

BHUMIJO

Ending the public toilet crisis for women

ALIZA HRIDULAA

There is a toilet in Gawsia that smells like flowers. It is clean, bright and flooded with sunlight. And it is solely for women.

This toilet exists because of the efforts of Bhumijo, one of five teams to win BRAC's first Urban Innovation Challenge. Bhumijo made a dull, dark, and dreary bathroom into a little oasis for women in just three weeks. Two of the members of the group are architects, and their work was supported by seed funding and incubation support by BRAC.

People who haven't resided in Dhaka may not understand just how distressing it is for women when they need to use public toilets. The issue isn't just the lack of toilets in Dhaka, it's also that the existing ones are in awful condition. They are squalid, congested, and dark. Many are non-functional; some toilets are used as storerooms and even sub-leased for shop keeping.

Delaying urination is one of the major causes of urinary tract infection, a disease which women are already more susceptible to than men. Bhumijo's initiative is renovating existing toilets in places frequented by a large number of women. No additional land is required for this, and spaces and resources previously being misused will be used properly. No new service lines are required and the toilets can be transformed relatively cheaply. This project cost only BDT 500,000 (USD 6,055).

Gawsia was chosen after extensively surveying 32 places with the highest concentration of people across Dhaka. The market has everything, from tie-dyed sarees to gilded jewellery, and is one of Dhaka's biggest shopping hubs for young girls and women. Before Bhumijo's initiative, however, it had no toilet which women felt comfortable using. Thousands of women came to Gawsia every day, and they all came knowing



that they would not be able to eat or drink anything, or their day would be agonising. Located on the second floor of Noor Mansion in Gawsia market, Bhumijo's toilet stands in stark contrast to its surroundings.

The toilet has smooth, clean and bright white walls. Sanitary pads and special facilities for babies are available. The team has also placed benches outside the toilet. Bhumijo co-founder, Farhana Rashid, says that the toilet has more than just functionality; it is also a place where women can rest safely.

Farhana Rashid recounts her own experience of using public toilets, "I can say from my own experience that no woman would like to go through such an ordeal."

The toilet is open to all women who wish to use it for

a small fee of BDT 10. Research has shown that the majority of the 2.5 million women in Dhaka are willing to pay – and the initial enthusiasm proves the same. With the proceeds from the entry fee, a female attendant will be recruited to ensure that the toilet remains clean. Bhumijo and the market authorities are jointly accountable for its maintenance, employing a supervisor to monitor the condition of the toilet on a daily basis.

Dhaka's population growth is not slowing. Bhumijo's initiative is starting a much-needed discussion about ensuring that sanitation facilities improve with that growth. Bhumijo isn't just creating toilets, they are brewing a revolution for women – starting with safe and hygienic toilets.

Aliza Hridulaa is an intern at BRAC Communications.

How to fine tune one's music and career

A CORRESPONDENT

Those who do music, are a bit messy in life – is an accepted perspective of our society. The picture always shows that musicians can never be good at any other profession.

To prove this wrong and encourage potential music enthusiasts, Dhaka University's FBS Music Wing organised a seminar on "Music and Career: How to Fine Tune". This seminar was solely based on the perfect balancing of career and music. It was also the first one of its kind in our country.

The speakers included the widely acclaimed vocalist of

Chirkutt band, Sharmin Sultana Sumi, the only Bangladeshi graduate of Berklee College of Music, Armeen Musa along with the drummer of Arbovirus, Nafeez Al Amin.

Nafeez Al Amin, a multitalented drummer, enchanted the audience by how he was invited by BUET to conduct sessions regarding automobile engines, despite being an assistant professor of marketing at Daffodil International University. "I am now trying to make my own battery powered motorcycle and if that becomes successful I will also try to make a battery-run car," said the proprietor of Beshi Joss Drums – a custom drum manufacturer company. His words enlightened the listeners on how to

keep perfect poise between career and work through work balance.

Then, Armeen Musa spoke about pursuing higher studies in music. She asserted her journey as a musician from her first song, a remake of "Bhromor Koiyo Giya", which became a hit, to her Berklee production "Jaago Piya".

She mentioned the importance of her institutional education on music and encouraged the students to keep learning. "People laughed at me when I was going to Berklee at the age of 25, but I kept faith in myself. Always remember that time is just a number," she said.

The last session was conducted by Sharmin Sultana Sumi who is also Creative Director at MindTree BD. She revealed her struggles as a musician and encouraged students to induce positivity in their lives. "The ones who used to mock me while I did music, turned out to be the ones taking pride in my success. Always be positive and keep practicing music, be your own brand," she advised everyone.

The seminar also held an online song competition titled "Lets Tune!" which was divided into three segments. The winners of each segment were adorned by crest and certificates from the speakers themselves.

FBS Music Wing was founded by 17 music enthusiasts from Faculty of Business Studies, Dhaka University, in 2014. The club currently has 70 members and a signature event "Falgun Festival". They have won several awards and organised various events.

