

Revitalizing the SuSanA Working Groups

- Concept note on how to improve member engagement and their benefits linked to SuSanA Working Groups

Authors: Kim Andersson, Annkathrin Tempel, Elisabeth von Muench, Diane Kellogg, Ruth Miskelly, Esther Shaylor, Doreen Mballo, Shobana Srinivasan, Arno Rosemarin and Simon Okoth

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1. Background

The thematic working groups (WGs) of the Sustainable Sanitation Alliance (SuSanA) have been established ‘to cover a variety of different sanitation aspects and to provide outputs that underline the problems and opportunities of these aspects’. A key objective of the WGs is to bring together members who share common interests in different sanitation thematic areas and wish to explore these themes (topics) with aim of providing outputs tailored towards addressing sanitation sector challenges as well as offering opportunities for learning and upscaling. The WGs members cooperate to promote knowledge creation and dissemination through debate and the organization of special events and products.

Currently there are 13 working groups, as depicted in Box 1. When SuSanA was established in 2007, all WGs had the clear mission to produce fact sheets linked to the thematic topics of each WG. The number of activities and the productivity over the years differ greatly between the 13 working groups. Examples of activities include WG meetings linked to SuSanA meetings, sounding board for publication of others, production of joint publications, webinars, Thematic Discussion Series¹ and specific lobbying activities (e.g. strengthening of gender dimension in the SDGs).

Box 1: SuSanA Working Groups

WG 1: Capacity Development	WG 8: Emergency & Reconstruction Situations
WG 2: Market Development	WG 9: Public Awareness, Advocacy & Civil Society Engagement
WG 3: Renewable Energies & Climate Change	WG10: Operation and Maintenance
WG4: Sanitation Systems, Hygiene and Health	WG11: Groundwater Protection
WG5: Food Security & Productive Sanitation Systems	WG12: WASH and Nutrition

¹ www.susana.org/en/resources/thematic-discussion-series

In 2013 the status and function of the SuSanA working groups were analyzed, mainly through a survey and interviews with WG leads. The study recognized the potential of the WGs and concluded (Panzerbieter 2013²):

- Preparation of products (e.g. factsheets) helped to “streamline” the sector and enabling dialogue, which is an important benefit.
- Many see large potential in the interest groups (mailing lists that have formed)
- Valuable to distribute partner results to interest groups
- May support fundraising through “distribution channel”

Nevertheless, it has become more and more evident that the function and structure of the working groups have weaknesses. This is not a recent understanding, since it was clearly depicted in the study carried out in 2013, where the following key challenges were identified by the WG co-leads:

- No clear terms of reference or guidelines
- Time intensive to build up activities
- Communication between co-leads is often irregular
- Co-leads find it hard to know their duties
- Lack of member overview and their interest to actively participate

During the initial WG engagement, which is an activity under the SuSanA Phase 3 Grant (2016-2019), other insights on the function of WGs have emerged:

Productivity of WGs heavily dependent on the co-leads of WGs: To a great extent, the WG leads are the gate keepers to the working groups, since the onus for organizing WG activities currently falls on them. Hence, most working groups tend to depend heavily on the efforts of the WG leads. If leads for different reasons cannot be actively driving for WG activities, the WG most likely will become inactive. This is not true for all WGs. Some WGs have very active members (often partner organizations) who support different activities, such as organizing WG meetings.

Outgrowing feasible size of a working group: The number of members signed up for the different WGs currently range between 300 and 5000, which are unfeasible numbers to manage for the co-lead. Especially if the main aim of WGs is to have productive working groups with active member participation. Organization structure “best practices” suggests that 5 is an optimal number of people to manage, 15 is possible for experienced managers with no work load of their own. Furthermore, some WG members are signed up for as many as 4 or more WGs making it difficult for them to be effectively contribute to the different groups. WG activities are often sporadic so when people sign up to a WG most usually there is no immediate activity for them to engage with. This is a missed opportunity.

² www.susana.org/images/documents/04-meetings/17th-meeting/susana_wg-assessment_final_130831_tp_tp.pdf



Figure 1: Size of working groups (July 2017). WG13 is tiny compared to the others because it only started in February 2017. WG 12 started in 20 but grew rapidly thanks to active leadership by GTO and others.

The current WG model not responding to the diverse needs and interests of members: The structure of WG has not changed since SuSanA was formed more than 10 years ago. At that time, it was a limited group of organizations and members, who was mainly the same people involved in the SuSanA set-up. The total number of members was also limited. Hence it was a more manageable number of persons signed up to the different SuSanA working groups. Due to the concrete mission to draft factsheets, the WGs were also more action-oriented, which people probably were aware of when signing up in the early years.

The constant increase of WG members has created a situation where it is practically impossible for the WG leads to have overview of members or allow for a functioning channel for member engagement. Currently, when people are registering as new members of SuSanA they are asked to sign up to the WGs of their personal interest. This automatically will make them members of these specific WGs. But there is no available information on members' general interest to contribute to the WGs they have signed up to. The interest between members looks very different and may also change over time for an individual member. Different interest levels may include:

- Learn more about this topic (only receive information)
- Be able to discuss issues with others under this topic on the forum
- Share findings from their work
- Collaborate with others, to make progress or promote this topic

In the light of the areas which need improvement to engage the working group members more effectively and enhance their productivity, this draft concept note has been developed within the SuSanA Phase 3 Grant. The concept note provides ideas on how an updated WG structure could help revitalize the SuSanA Working Groups, aiming at optimizing member engagement and maximizing benefits both within and beyond SuSanA, from the local to global level. It synthesizes lessons from different sources (2013 WG study, the SuSanA Discussion Forum, and WG Engagement of SuSanA Phase 3 Grant) and seeks to provide as concrete and detailed recommendations as possible enabling their pilot testing and full implementation.

2. Defining more comprehensive WG objectives

Currently the general objective of the working groups is vaguely described as aiming 'to cover a variety of different sanitation aspects and to provide outputs that underline the problems and opportunities of these aspects'. In order to improve the structure and function of the SuSanA working groups there has been an expressed need to create overall objectives that are much clearer and more detailed, and broadly agreed upon. The objectives for the WGs should be based on clearly established pillars including: (i) sharpening the knowledge focus in SuSanA's operations, (ii) empowering the communities of practice (CoPs) hosted by

SuSanA, (iii) strengthening external knowledge partnerships, and (iv) further enhancing sanitation sector learning and skills development. A set of objectives of SuSanA have been suggested in the online SuSanA Discussion Forum. These topics and specific tasks are summarized in Box 2 below, and are considered a good starting point for drafting new general objectives for the working groups.

Box 2 – Proposed general objectives of SuSanA Working Groups

Based on posts and discussion in SuSanA Forum (<http://forum.susana.org/69-relevant-for-all-working-groups/16750-what-are-the-objectives-of-a-susana-working-group>).

Support knowledge, research and learning exchange:

- Be a sounding board and provide feedback about new ideas and activities (e.g. new publications) raised by WG members
- Support capacity development activities linked to the topics of WGs
- Coordinate joint preparation of publications, e.g. discussion briefs, factsheets, and practical guidance.
- Share experiences from case studies.

Facilitate networking, collaboration and partnership development:

- Promote networking, exchange and help people to connect
- Develop/strengthen partnership and collaboration both with other sanitation sector people but also people involved in the non- WASH sector
- Organize and encourage active participation in events (off line and on line)
- Provide links to other networks and community of practices

Support policy change:

- Raise questions and concerns and identify key programmatic / policy issues
- Raise awareness and advocate for the topics of the WG

3. Redefining functional structure of Working Groups

3.1 Option 1: Different levels of WG sign-ups and forming WG Steering committees

A possible improvement of the WG structure is to allow for differentiated WG sign-ups, depending on the level of engagement. The level of sign-ups would not be a permanent choice, since people's interests and availability may change. It should therefore be possible to move between these levels of engagement to allow for people to contribute in various degrees over time. Three levels of engagement to sign-up for the current 13 working groups may offer the necessary flexibility and functionality sought for, as proposed below:

1. **WG Topic member** (*several thousand people per WG*): The people signing up as a Topic member will receive general information linked to the topic, e.g. new publications, webinars, meetings, and job openings. This level of engagement does not generally request any actions from the members. This is pretty much the current level of the majority of WG members.
2. **WG Task member** (*about 50-100 people*): This group of members is interested in contributing to the work of the WG. This can include signing up to provide feedback to a new publication or getting involved in a specific task, with limited time horizon. A potential function for the WG Task group is to be a sounding board for different WG activities and products. When there are WG tasks where inputs and feedback are needed, a request for support will be circulated to the people signed up as WG reference members.

3. WG Steering committee member (about 5-10 people): The WG Steering group is made up of active members with specified roles and responsibilities to support the achievement of the objectives set up for the different WGs. Initial ideas on functions and composition of the proposed WG Steering committee are presented below. The main objective with creating a WG Steering committee is to make sure that not all responsibilities linked to WG activities fall under the leads. This means that the responsibility for leading specific WG activities will be spread out on a larger group of members, the WG Steering committee. These people can in turn make use of the

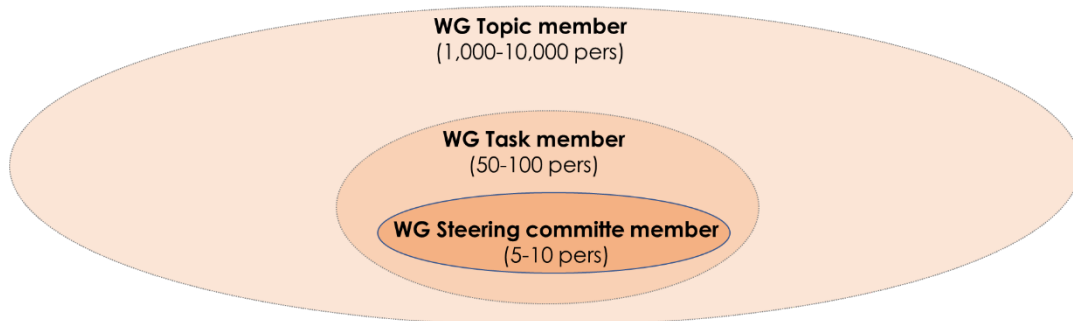


Figure 2: Visual overview of differentiated levels of engagement within one specific Working Group

It is important to provide a good overview of these different levels of engagement for both new and current members (see Fig 2). Looking through a normal user's eye, there might be many questions to answer: How do I become active in a working group? What is the use of a factsheet? What are the functions of the working group? Does a working group mean that we discuss things online in the forum or meet and organize events together? Hence, we for example need to clearly explain how they different levels work, what is the difference between them, and how to sign up or change between the levels of engagement. We also need to manage expectation linked to potential member benefits. Since there is a maximal number of people, especially on the WG Steering committee, there also need to be a formal process of applying and being selected as a Steering member. There would be three different e-mailing lists for each WG, one for each level, to facilitate communication to the different member levels.

3.1.1 Key functions of WGs

An important first step to set-up a new leadership structure is to better define the key function of WGs. These key functions need to be linked to the general objectives of the WGs, which were discussed in section 2.1. An important input to take into consideration is the summarized discussion on WG tasks that emerged in the assessment of working groups carried out in 2013 (Panzerbieter 2013):

- Important to build upon what members are working on anyway
- Different smaller sub-task forces could be formed within the WGs
- Define topics members can/should pick up autonomously in smaller groups
- Linking with practitioners is key (a systematic approach on how to do this is needed)
- Exact assessment of group capacities could make it possible to offer expertise to others (e.g. quality control, setting standards)
- Regular news-emails (maybe monthly) with link-list of recent developments related to specific topics (asking WG members to regularly feed in information that can be shared)

Based on the general objectives and the insights from the 2013 WG study the following 'wishing list' of **key functions of WGs** have been suggested:

- Keep thematic fact sheet / state of the art updated (key to link to 2030 Agenda)
- Contribute to overall governance of SuSanA through the SuSanA Core Group
- Support coordination of publication projects

- Initiate and lead thematic discussions and webinars
- Support curation of publications of the WG topic in the SuSanA library
- Sharing key topic announcements (e.g. events, calls for proposals, new jobs)
- Strengthening the focus on the south, in terms of targeting and inclusion of group members
- Support mentoring of students and younger professionals

3.1.2 Roles and responsibilities of WG Steering committees

The composition of each WG Steering committee is of high importance, to aim for diversity and balance in terms of gender, geographical representation, experience, and interdisciplinarity. A manageable size would be a small active group of 5-10 people in each WG, which preferably should be made up of a mix of more senior and young professionals. A list of suggested roles and responsibilities is presented in the table below.

Box 3 – Proposed roles of the Steering committee:

Roles:	Responsibilities:
Co-leads	- <i>Leading and supervising the overall work of the WG. They are also the general contact point for communication with the SuSanA secretariat.</i>
Core Group member	- <i>Represents the WG in the SuSanA Core Group. Participate in Core Group meetings and other CG activities.</i>
Comms. node	- <i>Provide support in different activities that require broader communication, also responsible for assembling and distribution of newsletter/regular communication (e.g. announcement of new job openings and calls for proposals linked to topic. This could also include content management on the WG topic webpage.</i>
Forum moderation	- <i>Moderating and initiating discussions linked to the WG topic. The moderators should also support the identification of topics and coordinate online thematic discussions on the SuSanA discussion forum.</i>
Webinars	- <i>Support the identification of webinar topics linked to the WG theme and potential presenters. Support the organization of the webinar.</i>
WG-meetings and events	- <i>Support the organization of physical WG-meetings, mainly in conjunction with SuSanA meetings, carried-out around the world.</i>
Publications	- <i>Support the identification of potential topics for publication and contributing authors. Support the development of publications.</i>
Capacity building	- <i>Support the identification of relevant capacity building activities linked to the WG topic. Support the coordination of capacity building activities.</i>

The list of key functions of WGs and the roles and responsibilities of WG Steering committee members should be considered a guidance for the working groups. Each WG needs to adapt to the specific needs, interests and capacities of the WG Steering committee and WG Task group. A steering committee member can undertake more than one role in the committee. Another idea to consider is to have members from the WG

1 Capacity development appointed to be the capacity building node persons in the different WG Task forces. This type of interactions between WGs could be worth further exploration.

3.1.3 Establishing routines and strategies for the WG Steering committee

The selection of the co-leads is suggested to be a more democratic process built on consensus within the WG Steering committee. Apart from a list of key functions and roles of WG Steering committee, there will be a need to develop more routines and structure e.g. meetings, agendas, goals, timing, and length of time as lead. For example, annual *WG Task plans* could be developed linked to the annual meeting of SuSanA in Stockholm. The driving force for the group must still be springing from within the group itself, with people who see benefits in their regular day-to-day work of interacting with SuSanA and that are passionate and can 'volunteer' on particular tasks. The SuSanA secretariat would keep the important role to provide guidance and follow up on the work of the WGs. A way to facilitate the communication and the work of the WG Steering committee is to set-up Adobe Connect Rooms that are made available for WG Steering meetings.

A part from implementing a new WG structure and steering, it will be crucial to review the focus and more specific objectives of the different working groups. This will also be an excellent timing and opportunity to make sure that the specific WGs objectives addresses the opportunities and challenges to support the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Especially since SuSanA now clearly has expressed the ambition to contribute towards the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda (see *SuSanA 2030 Vision*³ document and *Sustainable sanitation and SDGs: Interlinkages and opportunities*⁴ documents).

Arguments and incentives in joining as a WG Task member or Steering committee member need to be clearly described and broadly shared among all members. A key thing to explore further is how to visualize and give credit to people's input to WG activities, and SuSanA activities in general. Some roles like Discussion Forum moderation for obvious reason give some direct credit to the work input. But other activities may not be as visible. Apart from this there are of course other benefits that are already communicated such as sharing learning; sharing opportunity; keeping in touch in a focus area; and impact on the Core Group and SuSanA direction and priorities. One idea is that relevant ongoing projects could be a focus of the WG Task plan, especially if one needs networking and collaboration in a project. For example, several similar projects can be linked. The WG can also list relevant projects and create smaller sub groups for sharing and learning; as a sort of project pool. Apart from expanding the database linked to WGs, there is also a need to improve linkages to new knowledge products. In general, it is important to cater more to practitioners, and also to KM needs in the south.

3.2 Exploring alternative approaches...

If you think we should explore other potential models, please add here:

Only institutions are members of SuSanA. This would radically change the entire structure of SuSanA as a network for individual members... (EvM: what would this mean for the WGs? Dissolve them all?)

Reducing the number of WGs, closing those that are no longer so relevant or have never been active, putting some into officially inactive state and then focusing on only a few, not on 13.

³ www.susana.org/en/resources/library/details/2715

⁴ www.susana.org/en/resources/library/details/2859

4. Way forward

Action points to consider in the short-term:

- Clear definition for a working group on the SuSanA website describing the role of a lead, active members and a participant
- Guideline showing the roles and responsibilities of a working group lead and co-lead with respect to functioning of a working group and steering its active members. This document should clearly define the outcomes of the working group along with the relevant outputs (the current guideline document explains the benefits of a working group and the tools they can use).
- Standard template for working group meetings for follow-up.
- Making minutes available of working group meetings and reports on activities (e.g. in-country events) on working groups' webpages

Action points to consider in the mid-term:

- Share draft Concept Note to start a dialogue with WG leads and SuSanA members, on the suggested WG restructuring. Post the draft concept note on the Forum for more comment. Both these activities will take place when we have concluded the initial draft within the SuSanA Phase 3 project.
- Online webinar to present and discuss ideas for WG restructuring with SuSanA members
- Updated ToR for the WG leads (or steering committee).
- Test the proposed WG restructuring in one or two willing working groups.