

Report about survey results:

Questionnaire to Grantees funded by BMGF-WSH (survey ran from 20 Feb. to 6 March 2014)

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Date: 17 March 2014

Introduction:

This report analyses the results of the survey which was carried out amongst BMGF sanitation project grantees during a 2-week period from 20 February to 6 March 2014.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation contracted Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) in late 2012 to introduce the Foundation's sanitation projects onto the SuSanA website and to have them discussed on the SuSanA Discussion Forum. In addition, SEI recorded webinars to present the projects and discuss them with the grantees and with the external sanitation professional community (most of those being SuSanA members). Recordings of all six webinars so far are available here in a Playlist of the SuSanA Youtube channel: http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0gMdVBup-4MCymOPomtqL_XYT5YtLTSK

The grantees had been requested at various times since early 2013 to get involved with the SuSanA (Sustainable Sanitation Alliance) Discussion Forum (www.forum.susana.org) and the SuSanA library (www.susana.org/library) by the SEI project team with the support of BMGF project officers (e.g. Doulaye Kone, Roshan Shrestha, Carl Hensman, Alyse Schrecongost).

The subject of this survey was the Sustainable Sanitation Alliance (SuSanA) Discussion Forum's category that deals with sanitation grants by the foundation (<http://forum.susana.org/forum/categories/96-innovative-sanitation-science-and-technology>) and in particular the **perception of the grantees** regarding utilizing this part of the Forum, the SEI webinars and engaging with SuSanA more broadly.

Rationale:

The intention of the survey was to check on the success of the SEI project (Phase 1) from the perspective of the grantees' level of engagement and satisfaction with the SuSanA Discussion Forum, and to inform about improvements that could be made in a possible Phase 2 contract with SEI.

Methodology:

- 10 questions with multiple answer options were formulated for this survey in an iterative process (initial proposal by Roshan Shrestha, refinement by Elisabeth von Muench and Arno Rosemarin, further refinements after some tests with 6 grantees).
- 135 grantees were contacted using a web-based questionnaire (www.surveymonkey.com) and 61 responded. Therefore, the response rate was 45% which is in fact quite high for this type of simple survey, given that there was no direct incentive to participate and only *one* reminder e-mail was sent.
- The e-mail addresses of these 135 grantees had been compiled by Elisabeth von Muench, based on the grantees' database provided by the BMGF in November 2012 plus additions or deletions of names that had become apparent during the course of the SEI project work, i.e. when new grantees joined or some team members left the grants.
- It is not known whether those people who have been active with SuSanA in the past were more or less likely to respond to the request to participate in this survey, but our assumption is that those people who never responded to us in the past were also less likely to click on the survey link. Therefore, the respondents are likely to be those people who have had some interactions with SuSanA in the past, or who have had intentions to do so.
- The figure of 61 responses compares with 66 grants launched on the forum in 2013 (see: <http://forum.susana.org/forum/categories/96-innovative-sanitation-science-and-technology>). And it compares with grantees that are active on the forum as follows (data as per 12 March 2014): 9

grantees with 20 posts or more; 30 grantees with 10 posts or more; 55 grantees with 5 posts or more; 87 grantees with 2 posts or more; 102 grantees with at least one post.

Overall results of the survey, interpretations and way forward:

- The interest in the Discussion Forum can be summarized as filling two vital functions: participation using a networking tool to keep in touch with others and a content-driven or knowledge management tool (in conjunction with the SuSanA library).
- The relevance and importance of the Discussion Forum in the work of the grantees comes out clearly.
- The relevance of the webinars to the grantees is also obvious, with many stating that they have participated in or viewed them or would like to participate in future webinars.
- The survey revealed relatively good participation and interest. The survey shows clearly that SEI has accomplished the phase one very well and met all the project objectives.
- Hurdles for engagement of some grantees with the SuSanA Discussion Forum were found to be lack of time, unwillingness to use “social media” (such as an open discussion forum), preference for traditional ways of disseminating research results (e.g. by publishing peer-reviewed journal papers) and uncertainty on behalf of some grantees regarding who is going to be addressed in the Forum.
- Regarding the need for site improvements, these varied from no need at all, to navigation and more tailor-made e-mail digests.
- Improvements in navigation have been requested by some people; therefore this could be something to work on in Phase 2. People did not specify what they meant though, so we will have to delve into detailed discussions with the grantees to understand what they find difficult about the Forum (it could be the case that those who use the Forum only rarely find it difficult to navigate around. But once one uses it more regularly one gets used to it and finds it easy).
- It would be useful to segment the users into categories. For example, practitioners like to maintain social contact while some researchers are more interested in disseminating their results. There are also lots of new students and other people entering this field due to the BMGF funding options and publicity. They all have different information and knowledge needs, and certain trade-offs will be required (more detail / less detail; more frequently / less frequently, etc.). Once user groups and their needs are better understood, the next task is investigating how to satisfy the different categories within a single site without losing the effect of catalyzing exchange and mutual learning in between those distinct user groups.

Detailed analysis of answers to the ten survey questions¹:

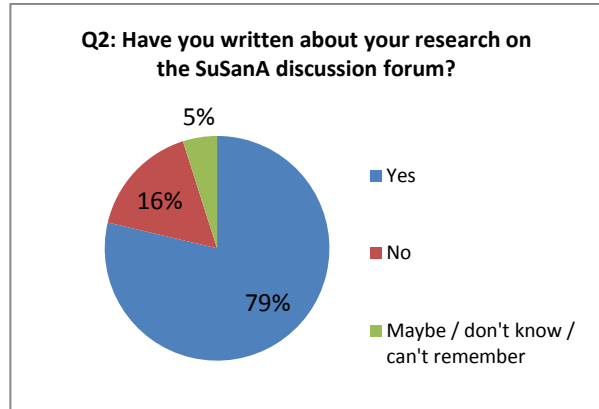
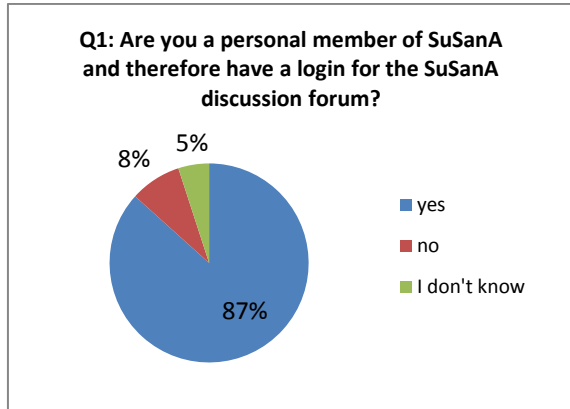
1. Are you a personal member of SuSanA and therefore have a login for the SuSanA discussion forum?

- This question was included in order to establish the basics. Nearly all grantees that were approached should be members (as they were transferred from the old Sanitation Network of the BMGF). However, the survey link may have been forwarded by some grantees to new project team members who are not SuSanA members yet.
- 87% of respondents answered with yes. 5 people said “no” and 3 people said they don’t know.

2. Have you written about your research on the SuSanA discussion forum?

- An overwhelming majority of respondents (79% or 48 people) stated that they had written about their research on the SuSanA Discussion Forum.
- 10 people stated they had not written on the SuSanA discussion forum, and 3 people stated that they are not sure.

¹ Raw results and all graphs are available in the separate pdf file entitled “Raw data – survey for grantees”.



3. If you have not written about your research on the SuSanA discussion forum, please state the reasons (check all that apply):

- Based on the results of Question 2, only up to 13 people should have answered this Question 3 plus those 16 people who ticked the answer option “This question does not apply to me (as I have written about my research on the forum)” in Question 3. This means that only a maximum of 29 people should have answered this question. In reality, 25 people answered this question, which is reasonable. Subtracting from the 25 respondents those 16 people who ticked that “this question does not apply to me”, leaves 9 people. These 9 people were allowed to tick several answers. The chosen answers of these 9 people were in priority order (keeping in mind very limited sample size for this question):

Too time consuming / I didn't have time for this	16%	4
I don't like using social media (I see an open discussion forum as social media like Facebook)	16%	4
We are a large team, and others in my team have the task to post on the Forum about our research	12%	3
Have patents or journal articles outstanding	8%	2
Did not want to discuss my research online in the public domain	8%	2
Didn't get Phase 2 funding and therefore no more interest / time	4%	1

- The table shows that all of the reasons cited were beyond the direct control of the SEI team – see also the analysis of the respondents' comments further down below.
- None of the respondents ticked these possible answers which is good:

Lost interest in this research project	0%	0
Can't see the relevance	0%	0
Didn't get contacted by SEI team or didn't know about this	0%	0
Internet connection too slow	0%	0

4. How have you engaged with SuSanA so far? Check all that apply.

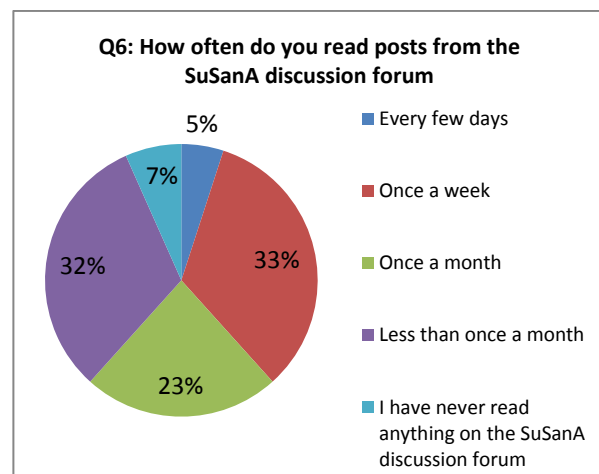
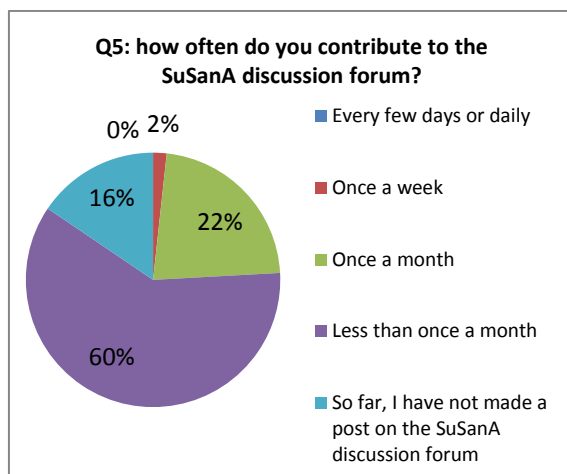
- The clear majority (74% or 45 people) had written posts on the SusanA Discussion Forum. Well over half (61%) of the respondents had also used the SuSanA website library to source documentation. Half of the respondents had engaged via taking part in the SEI webinars, and almost half (44%) have submitted documents for inclusion in the SuSanA library.
- Only 5 people had not yet engaged with SuSanA at all (these could be the same 5 people who answered “no” to the first question on “Do you have a SuSanA login?” and part of the 10 people who had stated they had not written on the SuSanA Discussion Forum).

Answers to Question 4 in priority order:

I have written posts on the Discussion Forum	74%	45
I have used materials from the website (www.susana.org) or library	61%	37
I have attended or watched one of the webinars that SEI organized	49%	30
I have submitted documents for inclusion in the SuSanA library	44%	27
I have encouraged others (students, colleagues) to make use of the Discussion Forum	44%	27
I have attended a SuSanA meeting, seminar or side event	26%	16
So far, I have not engaged with SuSanA	8%	5

5. On average, how often do you contribute to the SuSanA Discussion Forum?
6. How often do you read posts from the SuSanA Discussion Forum (on the Forum website or in the e-mail digest)?

- When looking at the results for Questions 5 & 6 together, it is interesting to note that the respondents passively utilize (i.e. read) the information on the Discussion Forum more often than actively contributing to it (i.e. make postings) – which is natural human behavior (compare e.g. with Wikipedia, where we all read but few people write).



Active Forum contributions (making own posts):

- About one-quarter of respondents contribute posts on the Forum with a frequency of once per month or more often.
- 60% of respondents stated that they make posts less frequently than once per month, and only 9 grantees stated they had never made a post on the Forum.

Passively utilizing the Forum (reading posts):

- One-third of respondents (38%) read posts on the Forum once per week (3 people out of this group even read on the Forum every few days), and another quarter reads posts on the Forum once per month. This means that 62% of respondents read posts on the Forum once per month or more frequently – which clearly shows the relevance of the Forum to them as a source of information and inspiration.
- Only 4 people said they had never read anything on the SuSanA Forum (consistent with the earlier number of 5 people without SuSanA login and 5 people who have not engaged with SuSanA yet).

7. What do you like about the SuSanA Discussion Forum? Check all that apply:

- The answers to this question show clearly that a high number of respondents appreciate the relevance and variety of content (65% and 51%), as well as the networking opportunities (47%), supportive atmosphere (45%) and richness of content (38%).
- 11 people stated that they found the Forum easy to navigate which is in contrast to the people who said in Question 8 that the navigation needs improvement.
- Only six people stated that they do not like the SuSanA Forum, and this could be the same people who said they do not have a login (5 people) or that they never read anything on the Forum (4 people).

Answers to Question 7 in priority order:

Relevance of content to my work	65%	36
Variety of content, i.e. wide range of topics	51%	28
It helps me to be in contact with others (researchers, practitioners) who have the same focus and interest.	47%	26
The friendly and supportive atmosphere	45%	25
Richness of content i.e. detailed information	38%	21
High quality of posts, discussions are well deliberated and balanced	20%	11
Easy to navigate	20%	11
Easy to collaborate	20%	11
I get high quality feedback, comments and answers from others	15%	8
None of the above (I don't like the SuSanA Discussion Forum at all)	11%	6

8. In your view, what aspects of the SuSanA Discussion Forum need improvement? (Check all that apply)

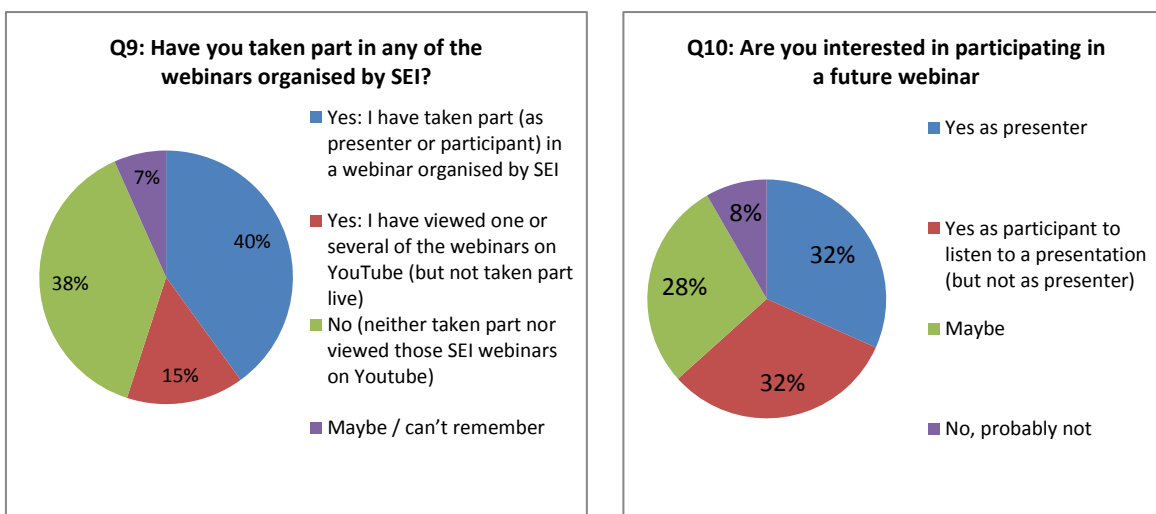
- 19 people stated that there should be a tailor made e-mail digest option, which is a feature that could be programmed relatively easily. The current e-mail digest option allows the user to select the frequency of the e-mail digest, but not the categories (it includes all Forum posts in a specified time period, i.e. daily, weekly or monthly). However, Forum users also do get direct e-mails as soon as someone writes something new on the specific thread they are engaged with, unless they have opted out of this “subscribe” function. An e-mail subscription to an entire category is also possible, but perhaps not all grantees are aware of this option.
- 13 people were so satisfied with the Forum that they answered “can’t think of any possible improvements”.

Answers to Question 8 in priority order:

Should have tailor made e-mail digest options so that I can more easily follow the category of the Forum that I am most interested in	40%	19
Should be easier to navigate	35%	17
I can't think of any possible improvements	27%	13
Should be easier to make postings	15%	7
Should have more richness of content i.e. detailed information	10%	5
Should have more variety of content, i.e. wide range of topics	4%	2

9. Have you taken part in any of the webinars with the BMGF sanitation grantees organized by SEI?

- The majority (55%) had taken part in the special webinars organized by SEI to discuss research of grantees (either as presenter or as participant).



10. Are you interested in participating in a future webinar organized by SEI with BMGF sanitation grantees?

- An even larger number (64%) stated that they are interested in participating in the SEI webinars in the future, while 28% said that they “may be interested”; only 5 people answered that they are not interested.

Analysis of the comments made by the respondents (comments made under various questions, re-grouped here - all comments are shown in the separate pdf file entitled “Raw data – survey for grantees”):

Strengths of the Discussion Forum	Weaknesses of the Discussion Forum
<i>It is really the fact that one gets a lot of information on the broad topic of sanitation under one single umbrella that makes SuSanA unique and useful</i>	<i>I find the site extremely difficult to navigate around.</i>

<p><i>It's useful to encourage discussion between scientists, as long as this is done in the right framework. In some respect, there is some healthy competition between scientists from in same field, so one needs to be careful with what one is encouraged/pushed to post on the forum.</i></p>	<p><i>Notifications do not always come when new posts are made to a forum topic that you have subscribed to, which makes it challenging to keep track of feedback on topics of interest.²</i></p>
<p><i>BMGF, besides the tap, are not really visible in this Forum. So the post and the participants are among the many. But on the other hand, the other Forum activities might / and do probably enrich the discussion for BMGF grantees. Thus, overall I like the decision to embed it, and not open a parallel forum. Moderators are quite important, and they also have a wealth of knowledge and active. But sometimes they can be a bit "educational" / Top-Down.</i></p>	<p><i>Overall the user interface is very clunky/not easy to use and the information is not presented in a way that makes it easy to read/consume. Also, the site is not structured in a way that makes sharing and comparing information as effective as it could be -- this is not a simple task, but if the website provided a structure for how information were shared, it would enable comparisons across various activities much easier and significantly improve the impact of the website.</i></p>
<p><i>Personally it seems like a very well intentioned effort to use social collaboration methods to encourage collaboration and knowledge exchange.</i></p>	<p><i>The content management system used for posting messages on Susana seems to originate in the stone age. It is not convenient at all for the layout of your text, and the person writing the message doesn't know at all how the message will look like online. I'd advice to get a new plugin or system for that. Besides this, Susana is a huge heap of papers, scientists and practitioners (seemingly) without any organization in it - it's hard to find things even when you're interested in it and take the time for it.</i></p>
<p><i>Our organization is very busy and we have tried to allocate the participation because we believe the community is important.</i></p>	<p><i>I often find it difficult to postings I know already on the forum. It's difficult to just browse.</i></p>
	<p><i>The negative "mood" always surprises me. Seems like everyone is only convinced by their own solution/research question/ interest and don't really "listen" to the others. But hey - guess that's just the way it is. It's not a very productive, engaging environment though. People stay friendly at least.</i></p>

Suggestions by respondents for improvements and general comments (comments made under various questions, re-grouped here)

- *Including update emails³*
- *Similar to many blog sites, allow posting via email (by specifying subject) without logging into account.⁴*
- *More credible and tailor made information rather than opinions of people who participate*
- *Should be sent out less frequently. I don't have time to read it twice per week.⁵*

² This is an IT problem that we have also noticed; there seems to be a firewall problem with some few users. We are working on resolving this.

³ Not clear what is meant here, as e-mail notifications for specific threads do exist.

⁴ This function already exists; needs to be advertised more (send e-mail to posting@forum.susana.org).

⁵ The user can adjust the frequency. Needs to be made clearer.

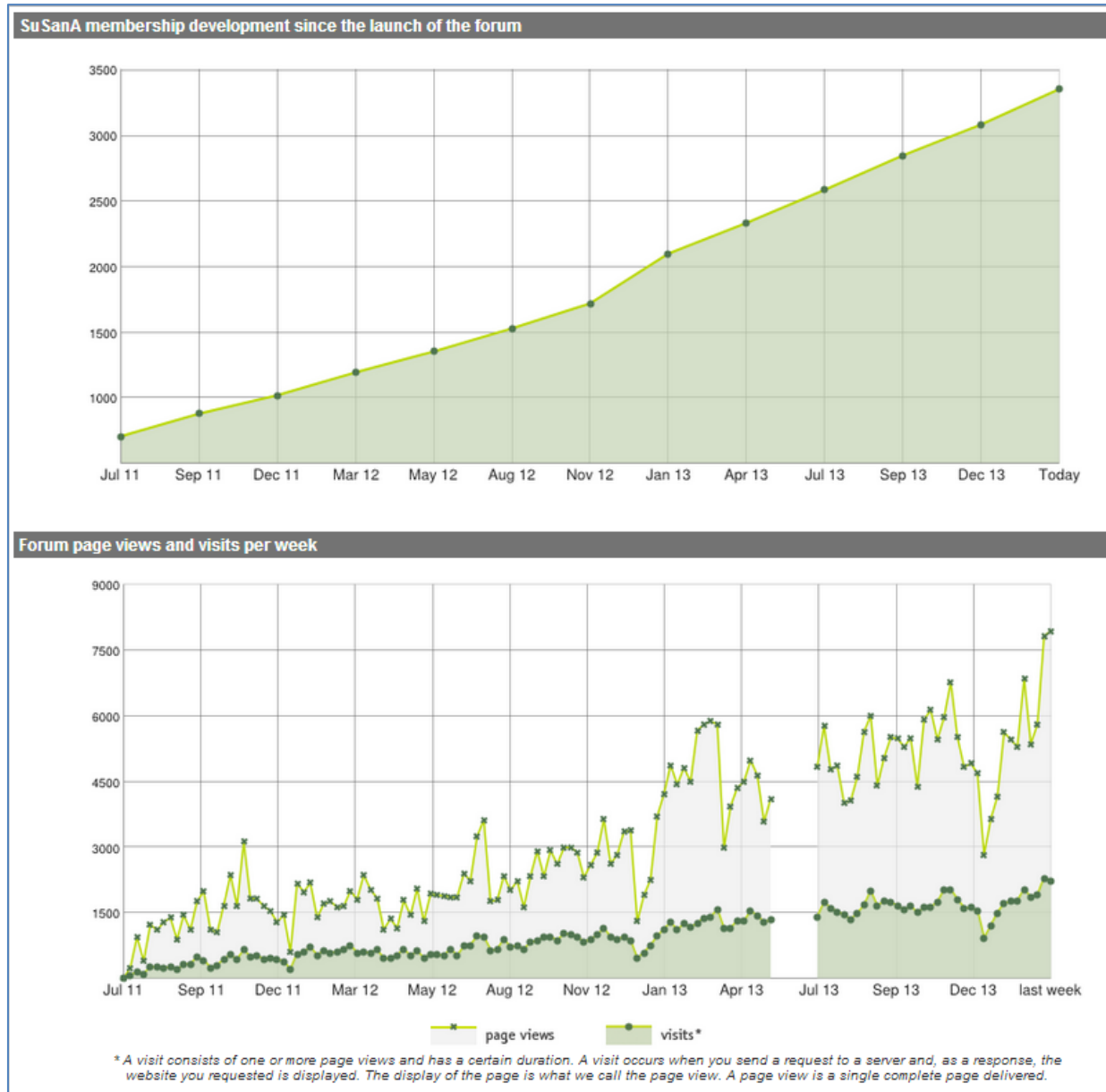
- *The majority of the forum are disconnected from the realities of the poor and the needs of the poor. There are non-technical components and aspects of the realities in the field and the culture of the forum drives these people away and wastes their time. Don't complain about spending millions of dollars and face philanthropy's innovation pileup when the structure of the system gleefully cans efforts that grapple with the difficult intersections between technology and field practice.*
- *I am still trying to figure out who the SuSanA users are by reading all the posts? There are so many postings, that I have not had time to read them all. I make innovative toilets. I am trying to reach feces collectors and composters. SuSana seems to be researchers - true?*
- *I'd like to see a past and present funders listing, with their expressions of focus, schedules, eligibility (social enterprises &/or NGO 501C3 US tax status), amount of grants or awards, etc.*

Comments by grantees relating to their own work style (comments made under various questions, re-grouped here)

- *It's not that I don't like it, it's just that I don't have the time to follow posts often.*
- *Personally it seems like a very well intentioned effort to use social collaboration methods to encourage collaboration and knowledge exchange. However it doesn't work for me, for two reasons: 1. This is not how I access information (since there are no filters / quality assurance mechanisms I expect there to be limited information of high quality) 2. This is not how I collaborate. If I need information on a subject I seek out people who are experts on that subject, I don't post indiscriminately on forums (in my experience people who have the most useful information have the least time to monitor these type of forums).*
- *For me my lack of participation is simply an issue of priorities and lack of bandwidth.*
- *I am not a frequent user because I have never been a big fan of on-line discussion groups.*
- *We are a very small team and while I still plan to do this we were tasked with a very rapid grant cycle for design build and test (8 months). With additional time consumed for preparation for shipment to the RTT fair, we are just getting the kind of time to complete any activity of this type.*
- *I always plan to read more, but it often is put behind other more urgent tasks.*
- *My priority is my work email so it is hard to manage other related communication media such as SuSanA, facebook and personal emails. I only do SuSanA when I have spare time or I really need.*
- *Our organization is very busy and we have tried to allocate the participation because we believe the community is important. As a small startup we have to be very careful about how we allocate our time. I believe that the forum is better lending itself to academic/research organizations in terms of this.*
- *I believe my project manager has responded to some questions about our project on SuSanA, but the primary reason we don't post is that we are busy. I personally don't think to log on SuSanA. A secondary contributing factor is that I have intentionally not used social media in other ways.*
- *I do not talk about all of my research due to limitations on time and the fact that when I want to get it out there, I usually do so by presentation at a meeting or publication or both.*
- *Wrote a little - hard to keep up with everything there, so I am not very active.*
- *Our project has its own website with extensive documentation. Therefore, we do not write long posts on the forum, but rather links to our website.*

Appendix

Current overall statistics of the SuSanA discussion forum (available at any time for anyone here: <http://forum.susana.org/forum/statistics>):



Link to the survey was: <https://de.surveymonkey.com/s/RHN3C3R>

Survey title:

Questionnaire to Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, WSH Grantees

Survey introduction text:

The subject of this survey is the Sustainable Sanitation Alliance (SuSanA) Discussion Forum's category that deals with sanitation grants by the foundation (<http://forum.susana.org/forum/categories/96-innovative-sanitation-science-and-technology>).

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation contracted Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) since late 2012 to introduce the Foundation's sanitation projects on the SuSanA website and to have them discussed on the SuSanA Discussion Forum. In addition, SEI has recorded webinars to present the projects and discuss them with the grantees and with non-grantees.

Please fill in this short survey by 28 February 2014. The answers will be collected in an anonymous way. Your assistance in this survey will help us to make improvements for a possible Phase 2 contract with SEI.

It will only take about 3-4 minutes to complete the survey. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Roshan Shrestha
Program Officer/Global Development
Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
Seattle, USA