Despite the fact that access to water and sanitation is globally recognised as a human right, 750 million people have no access to improved water sources, while a third of the world live without adequate sanitation. Without access to water and sanitation preventable diseases spread fast, leading to 500,000 children dying every year from diarrhoea alone.

Countries facing these problems often have WASH policies and regulations in place that include provisions for addressing the situation. However, the vast majority of communities remain unaware of their WASH rights, while local authorities and service providers often lack knowledge about relevant national policies, as well as the technical capacity, resources and political will to act on any community demand for better WASH services.

Simavi wants to empower communities claim their WASH rights and implement sustainable, long-term services that will stop preventable deaths. We know from ninety years experience of working with marginalised communities in Africa and Asia giving people a voice and advocating for WASH rights is a vital first step in improving basic health for all.
How to increase social accountability
Simavi’s approach

Simavi’s advocacy strategy at community level focuses on social accountability. This is an interactive process with three steps:

1. Increase citizen influence to ensure improved access to WASH services
2. Strengthen local WASH providers and decision-makers to meet citizens’ WASH needs
3. Advocate for accountable and adequate WASH policies, laws and investments

By working and communicating with each other, communities, authorities and service providers come together to break down social barriers and improve ineffective WASH policies.

The first step is to make people stand up for their rights regarding safe water and sanitation within their community. Together with our local partners we empower communities to generate evidence and statistics that can be used to hold WASH service providers and local authorities to account. At the same time, the local authorities are trained on national policies and encouraged to enter dialogues with communities on WASH. This creates a transparent enabling environment in which every stakeholder works together towards concrete objectives.

Each of our social accountability strategies is implemented according to the needs of every community. Here are a few examples:

**Citizen Reports**
Local citizen groups collect information on people’s satisfaction with the available WASH services. The results highlight areas where improvements are required and the extent to which local governments and providers fulfil their responsibilities. The data is a vital advocacy tool to present to service providers and national government officials. For example, in Kajiado county, Kenya, the Citizen Report Cards showed that 75% of people in the intervention area didn’t receive water from the company responsible for the supply in the area and that more than 50% of people in rural areas had to walk around five kilometres to fetch water. Moreover, 33% reported to be suffering from water related diseases. All these results were presented to the Kenyan government, other CSOs and local water service providers. Service providers were held accountable and pushed to make progressive steps to ensure peoples adequate access to WASH services.

**Community Engagement**
Communities are mobilised to form water committees that start dialogues with WASH stakeholders at every level, from community to district, regional and national level, to ensure their WASH needs are heard and recognised. For example, in the north of Tanzania organising the community and opening up dialogue between all stakeholders proved to be successful for the overall water governance in the area. The sustainable use of the shared water source is in each of the stakeholder’s interest. Bringing stakeholders together and clarifying roles and responsibilities, resulted in major improvements in access to water for communities, schools, clinics and other essential institutions.

**Budget Tracking**
Simavi, local partners and communities work together to track WASH budgets and expenditure by interviewing authorities and conducting desk studies. The results are presented in WASH Budget Hearing meetings in which communities can voice their WASH demands and ensure these are reflected in governmental budgets. Simavi’s Budget Tracking approach in six districts in Bangladesh has resulted in greater transparency and accountability and a 12-18% increase in the local WASH budget in less than two years.
Thanks to our advocacy training and implementation of advocacy tools, communities are able to demand and claim their WASH rights. Local authorities have a clear idea of the needs and situation of marginalised communities. As a result of their collaborations, communities have direct contact with WASH service providers and authorities at local and national level.

After asserting their WASH rights and managing sustainable WASH services, communities can ask for - and receive - increased WASH budget allocations that increase access to clean water and sanitation. In return, local authorities are encouraged to show increased transparency towards the citizens which leads to improved WASH governance and accountability, a vital first step towards basic health.

Improved access to, and awareness of, WASH creates a standard of hygiene, healthcare and equality that allows every man, woman and child to live healthy and productively: school attendances rise and more people can go to work. By tackling WASH issues, we can stop preventable diseases and deaths and boost social and economic development.

Case Study: **Budget Tracking**, Bangladesh, 2011-2015

Together with our local partner, Development Organisation of Rural Poor (DORP), Simavi initiated Budget Tracking to raise the basic WASH budget allocation for marginalised low-income communities in rural Bangladesh. Simavi wants to ensure that everyone benefits from improved WASH services and access, therefore we deliberately work with poorest and most vulnerable communities.

We developed a budget-monitoring tool to monitor the WASH budget allocated and spent by authorities in six unions of six different districts. At the same time, communities were educated on national WASH policies and their right to information.

WASH budget hearing meetings were facilitated between local governments and communities. During these meetings, communities were encouraged to voice their WASH demands and ensure that the government reflected these in their annual budgets.

Our intervention in the six Bangladesh unions resulted in greater governmental transparency and accountability, while the WASH budget in the intervention area increased by 12-18% in less than two years. In March 2014, DORP scaled up its intervention to 24 unions in the same six districts, with about 90,000 people expected to benefit.
About Simavi
Simavi is an international non-profit organisation working towards a world in which basic health is accessible to all. Our goal is to structurally improve the basic health of 10 million people in marginalised communities in Africa and Asia by 2020. By doing so, we enable them to build a better existence and break the cycle of poverty.

Our experience over the past ninety years has shown us that investing in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) is vital for people to be able to lead a healthy life. Therefore we concentrate our efforts in these two areas.

Theory of Change
All our programmes are based on three integrated pillars:
1. Empower communities to demand quality services and to practice healthy behaviour;
2. Create a supportive, enabling environment in which all stakeholders are aware of their roles and responsibilities, work together and can be held accountable;
3. Ensure that people use affordable, suitable and sustainable WASH and SRHR services. This is the core of our Theory of Change – it’s designed to ensure that everyone involved, from community to governmental level, works together towards realising sustainable improvement of basic health.

In the many years Simavi has been active, we’ve built up an extensive network of reliable and capable local partners and gathered a deep understanding of the religious, ethical and cultural sensitivities within every community we work with. This is crucial to realise sustainable change.

We know how to build the capacity of local partners to make sure that the community’s demands are voiced to regional, national and international influential stakeholders, according the law, legislation and regulation of the countries we work in.

We’ve established extensive local and international networks in WASH, SRHR and beyond. We believe that the interaction between these different stakeholders is crucial to learn from each other and to make sure that expertise and experience of our local partners are shared at international WASH and SRHR conferences, as this enables the southern voice in the international debate. In this way we create new synergies and partnerships within our networks, bringing together partners whose expertise complements each other with one goal: to facilitate more people enjoying basic health.