Success Tale of Private Producers
Sanitation was largely a neglected issue in Bangladesh in the past. This is more true considering the fact that Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world. The prime issue emphasized earlier in the sector was ensuring safe water supply while sanitation was the secondary preference. In 1990, a Social Mobilization (SocMob) campaign was undertaken to focus more attention towards hygiene and sanitation with a view to improving the field situation. Following the SocMob, a growing demand for latrines was identified from social feedbacks.

Towards the beginning of the present century the “Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)” were identified to uplift the developing countries. The goal is to attain the MDG targets within a period of 25 years as a sustainable growth initiative. The sustainable growth concept includes safe drinking water, hygiene and sanitation among other issues. The developing countries in South Asia decided to adopt special measures to boost up the MDGs in the region. This was agreed in all conferences through the South Asian Conference for Sanitation (SACOSAN) Declarations.

The conferences have proposed for a more proactive role in sanitation sector by the governments in the region. In line with this concept the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) proclaimed that Bangladesh would succeed in achieving 100% sanitation coverage by 2013. A wide range of activities and action plans have been undertaken to materialize the GoB’s declaration in due course of time by adoption of increased and rapid rate of development in the sector. In this respect, the private sector actors have been playing a momentous role towards attaining the target fixed by the GoB. NGO Forum for Drinking Water Supply & Sanitation (NGO Forum), one of the leading NGOs working in the field of water and sanitation in Bangladesh, has been extending technical and financial support to the private sector i.e. the Private Producers. The supports include financial provision for establishing Village Sanitation Centres (VSCs) in the un-served and hard-to-reach areas along with the capacity building assistance to develop the required level of knowledge and skill for running the VSCs proficiently. Taking into consideration the potential role of the Private Producers, NGO Forum has been increasing its partnership with the Private Producers and presently 500 Private Producers are being actively involved in production and marketing of sanitary latrines making millions of people benefited from their services. Through this document, an attempt has been made to reflect on the Private Producers, their evolution and success stories.
Private Producers and their Evolution

Around thirty years back the Private Producers were not involved in sanitation sector. However in the present day context, based on the needs that have grown over the years, the Private Producers have come forward to this field. They include those sections of small-scale investors who are involved in producing sanitary ware and accessories on their own investment and initiatives. They include small time masons, well-to-do investors, semi-educated youths and businessmen who are able to utilize their investment for boosting the sector as demand for such commodity has come up with time.

During 1970s DPHE/UNICEF initiated the first step towards the establishment of VSCs. These centres manufactured various components of sanitary ware like rings, slabs, etc for “free distribution” among the rural people. Slowly the initiative grew popular in the rural settings and human resources were also developed elsewhere for production of sanitary wares.

In essence, from mid-1980s the Private Producers undertook the major initiative towards production of various components for sanitary wares. Gradually, they took advantage of the SocMob programme towards stimulating their growth for a sustainable rural industry for sanitation. Presently 90% of the sanitary wares are being produced by the Private Producers which have wide acceptability to the rural people. Based upon their findings the NGOs have come forward with their possible resources in extending support to the poor rural individuals who have enthusiasm and potential to contribute in the sanitation promotion. They are guiding the Private Producers to acquire a widespread publicity and promotion schemes to create market for selling their products.

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Gradually, this grew momentum and the private sector supported by NGOs has taken over the effort.
Shopon’s Venture Liberates his Poverty

Shopon Kumar Sarkar lives in the Mukundapur village under Bolli union of Satkhira district. This youth has been operating his own business through a VSC since 2001. He established his VSC with interest free fund from NGO Forum and paid back his loan in due time. This youth has been a very successful one; he proved the worth for the scheme adopted by NGO Forum. He not only paid back the amount on time but also established his own construction business with the technical know-how and background that he acquired from NGO Forum’s efforts. Earlier he used to be a mason and provided all masonry supports required by NGO Forum’s local efforts. He has carefully capitalized the training skills which gradually enhanced his capacities in developing a construction business of his own. With the passing days Shopon’s capacities were identified and gradually he has earned a wide reputation as a contractor within his locality.

Ever since the operation of the VSC started, Shopon has been receiving contracts for producing rings and slabs from different corners like the local administration, NGOs and the community people. All these have opened up new avenues for him as a stable supplier and manufacturer of sanitary wares. It has also paved his credibility as a reputed and reliable contractor of large GoB/NGO works by consolidating his position. He acknowledges with gratitude that the trade has provided him with a sound earning and stability in the society. It has also enabled to rid of his poverty stricken state and endowed him with a reputed livelihood. Apart from manufacturing sanitary wares Shopon is also presently engaged in fabrication of various alternative safe water technologies such as Pond Sand Filter, Arsenic & Iron Removal Plant, etc on behalf of NGO Forum in the vicinity.

Shopon is a glorious tale of sanitation promotion efforts. This story is not only an inspiration for others but also a unique and classic example of a successful entrepreneurship. It has also contributed to the widespread recognition of fruitfulness of the sanitation programme.
Saleha’s Pathway to Empowerment

This is another case in the WatSan sector. Like other projects this one is also in line with the priority, set for women beneficiaries in order to establish that they are also capable of working independently. Saleha Begum, a woman entrepreneur of Palash village in Narshingdi district, runs a private VSC of her own. She started the VSC taking loan of Tk. 10,000 under NGO Forum-supported programme and already paid back her borrowed amount. Rings and slabs are only produced in her VSC. Her husband and the only son-in-law are also engaged with her in running the centre.

Saleha’s husband is a vegetable farmer and the sale price of vegetables was the main source of earning for their family before her engagement with the VSC operation. She is now able to contribute in meeting her family expenditures from the VSC income. Besides, she is playing the role of a motivator by making people aware on the benefits of using sanitary latrines in hygienic way which she has learned from the training sessions organized by NGO Forum.

Saleha Begum now feels proud of herself that she can also earn and contribute in her family along with her husband. She has renovated her house from her own earning; bought a colour television and a video CD player in which she watches movies in the leisurely afternoons with her family members. At this instant, Saleha considers herself empowered within the socio-economic vulnerability context in the society. She now plays equal role in taking decisions in her family which is also contributing in enhancing the level of her self-confidence. Saleha opines that she has been immensely benefited from the NGO Forum-supported sanitation programme which has gifted a meaningful livelihood to her.
Shaheb Ali is No Longer a Liability for the Society

Resides in the Talma Bazar village under Nagarkanda upazila of Faridpur district, Shaheb Ali is a VSC operator who initiated working at the centre to acquire training and proficiency as a mason. He had a very difficult past as an illiterate destitute and therefore he started working wholeheartedly at a VSC supported by NGO Forum. Within a short period he acquired the skills of art and technology of producing sanitary wares and associated infrastructures. He also mastered the art of business attitudes and ventured for a funding support from NGO Forum. With the financial arrangement assured and fund disbursed through the Regional Office of NGO Forum, he initiated his own operation. His skills, skills, business acumen, and enterprise have assisted him gaining a control over the local market in a short span of time. Afterward his offers were accepted by the local inhabitants and this has lead him becoming popular among them.

Shaheb Ali is a very proactive and positive minded person with a clear vision. Initially a destitute without any ends, his initiatives opened up a new prospective chapter in his life. He is no longer a liability to the society, rather NGO Forum and its supported VSC have added a new dimension to his latent skills. With optimism he comments that the aspirations of the growth of the local market have opened up new business for his initiatives. He has not only taken the advantages of the scope arranged through the VSC by NGO Forum but also has trained an entire breed of supporting staff that assist him in his efforts.

Shaheb Ali’s tale is a wonderful story of opportunity, a sequence in which the WatSan sector has opened up a new dimension of livelihood in the country side of Bangladesh. It has not only induced people to improve their living standard by adopting safe sanitation but has also developed marketing potentials. It has made a change in the lifestyle of people as a whole. Shaheb Ali’s tale is a distinct example in the pro-poor intervention strategy which is being adopted as a national goal from both economic point of view and attaining improved standard of living.