at Union and Upazila. They represent marginalised groups such as …….💬.

Campaign on WASH and IWRM services through banner and poster focusing on budget allocation and expenditure on WASH.

Wall painting: to ensure transparency and access to information, the budget is painted on the wall of buildings in 9 Union Parishads, through a process that is facilitated by CSOs.

Citizen Scorecard: in Bhola, the tool is used yearly for sharing feedback of community people to the authorities. The scorecard addresses water, sanitation and hygiene and contains a series of indicators which are monitored specifically.

Social mapping: Social mapping is a critical preparatory mechanism that helps CSOs engages in accountability of authorities. It is conducted at ward level to help citizens understand the current status of IWRM and WASH services.

Open Budget sessions: this participative and informative mechanism is organized in 9 Unions of Bhola Sadar Upazila, where the community, especially those who are marginalized, joins to demand the authorities to address their WASH needs. The sessions enable the communities to see the allocations of budget and ensure that the process and allocations are inclusive.

Inclusive and gender sensitive WASH and IWRM budget monitoring tool: this mechanism uses a tool to monitor budgets on a regular basis. CSOs fill up quarterly the tool with information on the (disaggregated) budget and expenditure, through meeting with the service providers at different stages.

Submission of petitions: 2 petitions have been submitted to BWDB, LGED, DPHE, and Upazila Parishad to include CSO members in the standing committees of Upazila, Union and program implementation process.

As illustrated in the examples above, there are various accountability mechanisms that are being used at local level that help with governmental accountability in the water sector. Yet, the existing accountability mechanisms at central and local levels are not mandatory, are practiced irregularly, are weak—in terms of coordination among the concerned entities, and do not create adequate space for the NGOs/CSOs (particularly from the grass-roots) to make meaningful contributions. There is therefore a need to systematise the accountability mechanisms, strengthen them, and ensure that they are part of the governance framework in place, both at national and local level. The examples mentioned in this paper can serve as examples of good practices to accelerate the change and help government adopt new inclusive and participatory practices.

Recommendations

* It is essential to formulate and apply a structured framework of assessment for the civil society to monitor (collaboratively) the performance of GoB in attaining national targets for SDG 6 and progressing towards the realisation of the human rights to water and sanitation for all.

* GoB should adopt a systematic method of engaging CSOs (including those representing grass-roots) in periodic reviews of the sector's progress, on a regular basis, and of incorporating the feedback received from CSOs and the public in the policy process.

Dutch partners, and local partners + MFA on two lines