World Water Day 2023: ACCELERATING CHANGE

Why and what is World Water Day?
Every year since 1993, World Water Day (22 March) raises awareness and inspires action to tackle the water and sanitation crisis. It is about taking action to tackle the global water crisis of the 2.2 billion people living without access to safe water. It is a United Nations observance coordinated by UN-Water. The theme is proposed in advance by UN-Water. It is aligned with the annual publication of the UN World Water Development Report, published by UNESCO on behalf of UN Water.

Accelerating change
World Water Day 2023 serves as a reminder of the urgent need to address the global water and sanitation crisis. Dysfunction within the water cycle has far-reaching consequences, impacting various critical global issues such as health, hunger, gender equality, employment, education, industry, disasters, and peace. As of WHO report (2022), 1.4 million people die annually and 74 million will have their lives shortened by diseases related to poor water, sanitation and hygiene.

In 2015, the world committed to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 as part of the 2030 Agenda – the promise that everyone would have safely managed water and sanitation by 2030. Right now, we are seriously off-track. Billions of people and countless schools, businesses, healthcare centers, farms, and factories are being held back because their human rights to water and sanitation still need to be fulfilled. There is an urgent need to accelerate change – to go beyond ‘business as usual.' The latest data show that governments must work on average four times faster to meet SDG 6 on time, but this is not a situation that any single actor or group can solve. Water affects everyone, so we need everyone to take action.

World Water Day 2023: National Seminar on “Accelerating change to solve the water and sanitation crisis”
NGO Forum for Public Health, Bangladesh Water Integrity Network (BAWIN) and the Daily Bhor Kagoj jointly organized a national seminar titled Accelerating change to solve the water and sanitation crisis at

UN Secretary-General’s Message
Water is the lifeblood of our world. From health and nutrition, to education and infrastructure, water is vital to every aspect of human survival and wellbeing, and the economic development and prosperity of every nation.

But drop by drop, this precious lifeblood is being poisoned by pollution and drained by vampiric oversuse, with water demand expected to exceed supply by 40 per cent by decade’s end.

Meanwhile, climate change is wreaking havoc on water’s natural cycle. Greenhouse gas pollution continues to rise to all-time record levels, heating the world’s climate to dangerous levels. This is worsening water-related disasters, disease outbreaks, water shortages and droughts, while inflicting damage to infrastructure, food production, and supply chains.

The theme of this year’s World Water Day reminds us of the cost of these failures on the billions of people who lack access to safe water and sanitation.

Out of every 100 people on earth, 25 fetch all their water from open streams and ponds — or pay high prices to buy water of dubious safety. 22 relieve themselves outdoors or use dirty, dangerous or broken latrines. And 44 see their wastewater flow back into nature untreated, with disastrous health and environmental consequences.

In short, our world is dramatically — and dangerously — off-track to reaching our goal of safely managed water and sanitation for all by 2030.

This year’s World Water Day reminds us of our individual and collective roles to protect and sustainably use and manage humanity’s lifeblood for present and future generations.

The United Nations Water Conference, which kicks off today, is a critical moment for national governments, local and regional authorities, businesses, scientists, youth, civil society organizations and communities to join forces, and co-design and invest in solutions to achieve clean water and sanitation for all.

Meanwhile, governments, businesses and investors must take much bolder actions to limit temperature rise to 1.5 degrees, with the G20 leading the way. We must break our addiction to fossil fuels and embrace renewable energy, while supporting developing countries every step of the way.

We don’t have a moment to lose. Let’s make 2023 a year of transformation and investment for humanity’s lifeblood.

Let’s take action to protect, sustainably manage and ensure equitable access to water for all.
Ms. Fahmida Sultana,
Representative of the United Nations
Information Center in Bangladesh,
read out the message of the UN
Secretary General on the occasion of
World Water Day.

In the first keynote presentation, Dr.
Tanvir Ahmed,
Director, ITN-BUET
and Professor, Department of Civil
Engineering, BUET, highlighted the
challenges encountered in achieving
SDG-6, which focuses on ensuring
access to clean water and sanitation
for all. He emphasizes that progress in
water supply, sanitation, and hygiene
in the past five years has been
notably insufficient compared to the
global average. Therefore, an
increased effort is necessary to meet
the targets set in SDG-6. Simply
following a "business-as-usual"
approach will not be sufficient.
Instead, there is a need for rapid
development and implementation of
innovative and transformative ideas
in the water and sanitation sector.

The second keynote presentation
‘Research and Monitoring Accelerate
Integrity and Security of Water and
Sanitation Services’ , was led by Dr.
Anwar Zahid,
Director, Ground
Water Hydrology, Bangladesh Water
Development Board, who stressed on
hydrological disasters and the need
to strengthen monitoring and
research which would lead to
effective data collection and analysis.
He also pointed out that a water
budget should be tailor made based
on the area’s available resources.

The experts from the different sectors
shared their critical observations and
experiences following the keynote
presentations, who were Mr. Tushar
Mohan Sadhu Khan, Additional
Chief Engineer (Planning),
Department of Public Health
Engineering (DPHE), Mr. Abdullah
Al-Muyeed, Chief Operating Officer,
CWIS-FSM support cell, DPHE, Ms.
Bachera Aktar, Assistant Director,
BRAC JPGSPH, BRAC University, Mr.
Shafiqul Alam, WASH Specialist,
UNICEF.

Mr. S.M.A Rashid, Executive
Director of NGO Forum for Public
Health, in his welcome speech,
emphasized on the need for clear
commitments and collective efforts,
pledges and actions involving all the
relevant stakeholders and
professionals to achieve the visible
changes.

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on the area’s available resources.
The Chief Guest of the event, the Honorable Minister of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, Md. Tazul Islam positively said that “we are committed to achieving SDGs by 2030. But we also have a specific goal for Bangladesh. We want to make a Smart Bangladesh by 2041. With the combination of these two goals, we are setting our plans and moving forward accordingly”. He emphasized on controlling illegal perforations in the water supply system which are done to get adequate water supply in overly populated urban areas. He also shared possible plans of dividing Dhaka into catchment areas for sanitation, effective and efficient faecal sludge management.

As the special guest, Engr. Md. Sarwar Hossain, Chief Engineer, Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) shared that DPHE has increased its budget on water and sanitation, put emphasis on expanding projects in the drought-prone and coastal area where water layer is rapidly decreasing.

While the panel experts put an emphasis on mitigation of climate change affects and quality of water, an effective outlook came from Mr. Shofiqul Alam (WASH Specialist, UNICEF) where he proposed a WASH regulatory body for the sector of WASH which would ensure fulfillment of all the accelerators and especially accuracy of data.

World Water Day Celebration in the Fields

NGO Forum has celebrated the day in the field level including in the Rohingya Camps 4, 5, 6, 7, 17, 26, 27, KTP RC, NYP RC and KTP TC with day long different colorful events involving the local communities. Rally, discussion session, Rain water harvesting demonstration, WASH stall display, street song around the camps, Household level campaign on Water Safety Plan, cultural events with children and prize giving among the best change makers were the major events of this program. The Camp In-charges (CIC) and Asst. CIC of the respective camps, representative from the donor agencies, local government representatives, community leaders, men, women and children from the refugee community were participated in these events.
The Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE), through the directives of LGD in collaboration with UNICEF, WHO and Embassy of Sweden organized a national seminar on World Water Day highlighting the theme “Accelerating Change to Solve the Water and Sanitation Crisis” on 22nd March 2023, in Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel. Mr. Md. Tazul Islam, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (MoLGRD&C), Government of Bangladesh was present as Chief Guest and Mr. Swapan Bhattacharjee, Honorable State Minister, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (MoLGRD&C) was present as Special Guest. The Ambassador of Sweden, UNICEF and WHO Representatives to Bangladesh was also present in the seminar.

Mr. S M A Rashid, Executive Director of NGO Forum was present as a Discussant of the seminar and highlighted the needs for collaborative efforts among the Government bodies, donor agencies as well as relevant stakeholders to accelerate the change in water and sanitation sector.

Views expressed in WatSan are not necessarily those of NGO Forum for Public Health while they are certainly those of authors.