



Water+: Annual Innovation in Sanitation Award

World Toilet Day 2021

In commemoration of World Toilet Day 2021, CARE's Water+ team would like to award our 3rd annual Innovation in Sanitation Award to **CARE Bangladesh, in concert with iDE**, to recognize their groundbreaking work on human-centered design and market-based sanitation in Northern Bangladesh.

Quick Snapshot

CARE in Bangladesh: CARE has supported development and humanitarian programming in Bangladesh for 65+ years, with a programmatic and geographic focus on amplifying the voices of the poor and marginalized. In FY21, CARE Bangladesh reached 7.71 million Bangladeshis across 53 projects that spanned food security, livelihoods, resilience, WASH, gender, equity, and social inclusion.

iDE in Bangladesh: iDE has supported market-based WASH efforts in Southeast Asia since 2002, scaling globally from original programming in Vietnam. The success of iDE's model is grounded in market-principles, and relies on simultaneous engagement of market actors, NGOs, and government WASH stakeholders.

Team: SHOUHARDO's sanitation strategy was created through a collaborative effort with CARE, iDE, USAID/BHA, and the USAID Pro-WASH activity. Those we list here represent a small subset of the dedicated staff who contributed to the results we describe here:

Afrhill Rances, CARE SHOUHARDO Deputy Chief of Party
 Riazur Rahman, CARE WASH Senior Technical Coordinator
 Zinat Afroze, CARE KML Team Leader
 Masud Rana, iDE SHOUHARDO Sanitation Project Manager
 Saroja Thapa, iDE Bangladesh Associate Director of Programs

Project Overview: SHOUHARDO III Resilience and Food Security Activity (RFSA)

Dates: 2014 - 2022

Project Areas: 8 districts (23 upazillas) of Northern Bangladesh

Donors: USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance; Government of Bangladesh

Budget: \$70.9M

Partners: CARE; iDE; SKS; MSKA; ESDO; NDP; POPI; DAM; RIMES

Impact to Date: 52,000 Bangladeshis gained improved sanitation access; 13,000+ latrines sold in 10 months of active sales; 60 of the 85 sales agents are women

Context and Approach

CARE's programming in the Chars and Haors of Northern Bangladesh addresses food insecurity and poverty¹ through integrated nutrition, livelihoods, disaster preparedness, WASH, and gender empowerment in poor and extreme poor (PEP) rural communities. The Chars and Haors are remote, low-lying areas and islands that are in a constant state of formation and erosion—highly vulnerable to recurrent flooding, climatic shocks, climate change, and other hazards. SHOUHARDO aims to improve WASH infrastructure and services in PEP communities, and through a partnership with iDE that was forged in 2018, they jointly tackle water supply and governance, water quality surveillance and remediation, and demand- and supply-side interventions for sanitation and hygiene. The sanitation strategy, co-developed by CARE, iDE, USAID/BHA, and Pro-WASH, reflected the unique challenges of working in the Chars and Haors—the team applied a sequence of human-centered design (HCD) and exploratory, field research to develop, pilot, and ultimately scale a market-based approach to sanitation and hygiene. The team is focused on converting traditional, direct delivery channels into **equitable and self-sustaining market approaches that work to strengthen existing systems and entrepreneurial capacities**.

Below we feature an interview with the CARE Bangladesh and iDE team, including Masud Rana (iDE), Saroja Thapa (iDE), Riazur Rahman (CARE), Zinat Afroze (CARE), and Marc Nosbach (CARE)—who have been part of the team supporting SHOUHARDO and other sanitation efforts in Bangladesh for over 20 years. [Interview notes have been compiled and edited for brevity].

Interview: CARE Bangladesh and iDE Sanitation Team

At the start of SHOUHARDO in 2014, what was the state of sanitation products and services in the Chars and Haors? Why was sanitation still a challenge?

Significant, but uneven progress: Bangladesh has achieved substantial gains in sanitation access over the last 20 years, and by 2015, only 1% of the population was practicing open defecation. Despite these achievements, some areas—like the Chars and Haors—remain stubbornly hard to reach, due to factors like remoteness, affordability, and low awareness. This is compounded by the impacts of recurring flooding in the Chars and Haors and the absence of 'flood resilient' sanitation solutions for the context.

These conditions, combined with the high levels of poverty, also contributed to challenging sanitation, market and supply conditions: (1) latrines were largely unimproved—lacking in hygienic water seals, improved features like flooring or roofing, and often discharging into the surrounding water bodies; (2) households deprioritized latrines investments; (3) the market ecosystem was fragmented and fragile, with very weak linkages between retailers, sanitation entrepreneurs, and consumers; and (4) the sanitation market was poorly integrated and inefficient, which also drove up the price of products.

What were some of the main challenges when trying to change mindsets and to shift programmatic approaches toward market-based solutions for sanitation?

On the demand side, there were initial challenges with households and communities deprioritizing latrine investments because of: (1) poverty and purchasing power—it was a challenge to sell to the large fraction of PEP households, and who often need to prioritize other basic services; (2) an expectation of subsidies and donor/government support for WASH services suppressed demand; and (3) the cyclic nature of flooding and rebuilding on the Chars and Haors increases maintenance costs and complexity.

¹ SHOUHARDO is a USAID/BHA (formerly Food for Peace) Resilience Food Security Activity (RFSa): <https://www.usaid.gov/humanitarian-assistance/bha-rfsa>

On the supply side, there was a need to (1) identify latrine producers who have entrepreneurial skills and are motivated to produce quality products for consumers; (2) to think carefully about incentive structures and methods to support the latrine producers to expand their business and to adapt to the needs of clients; and (3) to integrate promotional ‘nudges’ into the product line that spurred additional demand.

On the partner side, there were initial challenges recruiting project staff at the union level who were willing to work in the remote Char context and who were familiar with market systems. To counter this, iDE used a ‘mixed team’ approach to onboarding and training that blended new and existing staff to help facilitate transfer of market systems knowledge and terminology.

This is a new partnership for CARE and iDE—can you give an example of one thing you have each learned from one another and will take away into future programming?

CARE: SHOUHARDO III has learned and adapted to reflect the importance of both demand and supply side approaches to rapidly develop and scale a ‘last mile’ approach to MBS in Bangladesh. In addition, we have deepened our understanding of the need for a supportive enabling environment to ensure the sustainability of service provider models—like developing a smart subsidy model and expanding our advocacy with local authorities to ensure that WASH services are accessible to the poor and ultra poor.

iDE: Reflecting on prior experiences with other donors or primes, working as a sub to CARE offered a level of flexibility that was critical to quickly adapting and pivoting the MBS approaches, in response to both challenging field conditions and to COVID-19 lockdowns—we were able to quickly shift and use approaches like mobile campaigns, Youth Ambassadors, and peer-to-peer sessions.

Both CARE and iDE: Our work has also demonstrated the importance of a multi-sectoral, livelihoods-focused program that increases household incomes as a precursor to MBS approaches. iDE had previously piloted MBS in the Chars but encountered challenges with affordability and purchasing power. In contrast, CARE’s ongoing livelihoods and demand creation activities had helped to prime the environment for MBS in 2019— households understood the importance of sanitation **and** were able to afford the products and services being marketed.



What is something you are most proud of from the SHOUHARDO and SWIRL sanitation approach and results?

Our first ‘win’ was the strengthening of the nascent market ecosystem in the Chars and Haors—we have recruited and trained 70+ latrine producers, who in turn have recruited 85 sales agents, 60 of whom are women. And after only 10 months of active field sales, they have achieved dramatic sanitation results—selling more than 13,000 latrines to date, and results are expected to continue through and after project close-out in September 2022.

Our second ‘win’ was the integration of behavioral ‘nudges’ into our products, like painting slabs yellow and adding ridges to the footrests that increase visibility and remind users to wear shoes.

Finally, our third ‘win’ was the adapted approach we used to ensure that community-level efforts could continue in the face of COVID-19 and lockdowns—we started working through Youth ambassadors in lieu of schools, billboard campaigns in lieu of face-to-face SBC, and peer-to-peer counseling in lieu of school WASH groups.

How can (or should) large organizations think more thoughtfully about markets- and finance-centered approaches to development?

‘More is better’ when it comes to contextualizing the approach for poor and ultra-poor populations: We need to avoid blanket approaches and instead provide space and time to deeply understand the ‘whys’ and ‘hows’, like through human centered design approaches. These up-front investments result in targeted interventions that have a higher probability of success, better outcomes, and more cost-effective development.

Linking entrepreneurs to the right types of support: It’s important to identify and support entrepreneurs with the right types of support and capacity building—like linking them to the private sector and helping them to access financing to jump-start their business. The energy and willingness-to-learn in many youths have shown that they are a promising audience for this type of approach.

Balancing ‘public good’ and ‘private good’: It’s important to test the myth that market-based approaches conflict with public goods or services. When designed purposefully, they are not mutually exclusive. We often see that blanket or quick subsidies lead to market distortions and undermine nascent markets. Organizations like CARE and iDE have demonstrated that there is a better way to incentivize private sector engagement in development, while ensuring that we leave no one behind.

Expanding financial access and inclusion approaches: Addressing the supply side of WASH access also means addressing access to finance and growth capital for service providers, entrepreneurs, and all those working to build out a financially viable model. The recent growth of social impact investments and blended finance approaches present a range of opportunities and approaches that deserve to be explored.

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Congratulations to the CARE Bangladesh and iDE teams!

For more information, please contact:

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