

**Practical
ACTION**

TRANSFORMATIVE MODEL

From Emptiers to Entrepreneurs

A model aimed at improving the quality of life for
waste and sanitation workers



We put ingenious ideas to work
**SO PEOPLE IN POVERTY
CAN CHANGE THEIR WORLD**

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A CHALLENGING CONTEXT WITH GREAT POTENTIAL

In the densely populated regions of Bangladesh, sanitation and waste management workers are our unsung heroes, keeping our cities functional. But these workers often have rough working conditions: exposed to illness and diseases, with low and unreliable income, and left out of society because of the work they do. Challenges are even harder for women. Not only is securing fair wages, safe working conditions, and social acceptance more complicated, but they also have limited opportunities to develop their skills.

How can we help these crucial workers have better living conditions?

Since 2014, Practical Action has partnered with municipalities to increase their capacity to provide essential urban services like Faecal sludge and solid waste management. It was clear that informal waste and sanitation workers were key stakeholders. They were already offering informal services and running micro-enterprises at for-profit margins.

There is huge potential for these informal workers to step up; allowing them to be officially recognised, operate more safely with better working conditions, and increase their incomes.

They could provide a better service to their existing customers and expand their reach to thousands more households, while improving profitability. Moreover, they have the potential to incorporate the last mile community into the broader framework of citywide inclusive sanitation services.

What an opportunity!



TRANSFORMATIVE MODEL

From Emptiers to Entrepreneurs

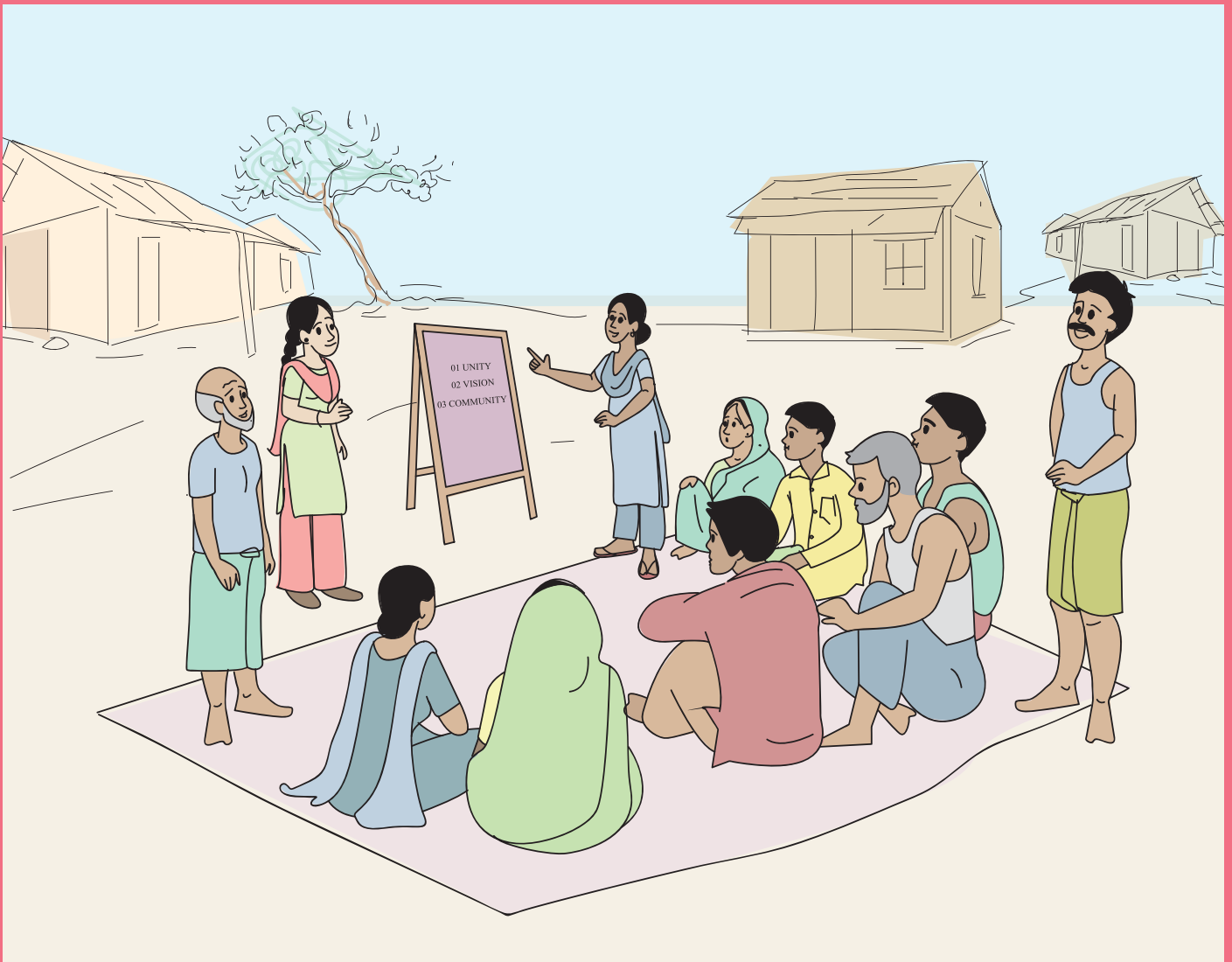
Practical Action initiated an exploration into the potential formalisation and empowerment of the informal waste sector. Throughout the period spanning 2014 to 2022, we closely collaborated with waste and sanitation workers, accumulating valuable experience and knowledge.

This has led to the development of a comprehensive model, which we've named the "Transformative Model: From Emptiers to Entrepreneurs."

Now, let's delve into the step-by-step workings of this model.

Create a **SHARED VISION**

We begin by bringing together communities of waste and sanitation workers. Collaboratively, we recognise their challenges and identify their priorities so that we can create a plan based on the agreed priorities of waste workers from all groups, shifting from struggling workers to thriving entrepreneurs.



Develop **COOPERATIVES**

Next, they form cooperatives. This means they make a list of members, pick leaders, set rules, open a shared bank account, establish an official office, and apply for recognition from the Department of Cooperatives in the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

As of September 2023, we've helped create 56 legal cooperatives in 13 towns, with a total of 2,431 members. Among them, 1,204 are men, and 1,227 are women.

We assisted them through the entire process by helping them understand how important it is to work together, have a clear plan, and trust each other within their group. Making sure their group is open about how they make decisions, handles money honestly, and has strong leaders is really important. So now, the informal worker's group has become a formal and stronger entity.



Expand **SKILLS**

We provide comprehensive support to cooperatives, covering a wide spectrum of areas. This includes improving their strategic skills, promoting rights and gender inclusion, and enhancing organisational capacity.

We introduce ingenious technology which are contextualised to their specific needs, enabling the automation of manual labour, and enhancing their overall work efficiency. We facilitate learning for them from successful peers who're using these.

We collaborated with the Bangladesh Technical Education Board to create technical courses tailored for workers and cooperatives. These materials will undergo rigorous testing and are planned to be implemented successfully at both municipal and national levels in the future.



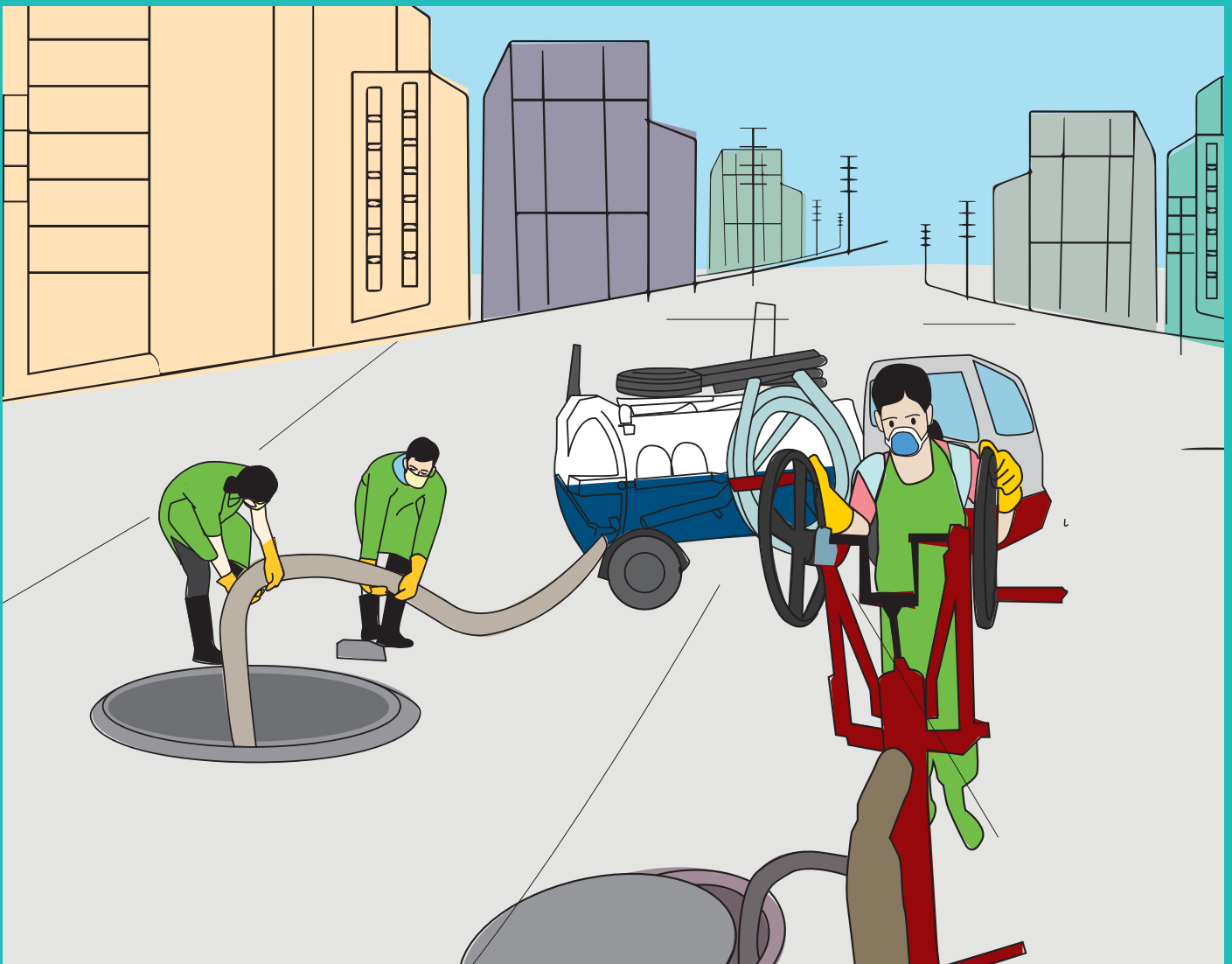
Boost access to

EQUIPMENT, FINANCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

We collaborate with cooperatives to develop technology for tasks like mechanical and motorised desludging, creating more efficient vehicles for transporting sludge, and improving treatment methods.

Women cooperative members can now access and use mechanical equipment which was designed with gender considerations to ensure suitability for women workers.

Cooperative saving programmes are often started, helping members manage their finances more effectively and supporting the businesses, which use the loans to lease equipment from the municipality.



Support

WELLBEING AND SAFETY

Once registered, cooperatives can also access specially designed health and life insurance schemes and be better supported on occupational health and safety. The number of working days lost to ill-health has reduced by 73% after co-operatives negotiated access to discounted health services for members.

We have established a formal Social Security Scheme (SSS) for 30 cooperatives with the aim of providing comprehensive coverage for hazards, accidents, and death.

We will work for the development and implementation of Labour Standards for waste and sanitation workers. This would result in sanitation and waste work being included in the list of high-risk jobs, enabling access to the labour welfare fund. In the end, our objective is to influence national agencies to establish an affordable sanitation scheme for all sanitation workers.



Reach partnerships with **MUNICIPALITIES AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR**

We support cooperatives in networking and forming partnerships with municipalities to create service delivery agreements, expand their businesses, and boost their incomes.

Additionally, we assist them in exploring opportunities in the private sector, including ventures like waste collection, sorting, processing, street cleaning, and water purification.

We also guide them in accessing resources available in government agencies related to social welfare, women's affairs, and youth development, enabling them to tap into those opportunities as well.

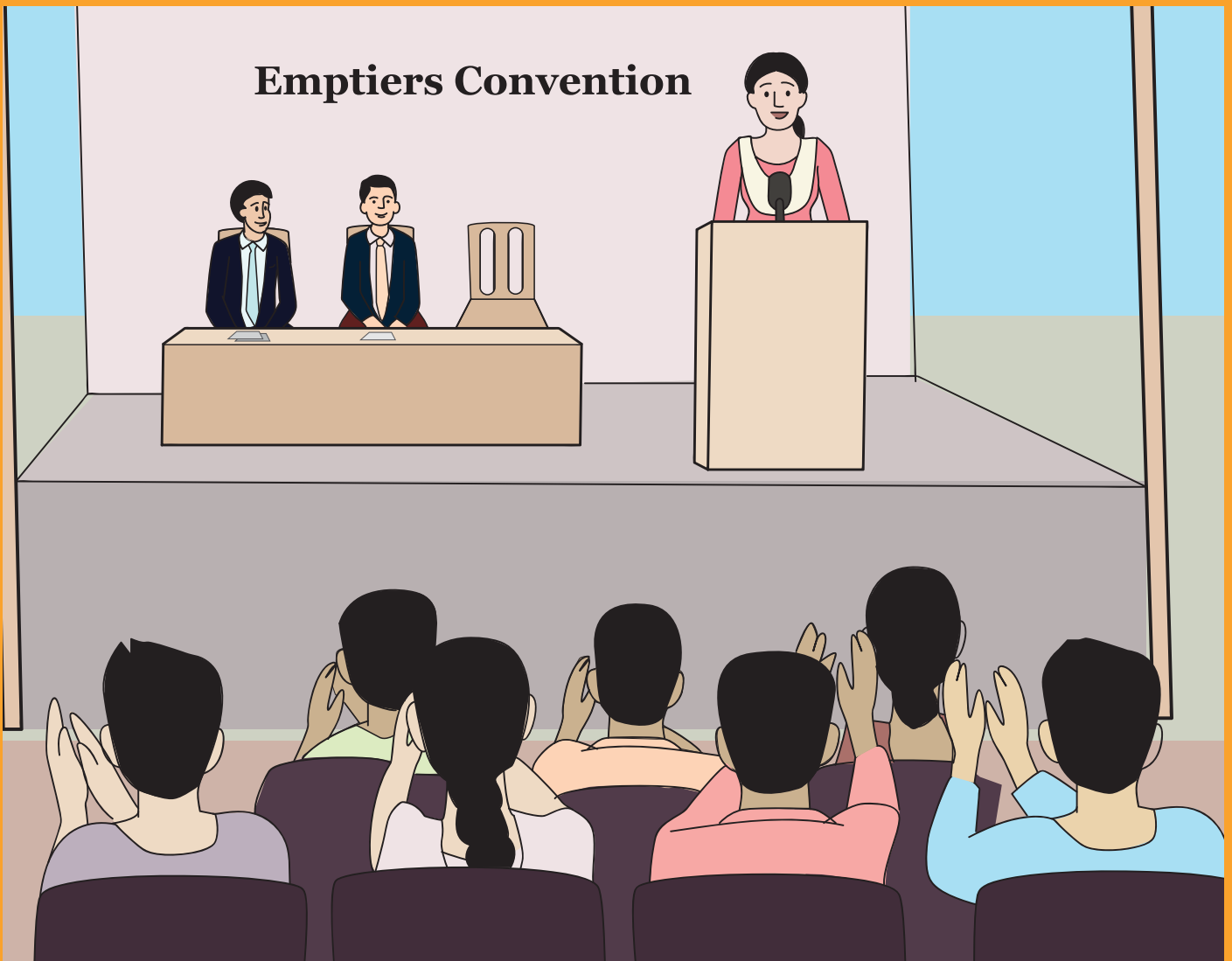


Harness

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL INCLUSION

By working cooperatively together and using individual skills, people are more prepared to participate in discussions where decisions are taken that impact their lives and their communities. This empowerment enhances people's ability to assert their rights and seek fairer treatment.

As the secretariat of the FSM Network Bangladesh, we have organised FSM and Emptiers conventions where sanitation workers get the chance to share the platform with policymakers and advocate their agenda.



Change **THE SYSTEM**

Establishing a city and national-level platform for workers and their cooperatives means they can directly communicate their needs and agendas to policymakers. This contributes to changing the context, creating a healthier, safer, prosperous environment for more workers.

We'll collaborate with multiple cities to assess their capacity for forming cooperative networks, conducting city-level workshops with cooperatives, municipalities, and stakeholders to establish sanitation worker networks.



Building a **BETTER TOMORROW**

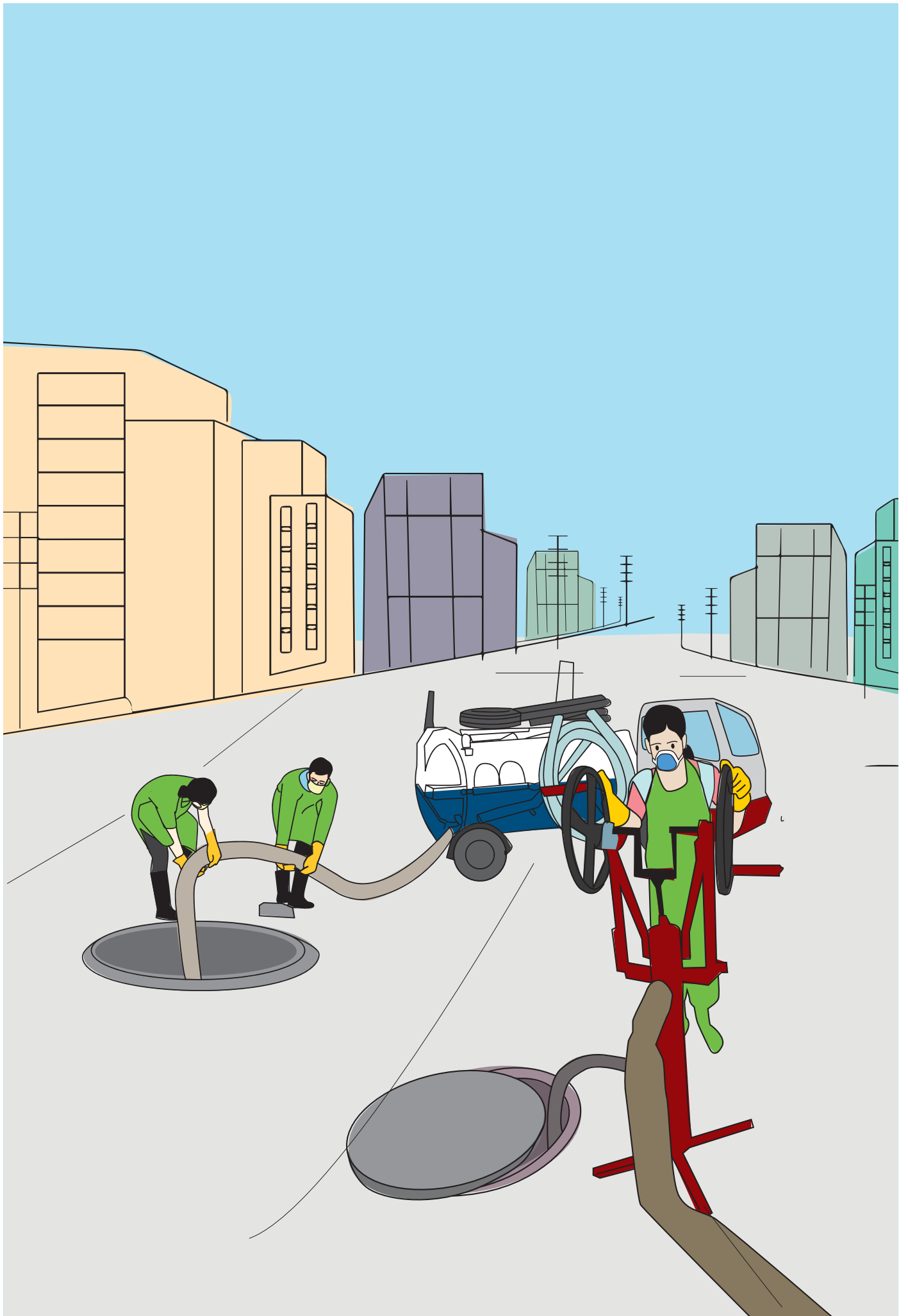
We are dedicated to upholding the policies of Bangladesh related to Faecal Sludge Management (FSM), such as the National Action Plan and Institutional Regulatory Framework. Our aim is to ensure that these policies are implemented by influencing government agencies.

Government departments like the Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) and the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) are adopting this model to reach 400,000 sanitation and waste workers nationwide.

Cooperatives need ongoing mentoring and support from us and each other for sustainability. We're learning and sharing through national and global networks. Behaviour change communication is required at all levels of the system – users, services, and governance – enabling women and other marginalised communities to influence decision making and oversight. A gender responsive sanitation system is one that works better for all users.

Practical Action is committed to helping the government achieve gender-transformative approaches and to supporting its progress towards safely managed sanitation under SDG 6.2





Our vision

**A WORLD THAT WORKS
BETTER FOR EVERYONE**

Big change starts small

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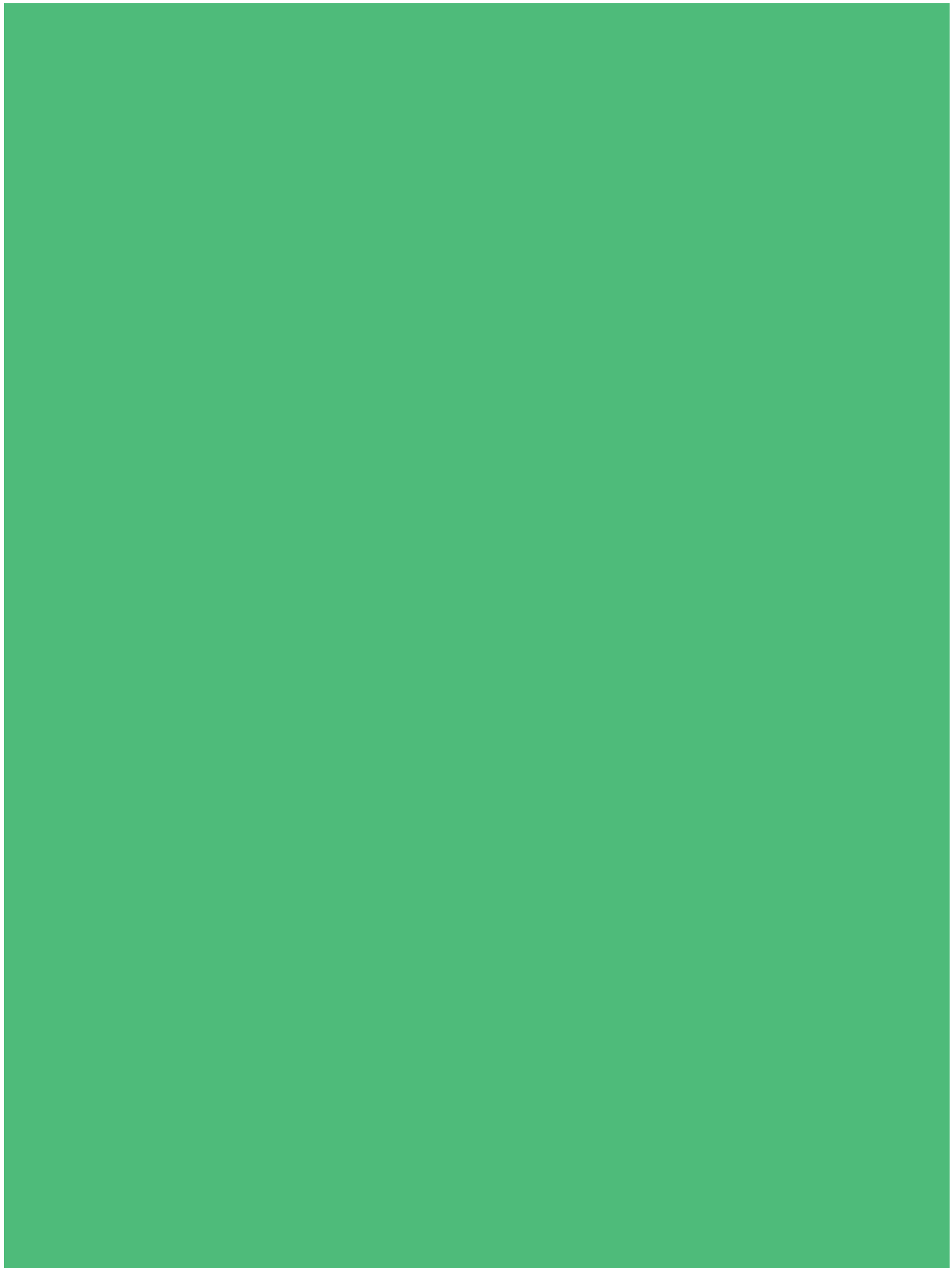
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