



# IRC

## Empowering citizens to Raise Your Voice for water, Watershed 2016-2020

Watershed was unique in the world. The largest programme to date supporting civil society (CSOs) organisations to use advocacy-based approaches to deliver changes in policy and practice in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and Water Resource Management (WRM). We encouraged members to #RaiseYourVoice for water. It was a strategic partnership between the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (the Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS)) and IRC, Simavi, Wetlands International and Akvo. In just five years (2016-2020) it achieved an impressive set of real and measurable achievements across seven countries (Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya, India, Mali, the Netherlands, Uganda) and globally.

This innovative programme enabled, empowered, and built the capacity of governments and civil society to consistently advocate for the human rights to water and sanitation using evidence-based lobby and advocacy strategies. Capacity strengthening of CSOs, and governments took place in the following areas: planning and execution of advocacy strategies; budget tracking and influencing local budget processes; empowering

citizens to use their voice and engage directly with local government officials and decision makers; translating data and evidence into advocacy messages and materials to improve WRM and inclusive access to WASH services.



**RAISE  
YOUR VOICE**

Supporting water sanitation  
and hygiene services for life

## Watershed's approach: #RaiseYourVoice

### > Encouraging Dialogue to improve water and sanitation services and WRM

Watershed activities focused on strengthening the skills of CSOs and governments to work with each other: setting up formal accountability mechanisms and strengthening the skills of CSOs to give them an effective and concerted voice.

The receptiveness and high overall level of engagement with governments demonstrates that dialogue-based approaches are an effective lobby and advocacy strategy in the sector. The Watershed approach, citizens voicing concerns, led to many governments welcoming them to participate in government planning processes. Since WASH and WRM are seen primarily as non-controversial 'technocratic' areas with broad policy support: no-one is 'against' universal access to WASH. Throughout the programme, CSOs and media were encouraged to question service providers on issues affecting them and advocate for their rights to water and sanitation services; issues such as water quality, tariffs, and waste dumping.

### > Systematic use of evidence-based advocacy strategies

Evidence-based advocacy strategies were essential to drive the teams and their activities. They were critical in creating a shared vision of the key issues and priorities that each country programme wanted to address; who they wanted to influence; what change they wanted to see; what strategies to try; and, finally, how to communicate the goals of the partnership to others. They were revised on an annual basis providing space for consistent review and adaptation to adjust to political changes in each country.

### > Theory of Change as a powerful and flexible tool to understand the country level context and influence policy makers

Country level Theories of Change proved to be a very effective framework, ensuring a context specific, flexible and adaptive programme. The Theories developed by each team were reviewed yearly and influenced the annual planning processes. Each team invested time and resources into obtaining monitoring data and doing analysis. They learned that without data you will not be heard. Sharing your evidence makes problems real and convinces policy makers.

### Consistent harvesting and learning from outcomes and achievements

The process of harvesting outcomes was instrumental in making changes visible. It allowed timely and rapid adaptations in the programme. The number and quality of outcomes achieved throughout the five- year programme are clear indicators of how the partners across all teams were able to use credible evidence to influence policies and practice, demonstrating the power of dialogue.

Annual team meetings, cross-learning strategies and dialogue between country teams were invaluable. They led to replication of success stories from one country to another and brought country experiences to regional and international platforms. The annual partner meeting, fuelled by a joint mapping of what did, and did not work, captured reflections and discussions that drove changes in strategies. These sessions were inspiring, thought provoking and an eye-opener for many.



## Our key achievements

Watershed's rigorous monitoring of its outcomes and achievements captured the following across its countries of operation:

- 552 outcomes including:
  - Increased budgets for water and sanitation
  - Increased social inclusion in access to services
  - Improved monitoring and quality of water resources
- 90 laws, policies and legal norms, adopted / implemented for sustainable and inclusive development
- 654 times that CSOs succeeded in creating space for their demands and positions through agenda setting and taking part in meetings, influencing the debate or creating space to engage
- 337 advocacy initiatives on, for instance pro-poor strategies, water quality and budget tracking, were carried out by CSOs, for, by or with their membership/constituency
- Knowledge products and training for ongoing support to CSOs

The skills developed through Watershed empowered civil society partners to raise their voice on other issues. Good examples are reproductive health rights and environmental protection.

## Watershed's legacy

Watershed's legacy can be seen in the skill sets of the many people who participated in the project and their ability to drive change in WASH and WRM work. Watershed taught them to truly raise their voice.

All the processes for evidence-based advocacy developed and trialled during Watershed have been documented and are a valuable knowledge base for other CSOs and organisations engaged within the civic space. In 2020 alone, Watershed published 85 resources for a wide variety of audiences. The [Watershed website](#) is a complete library and all resources will remain online for at least the coming year – till December 2022.

In early February 2021, Watershed launched the [“Voices for Water”](#) campaign to reach other CSOs and actors that were not part of the programme and to publicise the partnership's achievements. The global campaign was a call to NGOs, governments, and funders to prioritise resources to support CSOs as drivers of change. The campaign reached nearly two million people through social media and was commended by leading organisations including Sanitation and Water for All (SWA), the World Bank, UN-Water, African Civil Society Network on Water and Sanitation, Netherlands Water Partnership, Partos and more.

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**Our fight is not yet over. Our fight has only just begun and we have but 8 years left to achieve fundamental human rights. So there is still time to raise our #VoicesforWater and continue the battle**

Kitty van der Heijden, Director-General for International Cooperation, The Netherlands





## Moving Forward

A remarkable network of international and local CSOs have benefited from this innovative five-year programme. We are all eager to continue to advance the achievements so far and pursue bringing positive and transformational change to communities.

We have programmes and partners at the ready, not just in the original Watershed six, but in other countries where the need is urgent - Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Niger, South Sudan and Indonesia. Civic space is shrinking and governments are failing to meet the most basic human rights of their citizens. CSOs urgently need our help to #RaiseYourVoice for water and other key issues. In the wake of the pandemic, this has become even more important, where every citizen must be able to practise safe hygiene as a defence against COVID-19.

Current Watershed programme funding has ended, but neither our work nor our ambition has dimmed. We have bold plans for each country and exciting strategies for expansion. Help us raise funding to make this a reality. We are confident that Watershed can be instrumental in reaching SDG 6.

## Flagship knowledge products

### > Evidence-based advocacy

- An [online training course](#) on how to develop and implement lobby and advocacy strategies was launched in September 2020
- An overview paper on [Evidence-based advocacy: How civil society generates and uses evidence for influencing policy](#)

### > Financing for WASH and IWRM

- A training manual about [Civil society's role in public budgeting](#)
- A briefing note about [Civil society influence in drinking water, sanitation, and water resources budget: Four pathways for change](#)
- A policy brief for national level influencing: [Post-Budget Policy Brief National WASH Budget 2020-21 Bangladesh](#)

### > IWRM and water security

- A video on [Rehabilitating River Mpanga, Uganda](#)
- An article about [Changing the flow together, India](#)
- An overview paper about [WASH and IWRM: A booklet for Bangladesh](#)

### > Social inclusion

- A training manual about [Leave No One Behind Training Workshop on Facilitating inclusive multi-stakeholder WRM & WASH forums for improved water and sanitation services](#)
- A briefing note on [Identifying barriers to inclusion in WASH services in Tarkwa Nsuaem Municipal Assembly, Ghana](#)



**We have a once in a lifetime opportunity to make access to safe water and sanitation available for everyone, for good. The UN has set a target to achieve this by 2030 – known as ‘Sustainable Development Goal 6’ (SDG 6).**

### **Resilient systems: the only way**

We know that the only way to achieve this goal is through resilient local and national water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) systems that transform lives. We know how to build and strengthen these systems – but we need to do it now.

It will take everyone, in all parts of the system, changing the way they think and work.

### **Everyone, together**

Each part of a country’s WASH system must work effectively: from people using pumps, to monitoring tools, to finance systems. This can only be achieved if everyone in the system knows and plays their part.

Achieving universal access calls for collective action by a broad movement of government, civil society, private sector service providers, financiers, academia and others.

### **Our unique position**

As a change hub, we’re in a unique position to unite people to drive and champion change from the ground up. We need to convince district, country and global decision makers of what it’ll take to achieve SDG 6.

### **Now is the time**

We need to act now. We’re halfway through but not halfway there. We need everyone to commit to massive-scale change – and as you’re reading this, that also means you.

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