



START FUND  
BANGLADESH

START NETWORK

# STORIES OF FLOOD RESPONSE AND RECOVERY FROM SUNAMGANJ



# STORIES OF FLOOD RESPONSE AND RECOVERY FROM SUNAMGANJ

## PUBLISHED BY

Start Fund Bangladesh, 2023

## WITH SUPPORT FROM

The UK Government  
The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Center for Disaster Philanthropy (CDP)

## SPECIAL THANKS TO

Ali Ahsan, Start Fund Bangladesh  
Marwa Tasnim, Start Fund Bangladesh  
Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS)

## PRODUCTION

RedOrange Communications

## COORDINATOR

Umayer Abu Omar

## CONTENT

Nujhat Jahan Khan

## DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Mahmud Haider

## PHOTOGRAPHY

S. M. Mahfuzul Islam

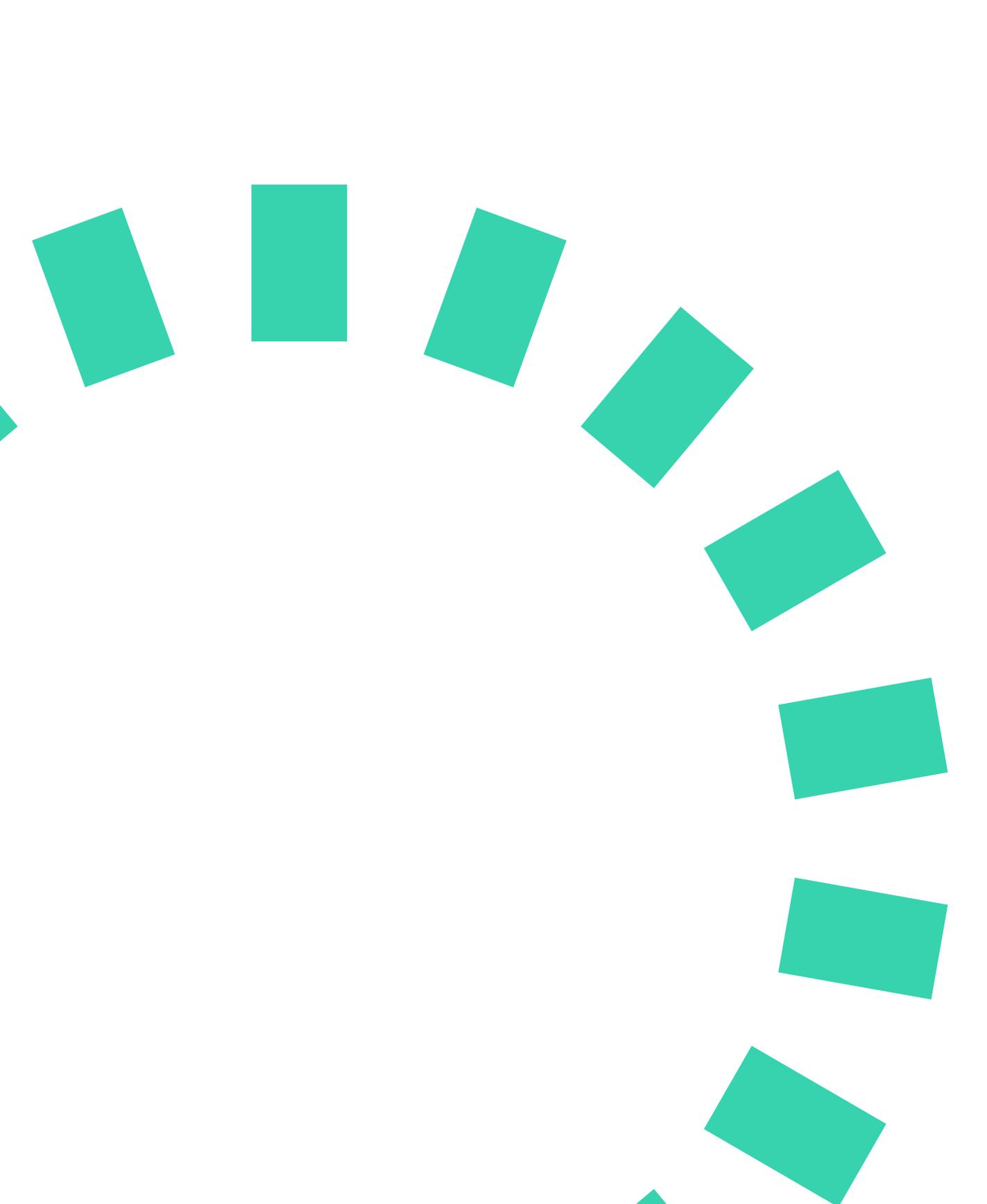
© 2023 Start Fund Bangladesh. All rights reserved.



# CONTENTS

Introduction	7
Dedicated from dawn to dusk	8
The pond behind his house	10
Making profit with ducks	12
Repaired tubewell, renewed hope	14
Our land, our labour	16
Women and men at work	18
A joint effort for road repair	20
A builder's insight	21
Improved latrines, improved sanitation	22
From despair to hope	24
Paan in the haors	26
From hopelessness to happiness	28
Preparing for the next crisis	30





# INTRODUCTION

In May 2022, the northeastern part of Bangladesh faced torrential flash flooding due to heavy rainfall. A second wave of flash flood due to heavy rainfall occurred in June 2022. Sylhet, Sunamganj and Netrokona were some of the worst affected districts. The Humanitarian Response Plan for Flash Flood 2022 found that among 7.2 million people affected by the flash floods in north-eastern Bangladesh, more than 50% of the people were still in need of humanitarian support.

The Start Fund targeted Sunamganj to award Rapid Response and Early Recovery projects in response to four concurrent alerts, with GBP 1.5 approximately funding from the UK Government and Center for Disaster Philanthropy (CDP). The support packages included distribution of multi-purpose cash grants, WASH items, repairing and maintenance, distribution of shelter and non-food items, construction of roads and bridges, DRR (Disaster Risk Reduction) activities, and distribution of agro-products to the affected communities. The Start Fund Bangladesh also provided small scale community restoration and livelihood support for enhancing resilience and restoring safety, dignity and resilience of the most vulnerable targeted population in Sunamganj through Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS) with the funding from the UK Government and CDP.

## **ABOUT START FUND BANGLADESH**

Start Fund Bangladesh is a civil society managed, pooled fund mechanism for anticipation and emergency response to humanitarian crises that are small to medium scale and thus often underfunded. Its aim is to protect lives, livelihoods and dignity through a pre-positioned fund which is localised, and membership driven, as well as accountable to communities affected by humanitarian crises. The fund is a platform of 47 organisations operating in Bangladesh, guided by its ambition to bring decision-making closer to crisis-affected populations and civil-society agencies at country-level.

# DEDICATED FROM DAWN TO DUSK

Jashim Miya is a young farmer from Tahirpur, Sunamganj, who works hard to provide for his mother. His mother is over 60 years old. After his father passed away recently, Jashim and his mother are the only two members in the family. Last year, they were affected by the worst flood that happened in Sunamganj in several decades. His house was submerged under the flood water which measured up to his waist. With nowhere to go, he built a platform with bricks for his family to survive during the flood. Their days were spent in hunger and sickness. They depended on donation packages for food and clean water, and skipped meals to make sure they did not run out of stocked grains.



🕒 Jashim's mother plays a vital role in taking care of his sheep



🕒 Jashim's mother keeps a close eye on the sheep, always alert to their needs

After the flood water receded, there was a disruption in employment opportunities due to the economic shock caused by the flood. Finding a source of income was a challenging task for Jashim. In such a hopeless situation, the Start Fund came forward to support struggling families with an income opportunity. This initiative encouraged affected families to voice their own needs and state the best way the Start Fund could support them. Jashim requested to receive three sheep, as they are easy and



🕒 Together, Jashim and his mother tend to the sheep with steadfast commitment

inexpensive to maintain. He received the sheep which he looks after along with his mother. "I put all my efforts into taking care of the sheep like my own children. I am grateful to the Start Fund for giving us a means that would support us in the long term." Having received two females and one male, Jashim hopes to own a sheep farm soon in the future.



🕒 Jashim, a young farmer, works hard to provide for his mother



## THE POND BEHIND HIS HOUSE

Rana Talukdar, a resident of the Jamalganj upazila at Sunamganj, just finished paying off a large family debt when last year's flood arrived. He lives with his mother and elderly father. When his home was submerged in water, he built raised brick platforms in the house to survive the floods. He had no savings to spend on food and medicine, and depended on stocked grains and aid to meet his family's hunger needs. Their only access to water was the flood water which they were compelled to drink because clean water was not available. This led to his family members suffering from illnesses like dysentery and diarrhoea. "In crisis situations, you can't imagine what lengths we have to go through to survive one more day!" said Rana.

© Rana Talukdar received 25 ducks to help him improve his economic status

When the flood water receded after a few weeks, Rana faced new challenges. The little money that he had was spent on his parents' medical expenses. Day by day, his financial struggles didn't seem to end as he faced failure in finding a long-term source of income. Observing his needy situation, the Start Fund reached out to him to hear how he would like to receive income-generating support. Rana has a small pond behind his home. Start Fund's offer was a perfect opportunity for him to request ducks as an income generating source which let him put his pond to full use.

Today, Rana owns 25 ducks. A few of them recently started to lay eggs, which he sells at Tk 15 per piece. "After selling the first few eggs, I plan to breed these ducks until I fulfil a target of 100 ducks," said an optimistic Rana as he plans for the future. A large number of ducks will promise an increased profit that he will use to improve his economic status.



© Start Fund gave Rana the perfect opportunity to put his pond in use



© Rana hopes to breed 100 ducks, which will increase his profits

# MAKING PROFIT WITH DUCKS

Living on the haors, Rasheda and her family are dependent on nature for their day to day life and livelihood. Her husband, a fish farmer, catches fish to make a living. But last year's flood disrupted his livelihood, leaving him without an income for months. Their house submerged and they took shelter inside a motor boat, where three more families shared the boat with them. They drained their savings to pay the boat rent and buy food. After the flood, they spent some more money to repair their home.



🕒 Rasheda received 30 ducks to help her generate a sustainable income



🕒 The ducks began to lay eggs, which Rasheda sells to her neighbours

When Rasheda was struggling to make ends meet, the Start Fund reached out to her to give her a jumpstart for getting back on her feet. She was selected after a close consultation with community and ward members. Soon after the flood, she received 30 ducks to help her generate a sustainable source of income. "The Start fund arrived with support just in time. My ducks have recently begun to lay eggs which I sell to my neighbours and earn money," said Rasheda.

# REPAIRED TUBEWELL, RENEWED HOPE

The tubewell at Chiksha Para in the upazila of Jamalganj, Sunamganj, has been serving a neighbourhood of about twelve families for the last fourteen years. This was their only source of clean drinking water. However, last year's flood, which was the most devastating flood in many decades, destroyed this neighbourhood's only tubewell. During the flood, the only solution to quench their thirst was to collect the flood water in a container, wait for the sediment to settle, and then drink that water. This led the people to suffer from dysentery, which was only one of the many health sufferings the floods brought. When the water receded, the women showed resilience by travelling long distances to collect clean drinking water. "We had to carry heavy pots of water over long distances," said Shukla Talukdar, a resident at Chiksha Para. After the flood, it was difficult for the neighbourhood to arrange money for repairing the tubewell.

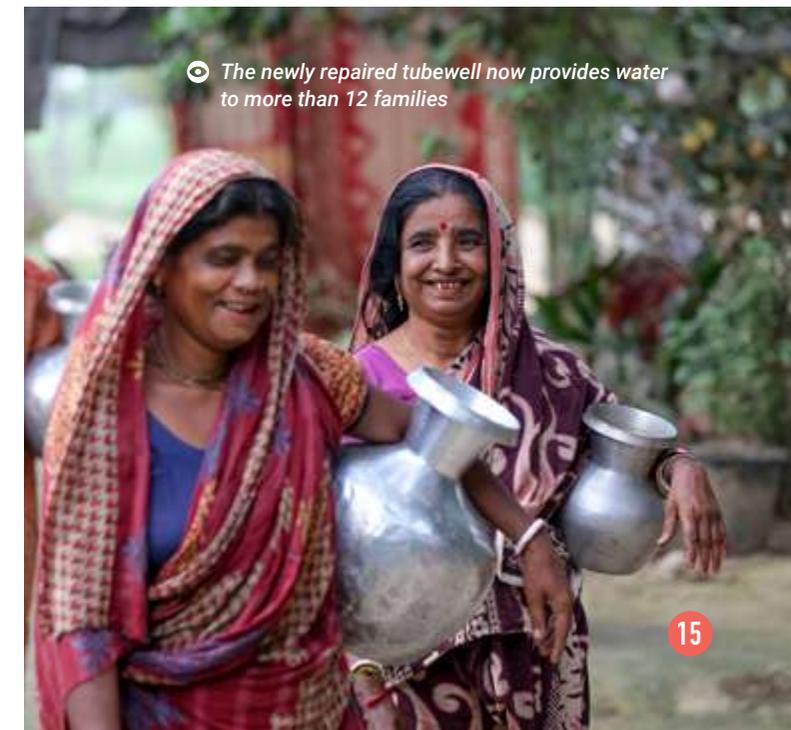


🕒 Women at Chiksha Para walked long distances to collect water when the tubewell was damaged



The Start Fund, with its Early Recovery Project, came to their rescue by offering to repair the tubewell within a short span of time. Not only that, it was repaired to make it resistant against floods in the future by building a high water-resistant platform. "The Start Fund repaired the tubewell so quickly! We thought we would have to wait for many more months before we can start collecting water from our own neighbourhood again, like we used to do before the flood arrived," said Rani Das, a resident at Chiksha Para.

The scenario was similar in other areas of Sunamganj. After floods damaged the tubewells, communities were unable to arrange money for repair. The Start Fund supported their resilience by repairing 60 partially and fully damaged tubewells in Sunamganj to make them flood resistant. With this support, communities across the flood affected areas were able to resume back to their normal lives. This shows that with a little bit of support, even in the most challenging of times, resilience and determination can help to overcome the toughest of obstacles.



🕒 The newly repaired tubewell now provides water to more than 12 families

# OUR LAND, OUR LABOUR

Ardad Ali owns a small piece of land right next to the haors of Sunamganj. His home overlooks miles and miles of greenery in winters, and in monsoon, this greenery is replaced with water. His land is home to about five families. Some stayed in their homes during the floods, and some took shelter in schools. In last year's devastating floods, these homes were submerged in water. Many people relocated to shelters. Those who stayed at home somehow managed to spend their days by building elevated brick platforms.

Ardad's land was most vulnerable when compared to others, because it was located closest to the 'haor.' After witnessing his land's vulnerability, and after consulting with the ward and community members, the Start Fund supported him for protecting his land against afal, a local term used to describe large destructive waves created by high tides. This technique, known as afal protection, involves tightly placing bags containing a mixture of cement and soil around a piece of elevated land. It involves dedicated labour work. This technique provides small scale protection against the destructive waves (afal) by weakening them, and is eco-friendly.



☉ Afal protection involves tightly placing bags containing a mixture of cement and soil around a piece of elevated land. Day labourers were employed from the local community, and were paid fairly for their time and labour

This intervention's uniqueness was the intense involvement of the local community in building the afal protection for their own land. After the floods, the residents of Sunamganj were struggling to find work. At this moment, they proposed to the Start Fund of building the afal protection themselves for some cash. The Start Fund quickly agreed to their proposal, as it provided an employment opportunity for the residents, and solved the problem of protecting their land. Day labourers were employed from local communities, and were paid fairly for their time and labour. Five labourers invested five days of their time to protect their land against afal waves, and received a total Tk 2500 each.



☉ After suffering from last year's devastating floods, the children are back at home playing together

"Without Start Fund's support, we would have to skip our meals to arrange money for building this protection. We already spent our savings to repair the homes," said a grateful Ardad Ali who supervised the entire work from its start to finish. Rashed Ullah, one of the labourers who built the protection, added, "By giving us employment, Start Fund gave us the opportunity to earn money with dignity when we were in such a vulnerable situation right after the floods." He also added that this solution was temporary, and will last no longer than a year or two after which their land will be at risk again. He requested the Start Fund to provide a permanent solution so that their land can be protected in the long term.

# WOMEN AND MEN AT WORK

On an elevated land overlooking the haor at Tahirpur, Sunamganj, a community of about eight families live in tin huts. Men from this community are involved with day labour, farming and small businesses. The women work at their homes, doing chores and looking after their children. Their daily lives were disrupted last year when their houses submerged in one of the most devastating floods that devoured North Eastern Bangladesh in 2022.

Abul Kamal owns a small motor parts business. The flood drowned his shop and took away a major portion of his goods, leaving his business in jeopardy. He is still struggling to recover from his losses, but is thankful for the support that the Start Fund provided for protecting



The women at this neighbourhood were proud to break gender stereotypes by doing labour work for the first time in their lives



The afal protection technique provides small scale protection against the destructive waves by weakening them, and is eco-friendly.

the land where his house stands. Otherwise, he would have to sell the remains of his shop to arrange money, leaving his future source of income uncertain.

The news of Start Fund's financial support for providing materials and labour wages to the community came like a ray of hope. With this motivation, the men and women of the community worked together digging earth, filling bags and placing them tightly around their land. These bags will obstruct the afal, or large destructive waves caused by the high tides. The labour was intensive, and the women claimed that this is the first time they did any kind of labour work, previously believing that this was only reserved for men. They were proud to break

the gender stereotypes, and thanked the Start Fund for paying men and women equally. Total 17 people were involved for 5 days, and each worker received Tk 500 per day for their time and labour.

"Desperate to find some work after the flood, when we heard that we will get paid for protecting our land, we found motivation," said Musammad Shazada Begum.

The afal protection will keep their land and homes safe for the next two years. "We are thankful for this intervention, but at the same time, we recommend that a permanent solution be provided. We will be forever grateful if we get a permanent or long-term solution."

# A JOINT EFFORT FOR ROAD REPAIR

The Sunamganj floods of 2022 disrupted millions of lives and livelihoods, leaving families without a source of income for days to come. By the time flood water receded, families had already exhausted their savings on medical expenses, home repair and other urgent needs. Things were made worse when people found no earning opportunities. The aftermath of the floods affected the labour market, leaving people unemployed in a place where the majority of the population work as farmers and day labourers.

The Start Fund's local member, CNRS (Center for Natural Resource Studies) consulted with communities to discuss how they may assist them in recovering after the flood. The community members suggested that nothing is more dignified than offering earning opportunities to the local communities. Further discussions brought forward the need for a road to connect a paddy field with the highway.

Based on this consultation with the community, the Start Fund introduced its Cash for Work initiative. This supported the flood affected people by involving them in community recovery activities and paying them for their time and effort. 30 people were selected via community consultations to build a road that is now used to



*This road is used to transport thousands of tonnes of paddy from the field*

transport thousands of tonnes of paddy from the fields, making lives of the farmers easier. Each worker received Tk 2500 after five days of intensive labour.

The local government provided a financial contribution by funding a supporting wall to ensure the sustainability of the road to protect it against upcoming floods. "The Union Parishad agreed to fund this wall because this road provided huge benefits to the farmers working hard to transport the paddy," said Yahiya Sazzad, Site Officer, CNRS.



*A supporting wall was built with financial support from the Union Parishad*

Muhammad Azizur Rahman is a father of two. He provides for his family by working as a farmer and labourer. He was one of the 7.2 million people affected by Sunamganj's most devastating flood in many decades. During the flood, he took shelter at a relative's house. "There was no end to our sufferings. My children were suffering from fever and diarrhoea. I had to pay for their medicines," said Aziz as he recalled how his family survived in the flood. When he returned home, he spent his savings on home repairs. He desperately looked for work everyday, but to no avail.

When the Start Fund reached out to the community labourers, Aziz breathed a sigh of relief. "This opportunity offered us a dignified way to earn money. I was able to buy some nutritious food for my children with my earning," said Aziz. He, along with 10 labourers built a road that connected the paddy fields to Sunamganj's highway. They worked for 10 days, and each labourer received Tk 500 per day. Not only was this an earning opportunity for Aziz right after a calamity, but he felt proud to build a road that would benefit him and his community in the long term.

## A BUILDER'S INSIGHT



*Muhammad Azizur Rahman is one of the ten recipients of Start Fund's 'Cash for Work' initiative*

# IMPROVED LATRINES, IMPROVED SANITATION

When the district of Sunamganj was submerged in one of the most devastating floods in decades, one of the major challenges was having access to latrines. "During calamities like floods, there is no scope to maintain privacy or hygiene. We were trapped in our homes, and we had no option apart from defecating openly in the flood water," said Salma Begum, a resident of Jamalganj, Sunamganj. People who stayed in shelters suffered equally as the toilets remained overcrowded. Women and girls faced most difficulties because the toilets were not segregated. Miles away in Tahirpur, Sunamganj, Moushumi narrates how she had to build a makeshift bathroom using an old broken table and bamboo. This structure gave them some privacy, but there was no way to ensure hygiene.

When the flood water receded, the families discovered that the toilets were totally destroyed beyond use. Prioritising latrines as an urgent need of the affected



 The Start Fund repaired 55 damaged latrines



 Women and girls benefited the most from improved latrines

population after the flood, the Start Fund repaired 55 partially and severely damaged latrines in Tahirpur, Jamalganj and Buri to improve the affected communities sanitation and hygiene facilities. Tk 18,000 was spent for each latrine, which included a raised platform so that the latrines withstand upcoming floods. Each latrine is used among 5 families in a neighbourhood. The improved latrines were built with sewage tanks so that the waste collected systematically in one place instead of polluting nearby areas. These tanks are cleaned on a regular basis.

These improved, safe and hygienic latrines brought a huge relief to the flood affected communities. "I couldn't explain how relieved I was after the Start Fund built a new latrine for us. It is more secure, has light, proper locks, and a waste collection tank. Our previous latrine was made of bamboo, and there was always a risk of falling, especially for old people like me, I am 85," said Abdur Rouf, a resident of Tahirpur, Sunamganj.



 With improved latrines, Start Fund also created awareness on hygiene and sanitation

# FROM DESPAIR TO HOPE

Ripa Begum is a courageous woman who lives in Jamalganj upazilla of Sunamganj district that faced the worst flood in decades in 2022. She and her family were among the 7.2 million people who suffered the consequences of the natural disaster and lost everything they had. Their home was submerged in water and their crops were destroyed. They had to live in fear and hunger, eating whatever they could rescue from their soaked stock of grains. They also had to deal with the aftermath of the disaster, using their scarce savings on fixing their broken house, purchasing vital medicines and food items. Ripa had a sewing machine that she used to make clothes for her neighbours and earn some income, but the flood ruined her business and left her with no customers. Her sons, who used to work as labourers and farmers, also faced unemployment and poverty in the post-flood situation as they lost their source of livelihood. Her daughter, who was eager to help her family, searched for a job but faced rejection everywhere.



Ripa received a multi-purpose cash grant of Tk 4500 to cushion her losses from the flood



Sewing clothes helps Ripa earn for her household

In this hopeless situation, Ripa received a salvation from the Start Fund Bangladesh, a humanitarian initiative that provides rapid funding for small to medium scale emergencies. The Start Fund Bangladesh gave Ripa a multi-purpose cash grant (MPCG) of Tk 4500, which she could use to buy food, medicines and other urgent supplies for her family. Ripa was overjoyed and grateful for this generous assistance. She said, “The cash grant immediately after the flood gave me huge relief. It cushioned our losses and helped us recover”. With the help of the grant, Ripa was able to meet her family’s basic needs and start rebuilding their lives.

Today, Ripa and her family are back on their feet. Ripa has resumed her sewing business and earns a decent profit by making clothes. Her sons have found work as labourers and farmers again and contribute to the family income. Her daughter has also achieved her dream of getting a job as a lab assistant in a nearby hospital. Ripa is proud of her daughter’s accomplishment and hopes for a better future for her family.

# PAAN IN THE HAORS

On a normal day, Abu Taher would make paan for lots of customers. His shop is located in a beautiful location, right next to the haors. But the beauty of his shop's location brought him misfortune last year. The deadliest flood of 2022 destroyed his shop, leaving him without business for many weeks to come. The floods devoured his shop and took away his products. All his investment was lost. After the water receded, the little savings that he had was spent on his family's treatment, home repair and food. He did not have scope to put aside some money to get his business running again. He was in despair.



Start Fund's multi-purpose cash grant helped Taher run his business again



Every day, Taher serves paan to more than twenty customers

At a time like this, the Start Fund provided him with a multi-purpose cash grant of Tk 4500 for immediate support after the flood. "Without the Start Fund's cash grant, I will have no means to run my shop again. I used the money to build back my shop, and I am very grateful to the Start Fund for their support at such an urgent time like this," said Taher. He used this money to build back his shop which was damaged in the flood, and buy a stock of products that would help him get back to his paan business again. It took him some time to run his business like before, but today, he makes paan for more than twenty customers every day.

# FROM HOPELESSNESS TO HAPPINESS

Mongol Mia is a man who loves his family and works hard to take care of them. He lives with his mother and daughter in Sunamganj, a district in Bangladesh that was hit by the worst flood in decades last year. His mother is over seventy years old and often falls ill. His daughter is nine years old and studies in class four. His wife works in a garment factory in Dhaka and sends him money to support the family. She visits them once a year during the holidays. But last year, she couldn't come because of the flood that submerged their house and forced them to take shelter in a nearby school. Mongol urged his wife not to worry and promised her that he would handle everything. He returned home after the water went down, only to see his house in ruins. The walls were cracked, the roof was gone, and the furniture were damaged.

He felt hopeless and helpless. But then he received a lifeline from the Start Fund Bangladesh, a humanitarian initiative that provides rapid funding for small to medium scale emergencies. The Start Fund Bangladesh through



*Mongol Mia, his daughter, his mother and his nephew*

Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS) chose to support him with the Early Recovery Project by giving him Tk 20,000 for repairing his house. He used the money to buy corrugated tins and rebuild his roof and walls. He also used the money to fix his home's electricity system which was broken by the flood.

He was grateful for this timely assistance. He said, "The Start Fund helped me restore my house and my dignity. They gave me hope and confidence. I am thankful to them for their generosity and kindness."

He also made his daughter happy by giving her a clean space for studying. She said, "I like to study at night and play during the day. Now I can do both because we have electricity and a good roof."

Mongol is looking forward to seeing his wife again in the upcoming holidays. He hopes that this year, he can spend some quality time with all his family members under the same roof.



*Mongol daughter and her friend chat on her newly repaired home's doorway*



*Mongol's nephew often visits his house to study together with his daughter*



© The toilets have been made to make the communities prepared for the upcoming floods

# PREPARING FOR THE NEXT CRISIS

Tahirpur Girls' School and College is a school that showed remarkable love and care for its community during the floods that devastated their region last year. The floods destroyed millions of lives, leaving many of them without a home or a hope. The school welcomed about 400 people and their cattle and made its classrooms and other spaces as pleasant as they could. The principal, the teachers, and the people who stayed at the school told their stories and feelings, and the friendships that grew among them.

One of them was Khairun, a mother of three who lost her house and her husband in the floods. She said, "I don't know what I would have done without this school. They gave me a place to stay, food to eat, and hope to live during the floods. They treated me like family, and I will never forget their kindness."

Another one was Alam, a farmer, who brought his cow and his son to the school. He said: "This cow is my only source of income. If I had left her behind, she would have drowned or stolen. The school let me keep her here, and even gave me some hay to feed her. They saved my life and my livelihood."



© The Start Fund built segregated toilets for use during disasters like cyclones and floods

But they also struggled with a huge problem: the toilet facilities available were not enough for so many people. They became filthy and dangerous, creating a health and dignity crisis, especially for women and girls. They wanted to give them more respect and comfort.

One of them was Morjina, a teenage girl, who said: "I hated going to the toilet in here. It was always dirty and smelly, and there was no privacy or security. Sometimes I had to wait for hours, or go outside in the dark. I felt scared and ashamed."

That's when CNRS came to their rescue with the support from Start Fund Bangladesh. They worked with the school to build WASH blocks or extra toilets for flood situations. They also showed them how to prepare better for future floods, and how to reduce their harm. They supported and advised the school, and helped them feel more confident for the next challenge.

One of them was Shabana, a teacher at the school, who said: "The project was a blessing for us as it helped us build new toilets that are clean and safe, and that can be used during floods. The project staff also taught us how to store water and food, how to raise awareness and alertness, and how to cope with stress and trauma."

Another one was Kamal, a student at the school, who said: "The project made me feel proud of my school. The project staff showed me that we can overcome any difficulty if we work together and help each other. They also inspired me to learn more about floods and how to prevent them."

The school is proud to be an institution that not only teaches students, but also helps people in need. They believe that education and kindness go hand in hand, and that by helping others, they also help themselves. They hope their story touches your heart and inspires you to do the same.

Start Fund Bangladesh is a civil society managed network of 45 NGOs in Bangladesh that supports local actors or agencies, best placed to deliver needs based, timely and effective humanitarian action.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:**

**Shofiul Alam**

Program Coordinator, Start Fund Bangladesh  
Email: [Shofiul.alam@startnetwork.org](mailto:Shofiul.alam@startnetwork.org)

**FOLLOW US IN:**

 [StartFundBD](https://www.facebook.com/StartFundBD)

 [@StartFundBD](https://twitter.com/StartFundBD)

 [www.startnetwork.org](http://www.startnetwork.org)

# START FUND BANGLADESH

---

START NETWORK