Everyday, Wasa supplies 22.5 crore litres of water to Dhaka households and plans to supply altogether 90 crore litres in the future. All this water comes from the Shitalakkhya and is treated at the Saidabad Water Treatment Plant. Wasa is also planning to set another water treatment plant, which will also use water from Shitalakkhya and its tributary Balu River.

Strategically Shitalakkhya is the most important river for Dhaka dwellers in terms of its use in domestic life. The adjacent areas of Shitalakkhya River has been termed by Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP) (from 1995 to 2015) as an 'environmental pollution protected zone'. The Shitalakkhya has been considered as relatively unpolluted compared to other water bodies and hence targeted being potentially a major source of drinking water for the ever-expanding population of the city. The DMDP has also suggested initiating environmental protection measures to prevent pollution of the Shitalakkhya River and its tributary, the Balu River, in order to ensure that it remains a viable, long-term source of potable water of Dhaka City.

According to the Plan; Rajdhani Unnyanan Kartripakkhya (Rajuk), Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) and Department of Environment are the implementing agencies to control all industrial and commercial development, existing and future, within one kilometre of the rivers. Furthermore, these agencies are supposed to make sure that minimum standards of effluent control are maintained by constantly monitoring the surface water of the rivers. They are also supposed to identify and stop any kind of pollution in the water.

The real picture, however is a far cry from the Plan's noble intentions. Ignoring the government plan as well as laws such as Environmental Conservation Act (1995) and Environmental Conservation Rule (1997) the river water is being degraded by the effluent flowing in from two directions: the outflow of sewage from the centre of Dhaka, and from the clusters of industries and urban development located along the outer edge of the watershed. The result is a thick layer of pitch black coloured effluent in the water throughout the dry season. The water flow decreases from 2742 cubic metre per second (cumec) to 173 cumec for six months of the year (December to May) but the volume of effluents discharged in the river remains nearly constant. A common complaint is the foul-smelling water supplied from Saidabad Water Treatment Plant. Moreover, there is every possibility of toxic heavy metals being pumped into Wasa supply line which may cause serious health hazards. Nutritionists believe that people all over the country may face health risk through the consumption of contaminated products of the Shitalakkhya River such as fish and vegetables grown in the surrounding areas.

