From the Ground Up: Three Sanitation Entrepreneurs Turning Crisis into Opportunity

A team of pit emptiers

Across Kamuli District and Kampala, three toilet pit-emptying enterprises have survived on perseverance and community trust. With structured support from Water For People, they will be closer than ever to becoming investment-ready businesses.

In Uganda's unsewered towns, where public sanitation infrastructure ends at the city limit, a quiet economy of pit-emptying entrepreneurs has taken root. They work in conditions most would refuse, and they serve the households that every formal system has left behind. For years, they did so invisibly without bank accounts, without business records, and without anyone measuring whether the work was sustainable. Water For People, with support from the United Nations' (UN) Sanitation and Hygiene Fund (SHF), has changed that narrative.

Water For People commissioned a comprehensive business diagnostic covering twelve (12) faecal sludge management (FSM) enterprises across five Ugandan districts. Among them, three private enterprises (G6 Sanitation, Unimax Sanitation, and Pezia General Ventures) emerged not just as promising but as the most credible near-term businesses for investment readiness. Their stories are different. With the right support, their trajectory is the same.

The Three Enterprises

Enterprise Profile 1: G6 Sanitation, Kamuli Municipality	
Core Services: Gulper pit emptying combined with sanitation construction, one of the few enterprises offering end-to-end service in its district.	**Investment Status:** Closest to readiness among the Foundation cohort. Requires tricycle acquisition and URSB certificate retrieval to unlock institutional contracts.

Sanitation is a business that has already solved the hardest problem: the willingness to keep showing up. Operating in Kamuli district with a combined service offer of gulper emptying and construction work, G6 demonstrates the kind of entrepreneurial instinct that Water For People's earlier engagement was designed to nurture. Prior assessments in Kamuli identified critical capacity gaps, and Water For People responded by introducing financial record-keeping tools, including receipt books and cashbooks, and providing foundational business orientation that gave G6's owner a clearer language for discussing costs, pricing, and service value.

The results were visible in the diagnostic. G6 showed greater awareness of its cost structure than many peers, and its owner could articulate the transport cost problem precisely: a UGX 50,000 to 80,000 hired tricycle fee consuming up to 50% of gross revenue on every job. That clarity is itself a product of prior support. The enterprise now sits at the threshold: a tricycle of its own, confirmation of URSB registration, and targeted business development support are the remaining gates between G6 and the investor conversation it is ready to have.

A mason next to an upgraded latrine

"Most jobs operate at near-zero or negative margins - making tricycle ownership the single most impactful lever to immediately transform unit economics across these businesses." Business Diagnostic Report, FSM-Enterprises, 2026

Enterprise Profile 2: Unimax Sanitation, Fort Portal City	
Core Services: Gulper emptying, soap production, and sanitation construction are the most diversified revenue base among all Foundation-stage enterprises.	**Investment Status:** High potential; currently blocked by NWSC dumping station suspension. Requires WFP advocacy intervention and a basic accounting system to proceed.

Unimax Sanitation has great potential for getting investment ready, and its diagnostic profile reads like a business that has been quietly building capacity for longer than its formal records suggest. It is the only Foundation-stage enterprise offering three distinct revenue streams: pit emptying, soap manufacturing, and construction a diversification that reflects both entrepreneurial ambition and the lessons absorbed through Water For People's prior engagement in Fort Portal.

Unimax pit emptiers transporting faecal sludge to a treatment plant

Water For People's earlier Fort Portal assessment surfaced the need for stronger financial tracking and more deliberate market positioning. Unimax responded. While its accounting remains informal, the owner demonstrates a clearer understanding of margins and cost centres than most counterparts. The enterprise maintains a minimal separation between production costs for soap and service delivery costs, a sophistication that speaks to the coaching it received.

Unimax's path to investment readiness is currently blocked by forces beyond its control. For over two months, the National Water and Sewerage Corporation has suspended acceptance of barrel sludge at Fort Portal's dumping station, effectively cutting off the enterprise's primary revenue stream. This is not a business failure. It is a regulatory crisis, and it demands exactly the kind of coordinated advocacy that Water For People is positioned to provide. Once the dumping station issue is resolved and a basic accounting system is in place and targeted business development support is provided through mentorship and coaching, Unimax is one of the two enterprises in the entire portfolio most primed for investor engagement.

Enterprise Profile 3: Pezia General Venture, Kampala	
Core Services: Briquette production from faecal sludge combined with pit emptying is the only enterprise in the portfolio operating a waste-to-energy model.	**Investment Status:** Growth-Ready. Requires HR formalization, structured market sizing, and an accounting system to cross the investment threshold.

Pezia General Ventures is the most distinctive enterprise; it's firmly in the growth-ready category, which reflects a business model that is genuinely ahead of its time in the Ugandan FSM sector. By converting faecal sludge into briquettes for fuel, Pezia has built a circular revenue model that transforms waste from a disposal problem into a commercial product. This is not accidental. It is the result of an entrepreneurial mind that Water For People's engagements helped sharpen.

Prior Water For People interaction with Kampala-based enterprises introduced Pezia's owner to the concept of service diversification and the value of understanding one's full cost chain. The briquette model is, in many ways, the applied result of that thinking, a response to the question every Water For People business session asks: What else can this waste stream do? Pezia answered it commercially.

What Pezia now needs is the infrastructure to match the innovation. HR formalization employment contracts, defined roles and targeted business development support would make the business legible to any investor conducting due diligence. A structured market sizing exercise would quantify the actual demand for briquettes and emptying services in Kampala. And basic accounting software, deployed on a free platform, would produce the twelve-month financial track record that turns a promising enterprise into a financeable one.

Example of briquettes

The Road Ahead: A Three-Phase Journey

The diagnostic report outlines a sequenced, twelve-month business development program that addresses the specific barriers each enterprise faces not with generic training, but with targeted, costed interventions designed around their individual conditions.

Phase 1: Months 0-3 Stabilization	**Phase 2:** Months 3-6 Foundation Building	**Phase 3:** Months 6-12 Acceleration
Tricycle co-financing for G6, daily cash recording mandates, business bank account opening, URSB certificate retrieval, and WFP-led advocacy to restore Fort Portal's dumping station for Unimax.	Accounting software deployment on Wave or Excel for all three enterprises, employment contracts, occupational safety refreshers, and a structured market sizing workshop to quantify real demand.	Referral partnerships linking gulper and cesspool operators, proactive marketing training to shift from referral dependency to active demand generation, and mobile money payment pilots to widen the customer base.

The investment required across all three phases is modest by any measure. Tricycle co-financing is estimated at UGX 10 to 13 million per business, a one-off outlay that immediately transforms a job operating at negative margins into one generating 30 to 50% net returns. Accounting software costs nothing if a simple free tool is adopted. Bank account opening fees run below UGX 100,000. The entire stabilization phase for these three enterprises could be executed for less than the revenue Unimax loses in a single month of the dumping ban.

"A portfolio in which enterprises hold bank accounts, understand their margins, operate with legal registration, and can demonstrate a twelve-month financial track record is a portfolio that can access microfinance, attract impact investment, and compete for institutional contracts." Business Diagnostic Report, FSM-Enterprises, 2026.

The Larger Story

G6, Unimax, and Pezia are not outliers. They are the forward edge of a portfolio of twelve enterprises that collectively serve communities public sanitation infrastructure has abandoned. What makes them notable is not that they have solved every problem, they haven’t but that Water For People's prior engagement has given them the awareness, and in some cases the early systems to begin solving them.

The forthcoming business development support is not rescue. It is the next logical step in a process that Water For People started when it walked into these businesses with diagnostic tools, asked hard questions about costs and customers, and listened to the answers. The enterprises listened back. Now the programme needs to meet them where they are specific, sequenced, and time-bound and help them cross the threshold from promising to financeable.

When they do, the returns will extend well beyond the balance sheet. These are businesses that employ workers, protect public health, and serve households that no one else is serving. Making them investment-ready is not a charitable act. It is, as the diagnostic report concludes plainly, commercial, strategic, and urgent.

The United Nations Sanitation and Hygiene Fund (SHF) provided US$6.3 million in catalytic financing and technical assistance to implement the “Accelerating Access to Improved Sanitation and Hygiene Services using Market-Based Approaches in Uganda” Project from April 2023 to 30 September 2026.

The Project was implemented by Water For People Uganda, working with the Ministry of Health as the Government lead institution, providing policy direction, oversight, coordination, and stewardship throughout implementation. Other implementing partners included the Ministry of Water and Environment, Ministry of Education and Sports, IRC, Uganda Water and Sanitation NGO Network (UWASNET), Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), Finnish Mondial, and participating District Local Governments.

The Project reached approximately 2.4 million people across seven districts: Buikwe, Kabarole, Kamuli, Kayunga, Luuka, Buyende and Kole, and five urban areas: Fort Portal City, Kamuli Municipality, Kayunga Town Council, Kampala Capital City and Kole Town Council. It focused on scaling household sanitation and hygiene services, strengthening sustainable WASH and menstrual health and hygiene services in schools and healthcare facilities, and promoting innovation for safely managed sanitation and hygiene.

For more information

Water For People Uganda

Plot 15B Kitante, Close (Off Yusuf Lule Road)

P.O. Box 1420 Kampala

+256 (0) 393 216 512

uganda.waterforpeople.org