

Empowering Women Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Drinking Water: The Transformative Journey of Dulali Begum

Background

Dulali Begum, a 70-year-old resident of Khaminarbagh village in Gharua Union of Bhanga Upazila, Faridpur District, has lived a life marked by resilience. After the passing of her husband, Dulali faced severe financial hardship. Yet, through perseverance and determination, she managed to support her household—including her elderly mother and three daughters—by operating a small grocery shop in her village.

In 2024, her life took a new turn when she became involved in the GoB-Unicef Arsenic Mitigation Project, implemented by EPRC. Through this initiative, Dulali joined the Community-Based Organization (CBO) in Khaminarbagh and quickly emerged as a proactive member, playing a pivotal role in promoting WASH in her community.

A Turning Point: From Shopkeeper to Water Entrepreneur

Dulali's unwavering commitment caught the attention of project WASH Motivator from EPRC. Recognizing her potential, WASH Motivator encouraged Dulali to expand her grocery shop to include tube well parts and water-related hardware. The goal was both practical and strategic: ensure the local availability of essential water repair supplies while increasing Dulali's income.



Later, Dulali also received caretaker training from the project, equipping her with the skills to understand and explain the basics of tube well maintenance and repair. She realized that with such training, community members could repair their own water sources instead of relying on expensive mechanics from distant markets. Inspired, Dulali began stocking essential tube well items such as seat valves, buckets, nuts, gaskets, band tape, and other small hardware components.

Previously, villagers had to travel to Bhanga town to purchase parts and hire repair services—an expensive and time-consuming task. Repairs were often delayed or left undone, compromising access to safe water. Now, community people thanks to Dulali's expanded shop, families can now obtain the necessary parts locally and restore their arsenic-free water sources much more efficiently.

Driving Change in Her Community

Dulali's shop has evolved into a vital community hub for water hardware—a place where commerce meets community service. With more villagers receiving training through the project, there has been a cultural shift toward self-reliance in maintaining tube wells. Households now take ownership of repairs, purchasing parts directly from Dulali and fixing issues promptly.

This local supply chain has significantly boosted Dulali's income and improved her family's financial well-being. Her shop, once a modest grocery outlet, is now a

symbol of empowerment and resourcefulness. The result: increased access to arsenic-safe water and reduced delays in repair, improving both public health and quality of life.



The WASH Motivator, continues to promote Dulali's shop during household visits, courtyard meetings, and CBO sessions. Meanwhile, project Documentation and Monitoring Officer, has provided valuable business development guidance, reinforcing her role as a trusted local entrepreneur.

- Households in the area now have consistent and local access to tube well parts and water-related supplies within the village.

- More tube wells are being repaired and restored, increasing access to safe drinking water.
- Dulali's household income has grown, improving her family's financial security.
- Arsenic-free water is now more regularly available due to quicker repair turnarounds.
- Dulali is widely recognized and respected as a female entrepreneur and a leader in her community.

Conclusion

Dulali Begum's story is a testament to the power of opportunity, training, and determination. Through a modest yet meaningful expansion of her business, she has not only transformed her own life but also contributed to her community's access to safe, arsenic-free water. Her journey from a struggling widow to a respected water entrepreneur embodies grassroots leadership, resilience, and the transformative potential of women's economic empowerment. Dulali Begum thanks to project team and herself proudly says: *"Empower women — and you start to change society."* Also a local farmer opinion: *"We get everything we need from Dulali Apa's shop—no more trips to Bhangra. If there's a problem with the tube well, she helps us solve it. We no longer make the mistakes we used to."*