

## Clean Toilets, Healthy Lives: How a Community and Entrepreneur Partnership Transformed Sanitation in Damudya Upazila

### Background

Damudya Upazila, located about 22 kilometers from the Shariatpur district headquarters, is among the most underserved sub-districts in terms of access to public services. Within Damudya, the unions of Dhanakati, Sidalkura, Sidya, and Darul Aman were particularly lagging behind in sanitation and hygiene standards.

Before the project's intervention, of the 11,050 existing household toilets, only 4,797 were hygienic, while 6,253 remained unhygienic, posing significant health risks—especially for women and children. Poor sanitation practices and inadequate toilet design were contributing to the spread of waterborne diseases and contaminating the environment.

### Problem Identified

A Community WASH Situation Analysis (CSA) conducted in May 2024 under the GoB–UNICEF project identified the root causes of poor sanitation across the four unions:

- ✓ Improper toilet design: Many households constructed direct pit, single-pit, or twin-pit latrines without a gooseneck pipe/water seal, a vital component for preventing odor and insect contamination.
- ✓ Unsustainable construction: Toilets were typically built with only 3–4 rings, causing pits to fill quickly, overflow, and become unhygienic within a short time.

Further investigation revealed that local toilet material suppliers were selling rings, slabs, and goosenecks separately at high prices, and often omitting the gooseneck/water seal entirely. For example: square ring slab – BDT 600, Triangular ring slab – BDT 500, Large ring – BDT 350, Small ring – BDT 250. For poor and lower-middle-income households, constructing a hygienic toilet was simply too costly. As a result, most families opted for cheaper, unhygienic designs that undermined health and dignity.



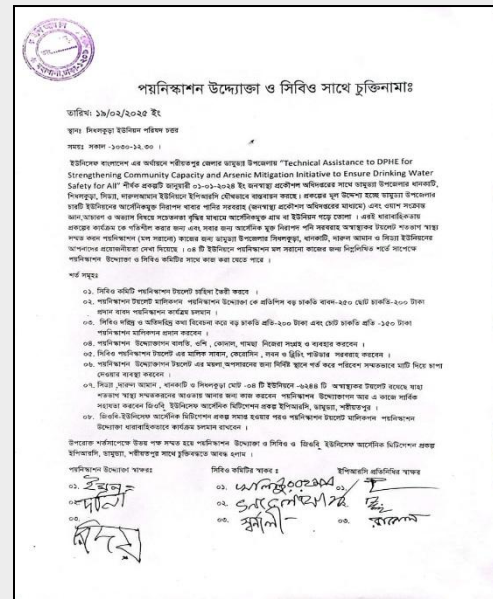
### Innovative Solution: A Tripartite Collaboration

To tackle this multifaceted challenge, EPRC project field team introduced and facilitated an innovative tripartite partnership model involving:

- 13 local sanitation entrepreneurs (toilet material suppliers);
- 12 toilet cleaners;
- 101 Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) representing poor households;

Through a series of multi-stakeholder dialogues and participatory meetings, the partners forged a mutual agreement ensuring shared benefits and community-wide impact. Key Partnership Commitments:

- **Entrepreneurs' contribution:**
  - Reduced prices for materials — Square slab, Triangular slab and each ring sell BDT 50 less
  - Mandatory inclusion of goosenecks/water seal with every slab to ensure hygienic toilet design.
- **Toilet cleaners' commitment:**
  - Reduced cleaning fees —toilet cleaners, in turn, agreed to lower their cleaning fees (large pit and small pit: from BDT 200 to 150) to make services affordable for poor families.
- **Local government enforcement:**  
 The Upazila DPHE and Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) issued official directives prohibiting the sale of ring slabs without goosenecks/water seal. Non-compliance would result in administrative action.



This government-backed enforcement significantly strengthened the accountability of suppliers and encouraged them to contribute proactively to improving sanitation quality.



**Economic and Social Impacts**

- The partnership not only improved sanitation outcomes but also boosted local incomes. Improved Income for Local Entrepreneurs and Workers: toilet material suppliers increased their average monthly income from BDT 14,000–15,000 to BDT 20,000–21,000 due to higher CBO demand. Also, toilet cleaners' monthly income rose from BDT 16,000–17,000 to BDT 23,000–24,000 due to the growing number of assignments.
- 100% Transformation to Hygienic Toilets: All 6,244 previously unhygienic toilets across the four unions were upgraded to hygienic standards, with proper goosenecks and sufficient pit depth and improved structural design.
- Health and Hygiene Improvement: Following the upgrades, all CBO families—including children— adopted better hygiene practices such as regular cleaning, safe child feces disposal,

and consistent handwashing with soap. The incidence of waterborne diseases notably decreased, and communities reported a visibly cleaner, healthier, and safer living environment.

### Key Success Factors

- Tripartite partnership model integrating local entrepreneurs, sanitation workers, and CBOs ensured inclusiveness and sustainability.
- Policy enforcement by the local directives from DPHE and UNO institutionalized the inclusion of goosenecks/water seal in toilet construction.
- Affordability through cost-sharing: reduced pricing and community contributions made hygienic toilets accessible for poor households.
- Community ownership through the involvement of 101 CBOs fostered accountability, local monitoring, and long-term maintenance.

### Lessons Learned

- Local market engagement enhances sustainability: involving private entrepreneurs ensures continuity beyond the project lifecycle.
- Policy enforcement drives quality assurance: local government oversight is crucial for maintaining construction standards.
- Mutual economic incentives motivate both suppliers and service providers to support public health goals.
- Community-based monitoring accelerates change: Empowered CBOs sustain hygiene behavior and infrastructure functionality.

### Conclusion

Together, this partnership proved that clean toilets truly mean healthy lives — and that when communities and local markets work hand in hand, lasting sanitation transformation becomes a reality. CBO members expressed heartfelt gratitude to all partners (EPRC, GoB-UNICEF project team, DPHE & local government authorities)—including local entrepreneurs and sanitation workers—for their cooperation in achieving 100% hygienic sanitation coverage across four unions of Damudya Upazila.

