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POLICY BRIEF, JUNE 2021



# Policy reform for safe drinking water service delivery in rural Bangladesh

*Rob Hope, Md. Monirul Alam, Sonia Hoque, Alex Fischer and Katrina Charles*

The Government of Bangladesh has provided global leadership in progress to improved drinking water access, with an estimated coverage of 98.5% of its 160 million citizens in 2019. However, the coverage decreases to 42.5% when service delivery accounts for indicators of water quality, proximity and sufficiency (UNICEF/MICS, 2019). As the Government sets out to revise the 1998 National Policy for Safe Water Supply and Sanitation, the ‘SafePani’ model proposes reforms in institutional design, sustainable finance, and information systems, to advance the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 6.1 of universal access to safe and affordable drinking water for households, schools and healthcare facilities.

## Context

- Existing rural water service delivery in Bangladesh focuses on increasing ‘access’ by installing water supply infrastructure paid for by public funds and external assistance (Figure 1).
- Gaps in public service delivery are being addressed by uncoordinated private investments by households and small informal water enterprises.

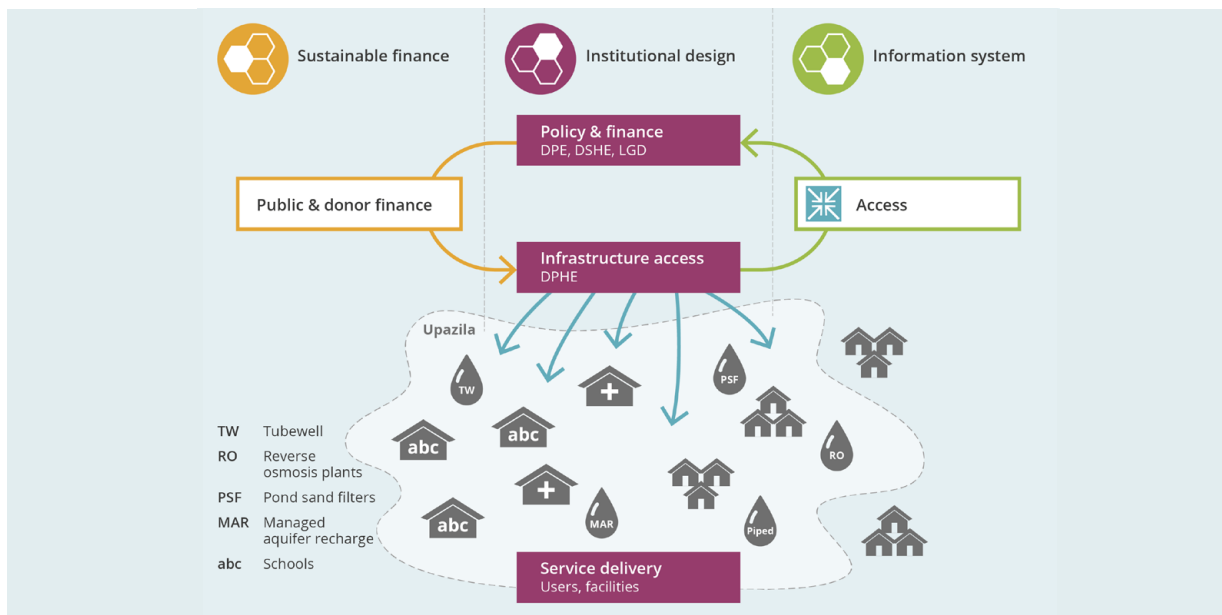
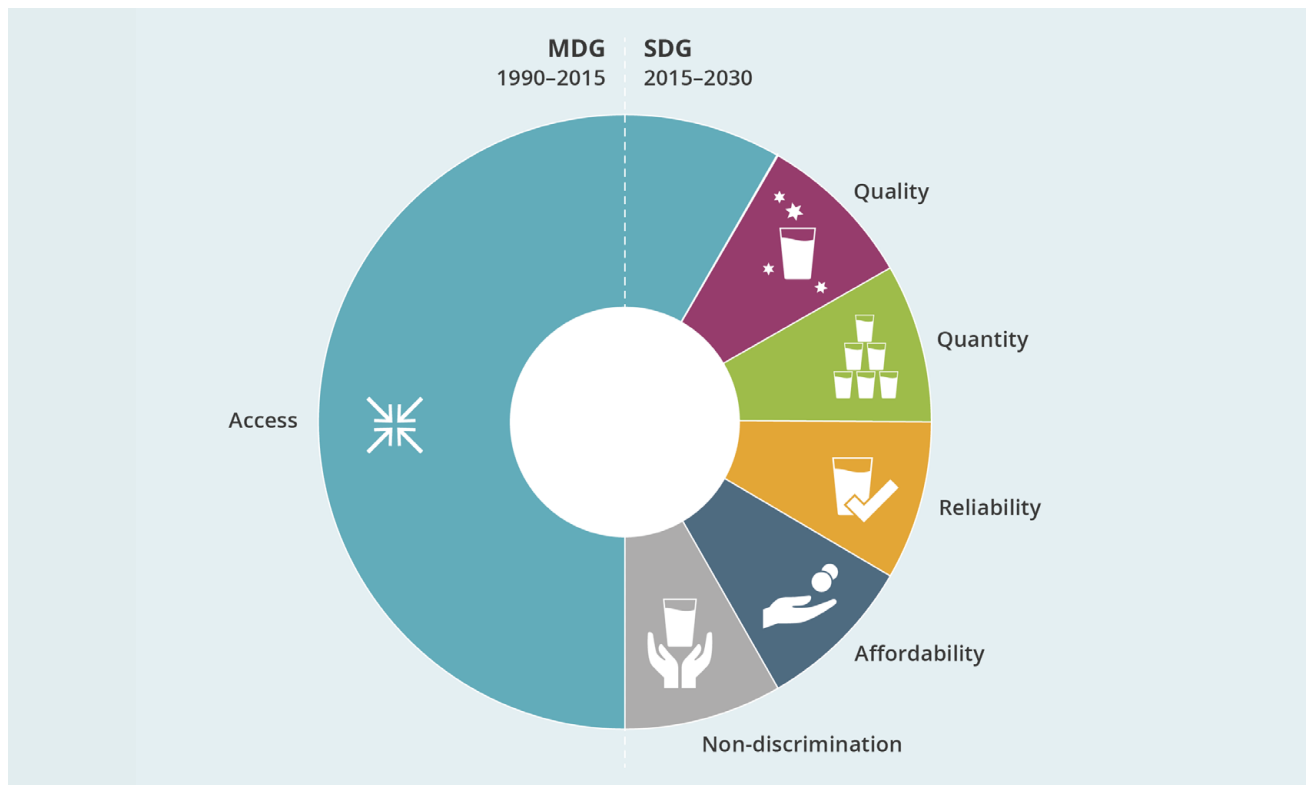


Figure 1: Existing model for rural water service delivery in Bangladesh.



**Figure 2:** Moving from Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Target 7c to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 6.1.

- Social and spatial inequalities in public water infrastructure are amplified by climate risks and multiple water quality hazards (Figure 2).
- The expanded focus of SDG 6.1 entails a revised institutional framework to strategically leverage public and private funds, with timely and accurate information systems to support independent monitoring and regulation of water service delivery.
- First, institutional change will entail responsibilities to be clearly allocated and regulated from national to local levels with information and monitoring systems to allow progressive improvement of the quality of water services in terms of safety, functionality, and affordability. Service delivery models can be designed to network infrastructure at the right operational and political levels. Legal provision can make provision for exclusive service areas and independent regulation and enforcement to ensure no one is left behind.
- Second, financing service provision will require public and private funds to be more effectively combined to deliver results. Information systems will improve the allocation of funding and can attract new sources of funds based on performance. User payments will be central to financial sustainability with preferences for on-site infrastructure, such as piped water to homes and facilities, requiring tariffs to be affordable for all water users.

### The SafePani model

Future policy has an opportunity to not only recognise the role of private investments from households and small water enterprises, but also create new service delivery models with sustainable financing and regulation at scale. Achieving this will require reforms in two key areas (Figure 3).

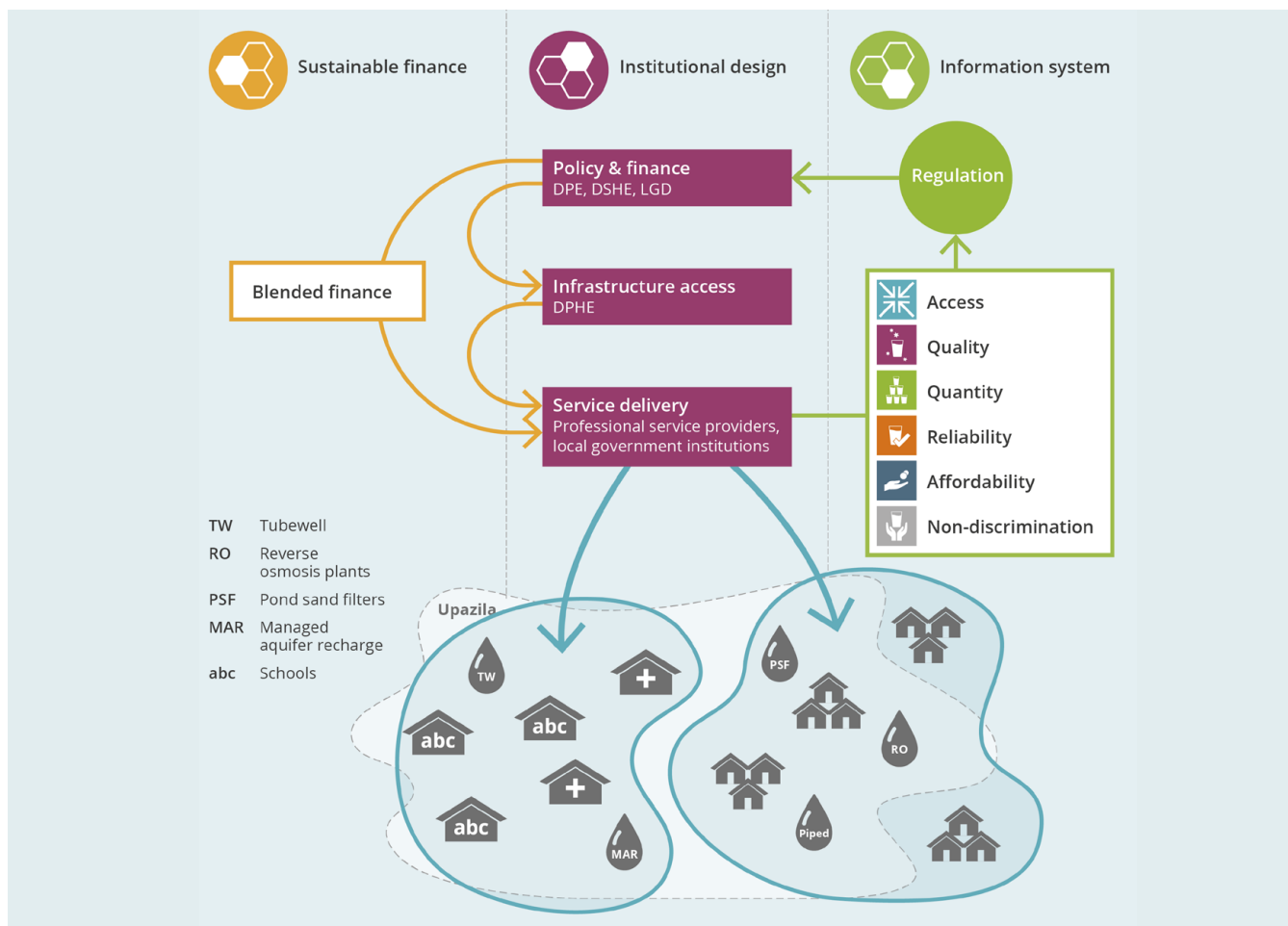


Figure 3: The SafePani model – Proposed framework for rural water service delivery in Bangladesh.

## What's next?

We propose three courses of action based on the recommendations.

1. First, the SafePani model and associated recommendations across institutional design, information systems and sustainable finance can support the government's policy reform process.
2. Second, donors and other stakeholders can consider how an independent regulator may be established and funded in coordination with wider government reform.
3. Third, the REACH programme will continue to collaborate with government agencies, building on the research findings to test the SafePani model in coastal Bangladesh.

## Acknowledgements

The design of the SafePani model is informed by collaborative work of the REACH programme, a global research programme to improve water security for 10 million poor people in Africa and Asia by 2024, funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). In Bangladesh, REACH is a collaboration between the University of Oxford, UNICEF, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), and the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Diseases, Bangladesh (icddr,b). For more information, visit [www.reachwater.org.uk](http://www.reachwater.org.uk).

*This policy brief summarises the following report: Hope, R., A. Fischer, S.F. Hoque, M.M. Alam, K. Charles, M. Ibrahim, E.H. Chowdhury, M.Salehin, Z.H. Mahmud, T. Akhter, P. Thomson, D. Johnston, S.A. Hakim, M.S. Islam, J.W. Hall, O. Roman, N. El Achi, and D. Bradley (2021). Policy reform for safe drinking water service delivery in rural Bangladesh. REACH Working Paper 9, University of Oxford, UK.*