Simavi aims to structurally improve the health of ten million people in low and middle-income countries. Therefore we are working in marginalised communities on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). Our programmes focus on getting WASH and SRHR services in place; empowering communities to demand quality services and to practice healthy behaviour; and creating an enabling environment, consisting of groups from government, private sector and NGOs.

Advocacy
Advocacy is an indispensable element in Simavi’s Theory of Change. Together with our partners, we promote the recognition of WASH and SRHR within the new United Nations Development Framework: we participate in global networks such as Sanitation and Water for All and we bring private sector groups and NGOs together to come up with sustainable solutions. More specifically, we advocate with the Dutch government in order to maintain the country’s lead position on WASH and SRHR, and we collaborate with our partner organizations to keep their national governments accountable for adequate policies, laws and investments in WASH and SRHR.

But it all starts in the community. This is where knowledge, empowerment and mobilisation lead to greater accountability between communities, service providers and governments - indispensable to improving access to WASH and SRHR services.

Social accountability
Simavi’s advocacy strategy at community level has a specific focus on social accountability. Social accountability is an interactive process that aims to increase citizen influence (voice) and to strengthen the response of the local WASH and SRHR providers and decision-makers. Social accountability breaks social and systemic barriers in contexts where national policies seem to be adequate, but where, in reality, these policies are insufficiently implemented and where inequality prevails. Communities are mobilised and empowered to understand their right to, for example, clean water or a safe and staffed birth facility. Knowing their rights and being aware of effective methods to voice their needs, helps communities to create an environment where governments and service providers implement policies and improve services. This contributes to structural improvements in WASH and SRHR, and less inequality.
The people in the southwest coastal region of Bangladesh face severe drinking water crises due to frequent flooding, water logging, cyclones, arsenic contamination and increasing salinity. Additionally, proper sanitation facilities are lacking in the area and most people are unaware of proper hygienic practices. As a result, they face a wide range of health related problems and diseases. The government of Bangladesh is responsible for improving this situation through its WASH policy and Right to Information Act. By using the Budget Tracking approach, Simavi has proved to be highly effective in keeping the government accountable by using existing policies and acts, to ensure budgets are used to improve access to water and sanitation.

### Problem

The government of Bangladesh allocates water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) budgets to be spent by local governments. At local level, WASH budgets are supposed to be spent on necessary improvements and programmes, depending on the specific WASH context and needs of the communities in the respective area. In 2008, the government of Bangladesh adopted the “Right to Information Act”, which gives people the right to request any information about WASH strategies, activities and budgets from the government. The responsible local governments are obliged to consult with communities about their WASH needs. Policy makers need to use this information to formulate their WASH budgets on union level. After the approval of these budgets by the national government, the local government has to inform the communities about the available resources for WASH improvements in their villages. Despite the clarity of the act and existing WASH policies, they are not implemented appropriately, resulting in poor WASH governance and outcomes on the ground. To address this challenge and to increase accountability by the government, Simavi developed a Budget Tracking approach.

### Budget tracking

Together with her local partner, Simavi initiated Budget Tracking in six unions in Bangladesh. The allocated and spent WASH budgets by different authorities in each of these unions were closely followed over a period of time. In addition, communities were made aware of the national WASH policy and Right to Information Act. The next step consisted of WASH Budget Hearing meetings between local governments and communities, which were facilitated by Simavi. During those meetings, people were able to voice their WASH demands and ensure that the government reflected these in their annual budgets. After approval of the budget by the national government, the budget lines and expenditure are painted on the wall of the local government office to stimulate transparency and accountability. Finally, by using a mobile-based monitoring tool from AKVO-Flow, information on the local WASH budgets and expenditures for a number of locations are collected, published and analyzed on an online platform. This enables Simavi to compare different locations, and use this information as an advocacy tool to demand for increased allocation of WASH budget at the national government of Bangladesh.

### Results

Simavi’s Budget Tracking approach in the six Bangladesh unions has resulted in greater transparency and accountability. Concretely, the unions where the Budget Tracking approach was applied, saw a 12-18% increase in the local WASH budget in less than two years - a phenomenal success. As the story of this success is spreading, many more communities in other unions are starting to apply this tool and demanding their Right to Information and access to WASH services. Simavi’s aim is that through this domino effect and active advocacy at national level, overall WASH budgets that are allocated and appropriately spent increase.