



Village Sanitation Centre — The Seed-bed for Sanitation Promotion

Backdrop

Sanitation was largely a neglected issue in Bangladesh in the past. The prime issue emphasized earlier in the sector was ensuring safe water supply while sanitation was secondary preference. Promotion of hygienic sanitation came into focus with the launching of the UN-declared '*International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade*' programme in Bangladesh in 1982 with the emergence of NGO Forum for Drinking Water Supply & Sanitation. From mid-1980s, the Private Producers undertook the initiative towards production of various components for sanitary wares. In the nineties, a Social Mobilization for Sanitation (SocMob) campaign focused more on hygiene and sanitation coverage. Following the SocMob, a growing demand for latrines was identified from social feedbacks. The demand went on so high that some NGOs had to open Village Sanitation Centres and Sub-centres for providing the latrines at the very door-step of the community. Gradually, the Private Producers took advantage of the SocMob programme towards stimulating their growth for a sustainable rural industry for sanitation.

NGO Forum realized that more options should be given to the poor community as far as technology and financial investment are concerned. NGO Forum started running Village Sanitation Centres (VSCs) through its partner NGOs to increase the low-cost hygienic latrine coverage in the rural community. For each VSC, with the production capacity of 100 latrines in a batch, the Forum provided superstructure and equipment facilities worth Tk. 10,000 and an amount of Tk. 50,000 as seed money. The seed money was used as revolving fund, and latrines were sold to the community people at cost price. Different technological options i.e. Water-seal, Hygienic Pit, Twin-pit, San Plat, Off-set, etc were being promoted through the VSCs.

NGO Forum's Village Sanitation Centre

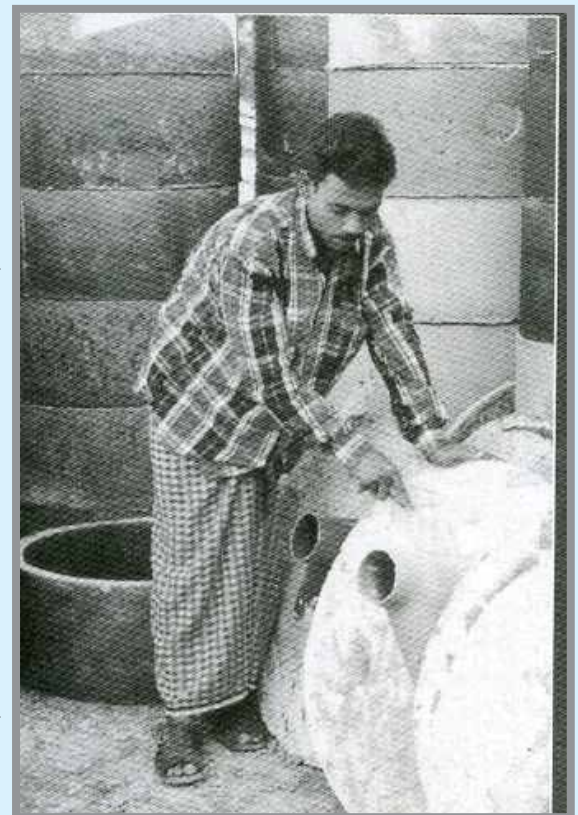
NGO Forum started providing the partner NGOs with Village Sanitation Centre support back in 1991. Later the Private Operators were taken into partnership to run the VSCs. The VSCs are managed and operated solely by the partner NGOs. Mainly the community people after receiving Village Sanitation Training work in these Centres as masons. The Forum only conducts follow-up and monitoring of the VSCs to keep them in right direction. Through commendable progress in motivational, promotional and training activities the sale of the latrines raise significantly. Based on the high demand, some Centres need to run Sub-centres & Mobile Centres for providing the latrines at the door-step of the community. Thus, the people can install sanitary latrines at a very low-cost.



More than a Businessman

"I am contributing in social work within the range of my capacity, it makes me proud and happy to think I am contributing in prevention of diseases for thousands of people", says Nurul Islam as he is busy at his Village Sanitation Centre at Sitakundo. Established back in 1994, gradually with time goods of different kinds alongside good quality of sanitary latrines are now being produced. The expansion, especially the production and sale of a large number of sanitary latrines owes to the intervention of sanitation programme in the area by YPSA, Sitakundo, a local partner NGO of NGO Forum.

Over the time the buyers of the sanitary latrines have been increased and expanded to many villages around the area. Different types of latrine technology have been produced at the VSC based on the demand from the buyers. Nurul Islam says, "I advise my customers to buy water-seal latrines since it is hygienic. I consider it my duty to tell them not to break the water-seal and explain the use of the water-seal". "It's not business alone, I care beyond that. My centre has created scope for expanding business for me with the creation of demand through NGO Forum's Community-managed WatSan Programme. I owe my responsibility to contribute in achieving the goal of the programme," Nurul Islam concludes.



Promoting the Private Producers

The 1st SACOSAN in 2003 proposed for a more proactive role in sanitation sector in the region. In line with this, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) set its National Goal to achieve 100% sanitation coverage. A wide range of activities and actions had been undertaken to materialize the GoB's declaration in due course of time by adoption of increased and rapid rate of progress in the sector. The private sector actors came into the scene and started playing a momentous role alongside the NGOs towards attaining the National Goal. Like others, NGO Forum for Public Health has been extending its support to the Private Entrepreneurs. The supports include financial provision for establishing VSCs in the unserved and hard-to-reach areas along with the capacity building assistance to develop the required level of knowledge and skill for running the VSCs efficiently. Taking the potential role of the partnership with the Private Entrepreneurs into consideration, presently hundreds of Private Producers are actively involved in production and marketing of sanitary products and making millions of people benefited from their services.



Pursuit of Better Life: A Journey with VSC

“Days were so hard; we couldn't manage our daily meal just after sudden death of our father”, said Md. Jahirul Islam, a successful VSC owner of Dhulihar union under Satkhira Sadar upazila, Satkhira. The 7-member family had fallen in the deep uncertainty. Jahirul's younger brothers and sisters almost stopped going to school due to financial crisis.

Finding no other suitable option, Jahirul sold his mother's ornament and managed some money to start business running a Village Sanitation Centre in 2012. But it again appeared to be tough for him to produce quality sanitary products without having any previous knowledge & skills. He came to know that Palli Chetona, a partner organization of NGO Forum was providing loan and training on sanitation business. Following this communication, Jahirul received a 5-day training on running and producing sanitary products. Following the training course in October 2013, he received Tk. 30,000 as a refundable loan, Latrine Production Manual and one Ring-mould Set from NGO Forum. Jahirul shares, “I started producing low-cost sanitary products maintaining quality with the help of my younger brothers. Our products received a good reputation soon across the village and other neighboring areas of the Union. It's our happiness that our mother is no more working in fields as day labor to feed her children.”

Many local development organizations and the Dhulihar Union Parishad are regularly placing their demand to Jahirul's VSC based on its quality products. Jahirul along with his brother Md. Ruhul Kuddus has also extended the business further using their enhanced skills. Their VSC is now producing and selling pipe, pillar, plastic pan, syphoon, water-seal, Bandhu Chula (environment-friendly stove), alongside different types of sanitary products. The capital of the VSC now stands at around Tk. 60,000. Jahirul's family profits nearly Tk. 15,000 per month from the VSC which provides the key support to continue education of his younger two brothers and three sisters. Jahirul is also presently enrolled into the college for post graduation degree. His younger brother Md. Ruhul Kuddus is studying in second year of honors alongside working with him in the VSC. They have built a 2-room brick-house as a secured shelter of the family.



Owning A VSC – Winning the Poverty

Poor mason Md. Shamsul Alam living in Nezampur Bazar area of Nezampur union under Nachole, Chapai Nawabganj now runs his business across the union and beyond. Starting with a minimal investment of Tk. 10,000 his capital now stands at Tk. 150,000 owning two centres. Alam's business as a private VSC owner began with manufacturing ring-slabs but did not stop there. The tripartite partnership among NGO Forum, ASSEDO and Md. Shamsul Alam under the guidance of Nezampur UP has helped the VSC come up with inventive ideas and expand the business in new areas. His business has flourished getting Tk. 30,000 and training services from NGO Form. Shamsul Alam is now producing and selling 'Bandhu Chula' – an increasingly popular environment-friendly stove, self-initiated 3-layer reservoir (RWHS), various kinds of pipe, ventilator, cemented home decors, etc. Alam's VSC is also playing an enthusiastic role in promoting sanitation in the area.



Conclusion

Imparting training to the masons on low-cost hygienic latrine production to ensure people's easy access to sanitation facilities with an affordable price has proven essential while the masons are involved in latrine production in NGO-run VSCs or working as private producers. The technical skill development of masons has been considered as integral part of NGO Forum's sanitation promotion to ensure access of people to quality hardware support, and in turn to assist the poor masons earning through running the Village Sanitation Centre.



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Photography: Joseph Halder, Abul Kalam Raja, Graphic Design: Rokibul Hasan

Printed by: Dana Printers Ltd.



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