

Child as a Catalyst for Hygiene Behavior Change: A Case from Shikri Village, Sharsha Upazila, Jashore

Background

Nine-year-old **Md. Sagor Hossain**, from Shikri village in Putkhali Union under Sharsha Upazila, Jashore, once suffered from severe dysentery during early childhood. His condition deteriorated so badly that doctors had to administer painful injections. Although he eventually recovered, the experience left a lasting impression on him.

Sagor’s mother, Ms. Hawa Begum, is a member of a Community-Based Organization (CBO) formed under the GoB–UNICEF project “Strengthening Community Capacity and Arsenic Mitigation Initiatives to Ensure Drinking Water Safety for All,” implemented by EPRC. These CBOs work at the local level to promote safe water supply, hygienic practices, and improved sanitation among rural households.

Health Awareness Journey

Sagor is an attentive and curious student. Alongside his regular schooling, he actively participates in hygiene education sessions conducted at his school by project staff. During one such session, he learned that waterborne diseases—such as diarrhea, dysentery, and cholera—are primarily caused by unhygienic hand wash practices. This realization helped him connect his own childhood illness with the lack of proper hand hygiene and safe water practices at home.



Currently studying in Class Four, Sagor lives with his parents, one elder sister, and one younger brother. His father, a daily wage laborer, struggles to meet the family’s basic needs. Despite their economic hardship and limited literacy, Sagor’s parents were open to learning when he began sharing what he learned about low-cost hand wash device making process, hand hygiene and sanitation. Inspired by project field staff and by the courtyard meetings attended by his mother, Sagor became a bridge for behavior change within his household.

Child-Led Change

Sagor first convinced his mother to buy a covered bucket with a tap for handwashing, similar to those promoted at a low-cost hand wash device through the GoB–UNICEF–EPRC arsenic mitigation project. Although it was a financial challenge, Ms. Hawa Begum managed



to purchase one. Sagor installed the tap himself and ensured that all family members washed their hands with soap before meals and after defecation.

Beyond his household, Sagor regularly encourages his friends and playmates to maintain personal hygiene, particularly handwashing. He explains the importance of cleanliness in simple terms, reinforcing the hygiene messages he learned from school and community sessions.

Family Transformation

Reflecting on the change, Hawa Begum, mother of Md. Sagor Hossain said:

“To be honest, we were never used to proper handwashing before. It is only because of Sagor’s constant reminders and encouragement that our habits changed. Even now, if we forget, he does not let us miss it. Sagor has shown us that every child has a hidden potential to learn and inspire positive change.”

Today, Sagor’s entire family—and even neighboring families—consistently practice proper hand hygiene and have noticed a significant improvement in their overall health. They expressed their gratitude to EPRC and the GoB–UNICEF project for providing the knowledge, motivation, and support that made affordable handwashing devices accessible at the community level, enabling such positive change.



Lessons Learned

- ✓ Children are powerful influencers: Even in poor and semi-literate families, children can be effective catalysts for positive behavioral change.
- ✓ Simple interventions work: Affordable solutions, such as buckets with taps, can effectively promote safe hand hygiene practices at the household level.
- ✓ Knowledge transfer matters: School-based hygiene education, when reinforced through community engagement, creates lasting and sustainable change.