Results of Sanitation Wikipedia Survey

Author: Elisabeth von Muench, independent consultant (working for SEI on BMGF grant)
Date: 10 December 2018

Table of contents:

1.Purpose

This survey was part of a project on knowledge management in the sanitation sector led by Stockholm Environment Institute and funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (see [here](#)).

With this survey, we wanted to see if SuSanA members and others had noticed an impact from our Wikipedia editing efforts in the last two years (Sept. 2016 until Sept. 2018).

The most important question was therefore Question 6: "Have you noticed a change in Wikipedia's sanitation, water and hygiene content in the last year or two? (for the English Wikipedia)?"

Another purpose was to receive guidance on the future direction of Wikipedia editing work that is desired by SuSanA members and others.

2. Methods

The survey was run for six weeks between 10 October and 26 November 2018. It contained 10 questions and took about 2-4 minutes to complete. Anyone was invited to fill in the survey, whether they were a user of Wikipedia or not.

Advertising was carried out as follows:
- Several forum posts (first one on 10 October)
- E-mail to Working Group 7 and Working Group 1 (the e-mail to WG7 led to the biggest jump in responses)
- The survey was mentioned in the SuSanA news mail at the end of November
- Several tweets about the survey from the twitter handles @susana_org and @EvMuench
- I had added the link to my e-mail signature for the duration of the survey
- I sent some direct e-mails to a group of current or former colleagues of mine

We have no way of knowing how representative the survey respondents were of the SuSanA membership at large (to find that out, additional questions about demographics would have had to be asked, with the downside of making the survey longer).

3. Results and discussion

We received **310 responses**. This represents 3% of our SuSanA members. The aim was to obtain 500 responses. More intense advertising would have been needed to get more responses, like a dedicated e-mail to all SuSanA members.

I assume that the majority of respondents are SuSanA members as we mainly advertised it via SuSanA channels. But it is also possible that some people filled in the survey who are not SuSanA members e.g. if they saw it advertised on twitter.
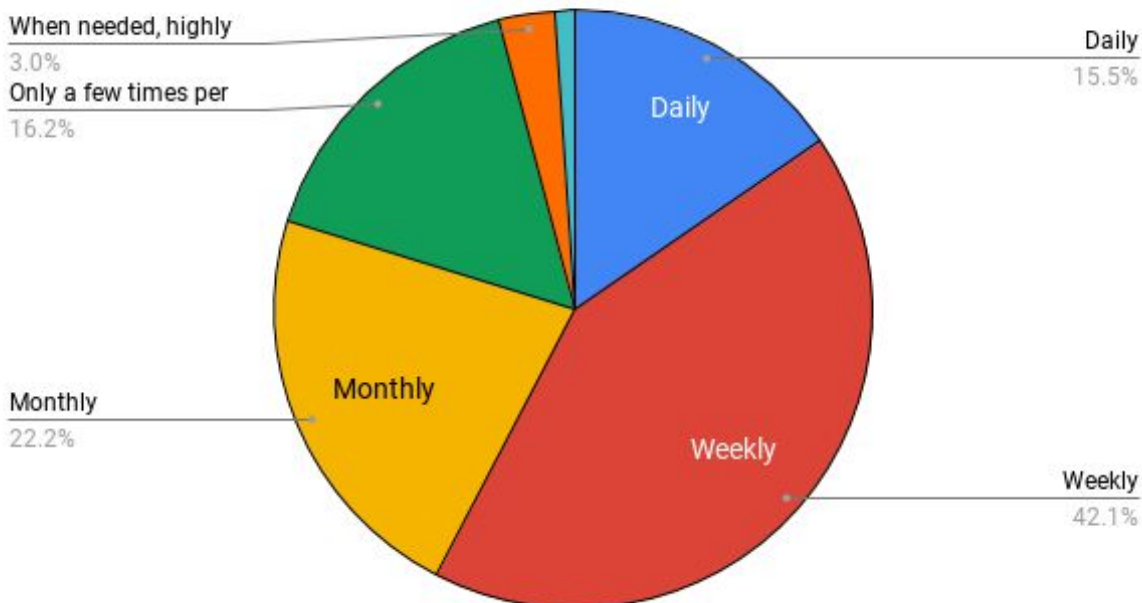
Question 1: How often do you use Wikipedia?

Purpose: To see how popular Wikipedia is amongst the survey respondents.

Results:
- 57% of people who responded said they use it weekly or even daily.

How often do you use Wikipedia?

When needed, highly 3.0%
Only a few times per 16.2%
Daily 15.5%
Monthly 22.2%
Weekly 42.1%

Some additional responses given in the survey included:

- *"Need based, it may be daily, weekly or monthly"*
- *"Depends on the topic. Sometimes weekly, sometimes less."*
- *"It's my go-to when I need to"*

Question 2: What type of information do you look up on Wikipedia? (several answers possible)

Purpose: To see whether people use Wikipedia mainly for work or mainly for non-work topics.

Results:
- The most common topic area was countries, regions or towns.
- Of the topic answers to choose from, WASH was the second-most picked topic area, followed by other work related content. This shows that Wikipedia is widely used also for work, not just for non-work topics

2. What type of information do you look up on Wikipedia?
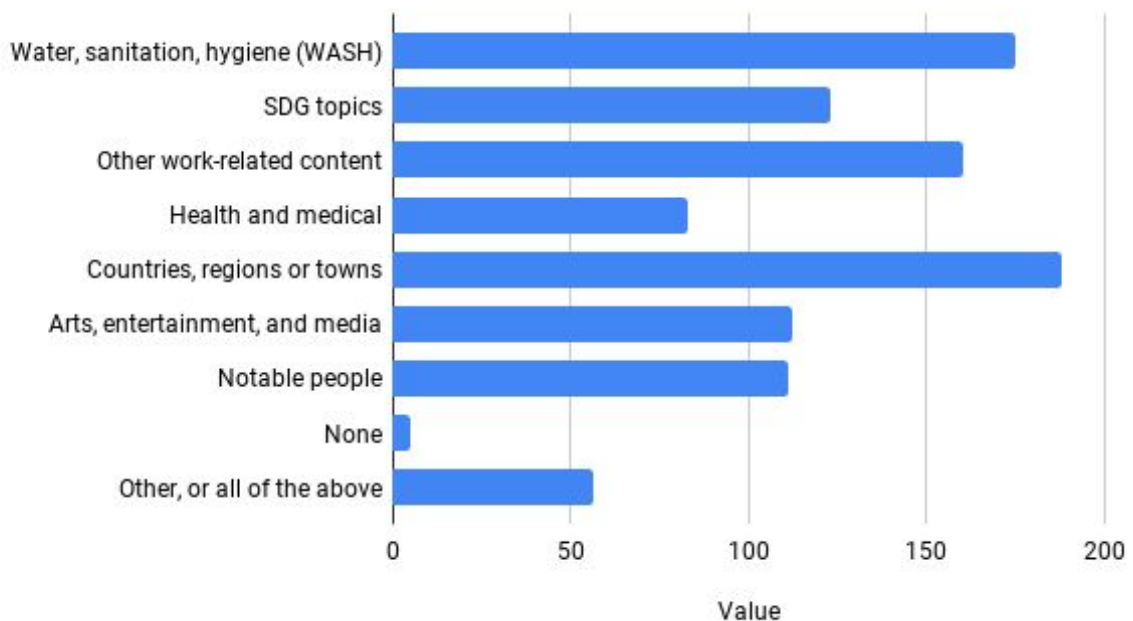
Further comments:
- In the "Other" field, interesting or typical responses included *"to translate it into other language - by changing language"*, random things, everything,

general knowledge, definitions, *"any term/place/concept I don't know"*, *"any kind of concepts, educational issues"*.

Question 3: If you rarely or never use Wikipedia, what are the main reasons?

Purpose: To see what stops people from using Wikipedia. We were curious to see if low internet speed was a frequently cited reason.

Results:
- 32 people said they don't use Wikipedia because "The information that I look for is usually not available on Wikipedia".
- 30 people said that they don't trust Wikipedia.
- The other answer options provided attracted only few responses, indicating that issues with internet speed, language, images or clarity of language are not major deterrents.

3. If you rarely or never use Wikipedia, what are the main reasons?
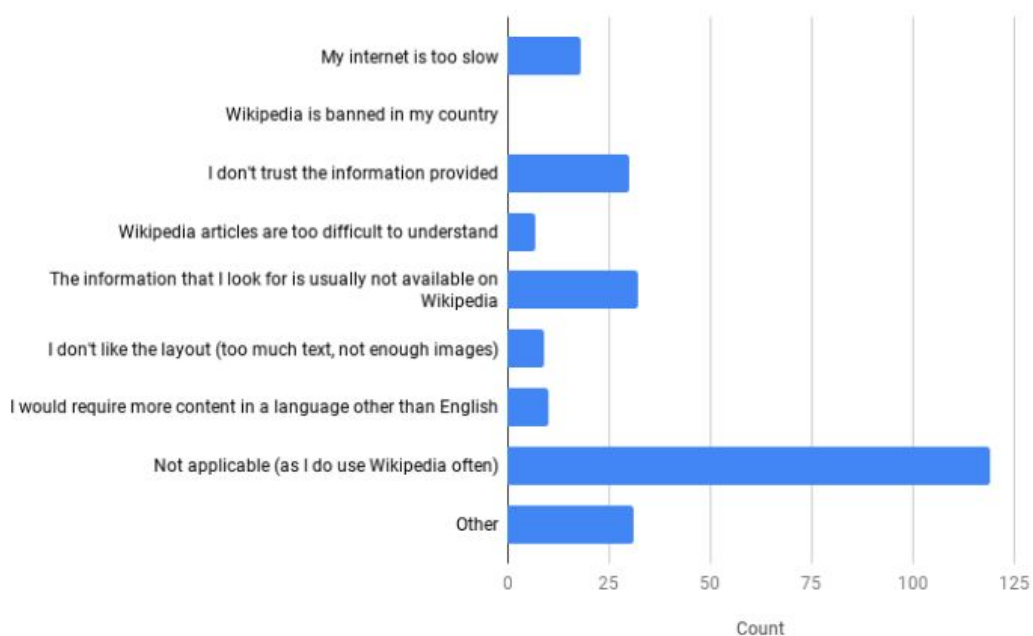
Other comments:

- Credibility was raised several times, such as *"Not considered a credible reference for academic research", "I use wikipedia as a basic knowledge, not as a source of references for my paper.", "Sometimes not referenceable"*.
- Several people said they'd rather do a Google search (which may or may not lead them to Wikipedia as well), e.g. *"If I google and wikipedia pops up then I use. Otherwise I use what I have googled"*. The trust in Google searches and its convenience are rather high, see also the answers for Question 10.

Question 4: In general, has your usage of Wikipedia increased lately?

Purpose: To see whether there is a trend emerging, i.e. an increase or a decline in Wikipedia usage. It would be worrying if there was a decline in Wikipedia use.

Results:
It seems that Wikipedia usage amongst the survey respondents has on average remained pretty much the same - on average neither an increase nor a decrease overall.

"I use Wikipedia more than before" (Q4)

Strongly disagree	7.7%
Disagree	15.7%
Neither agree nor	46.8%
Strongly agree	7.0%
Agree	22.7%
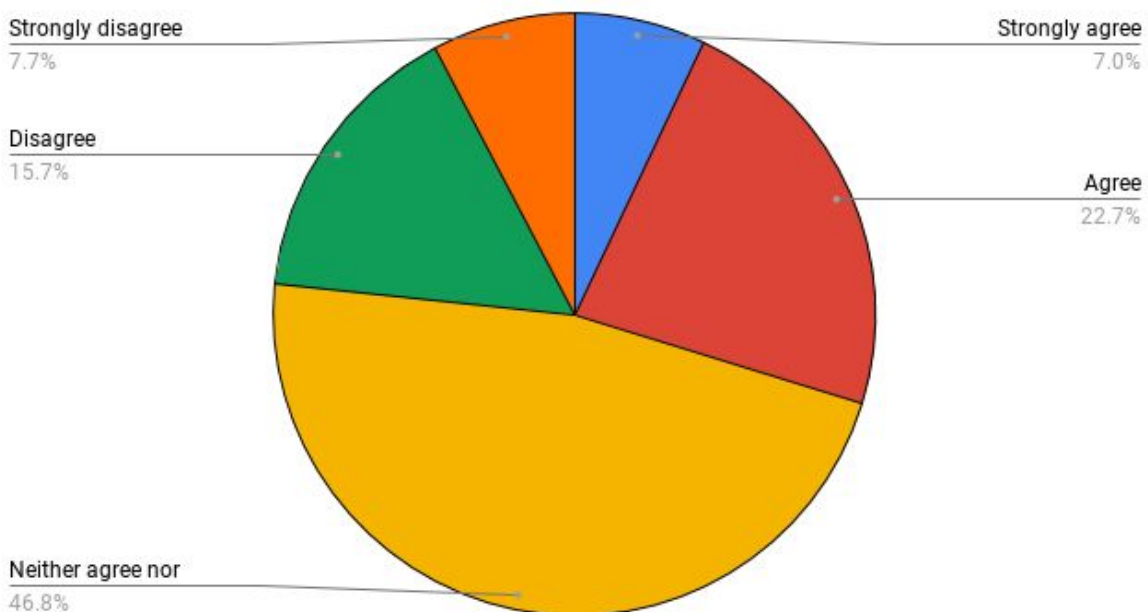
Question 5: In general, how do you rate the quality of Wikipedia articles regarding the following four parameters?

Purpose: To see which of the four quality parameters that we have identified should be focused on in future.

Results:
When comparing the four quality parameters that we asked about we can see that many people found that Wikipedia articles were easy to understand as well as comprehensive and informative. It seems that fewer people found that the articles were also well referenced (sources of content provided) or well illustrated with photos, schematics etc. These "problem areas" also showed up in in the answers to Question 10 regarding possible improvements: more references, more images are needed.

5. In general, how do you rate the quality of Wikipedia articles regarding the following four parameters?
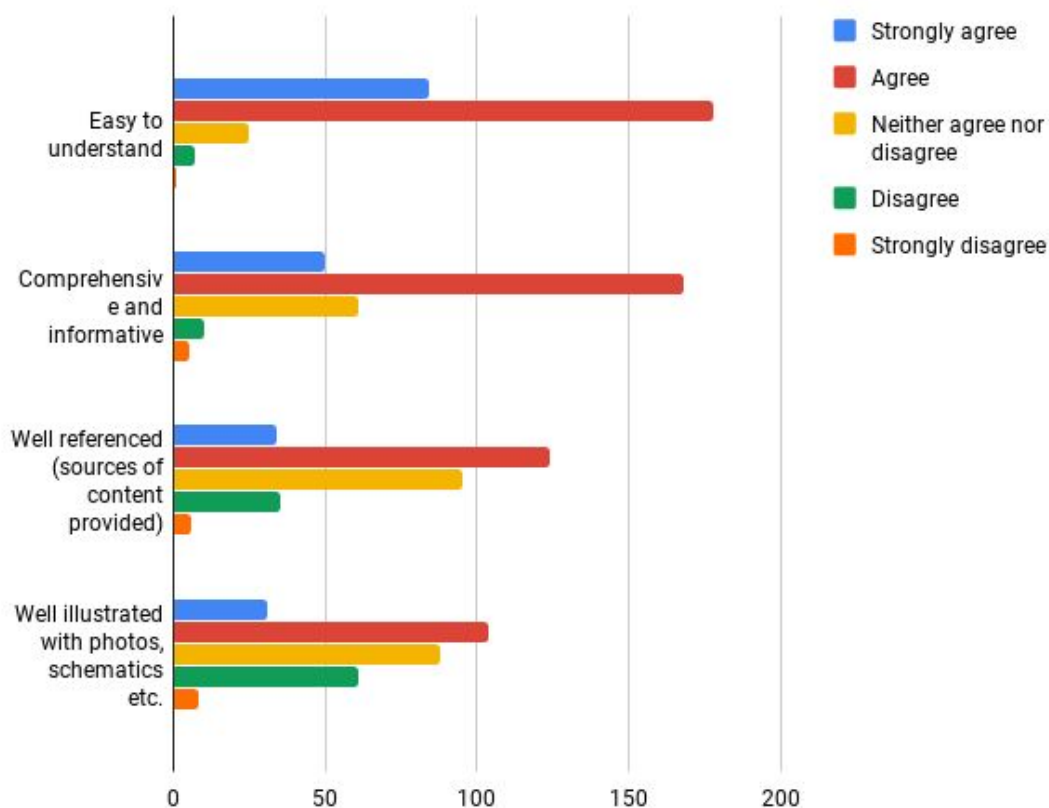
I am surprised that so many people found the Wikipedia articles easy to understand because from our analysis the readability is low for many articles. Perhaps this is due to the fact that most respondents to this survey are university educated and have no problems with English as a second language (if not their first language) but the same may not apply to the public at large who also uses Wikipedia.

Question 6: Have you noticed a change in Wikipedia's sanitation, water and hygiene content in the last year or two? (for the English Wikipedia)?

Purpose: We wanted to see if our Wikipedia editing efforts in the last two years as part of this project have had a noticeably impact.

Results:
Encouragingly for us, about one third of the respondents felt that the sanitation content on Wikipedia has been improved lately (they agreed or strongly agreed to this statement). About 60% had not noticed a change, and a small number said it had not improved (only about 5%)

"Sanitation content on Wikipedia has improved" (Q6)

Disagree
3.4%

Strongly agree
7.7%

Agree
26.2%

Neither agree nor
61.1%
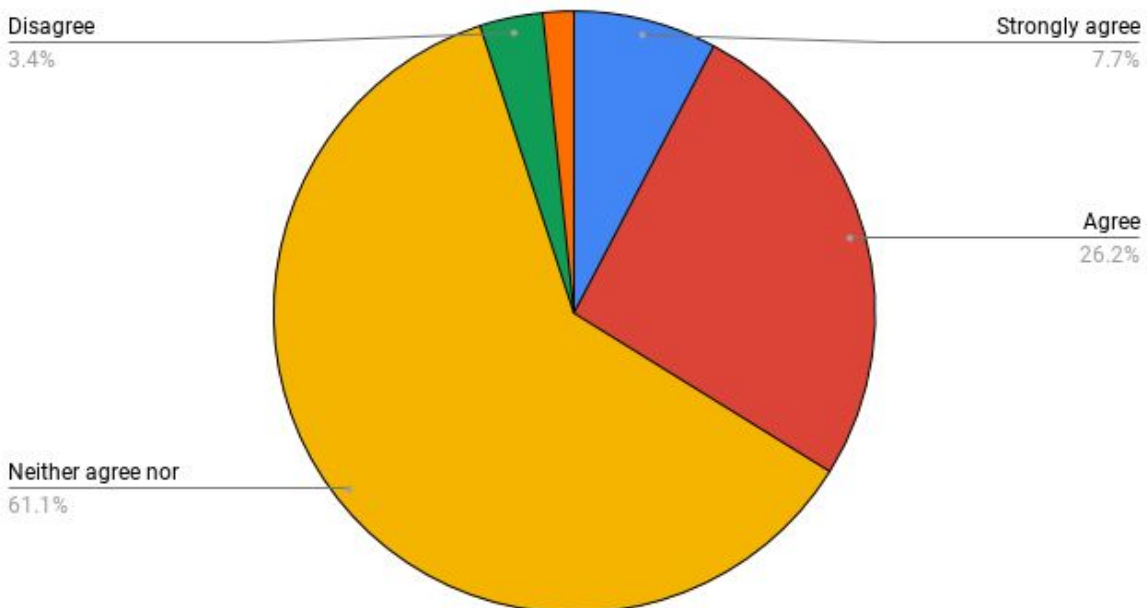
Question 7: Do you use Wikipedia in languages other than English? If yes, which ones and why?

Purpose: To see whether people mainly used only the English Wikipedia or if there a strong interest in other languages as well.

Results:
Just under half of the people said they do not use Wikipedia in a language other than English (42%), whereas just over half (58%) answered "yes" to this question and mentioned a language. Of the language mentioned, the languages mentioned the most were: French (29 people), German (22), Spanish (19), Portuguese (7), Swedish (7), Bahasa Indonesia (6), Hindi (5).

The main reasons why people use Wikipedia in other languages are (a) for using it as a translation aid or (b) to access content that is more specific to a country. It should be noted that Wikipedia articles in different languages are not usually a direct translation of each other. To give an example, the Swedish Wikipedia has more details on "feminine hygiene" than the English Wikipedia. Sometimes this is tagged as such at the top of the article, see here.

Some typical quotes included:
- *"German, Swedish, French - why - often to translate content that's not so easy to find in dictionaries"*
- *"Spanish, to see what the Spanish translation would be for things that I only know in English."*
- *"French, because the information is not exactly the same and it helps understanding to have several view on a topic."*
- *"Yes, German because it's my native tongue and some specific information only exists in German."*
- *"Dutch (native language), sometimes German if it's very specific information that may be better described in German"*
- *"Telugu, as it's my mother tongue and it's easy for me to comprehend the same."*

Question 8: Would you donate money to Wikipedia in the future (as part of their crowd-funding annual campaign?)

<u>Purpose:</u> We asked this question because it might have relevance in future if we ask for crowd-funding type donations to SuSanA.

<u>Results:</u>
About half of the respondents were undecided; about one third said "no" and only about 16% said yes.

8. Would you donate money to Wikipedia in the future (as part of their crowd-funding annual campaign?)
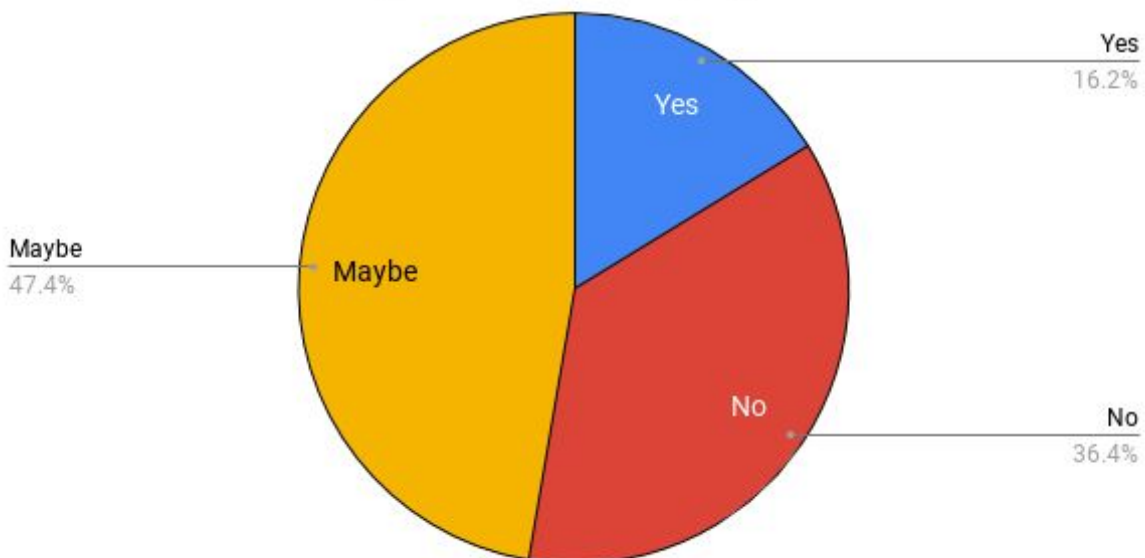
Additional comments:
I think people are used to receiving free content on the internet, so the willingness to pay is relatively low. However, it would be interesting to find out how the people who answered "maybe" could be motivated. One factor could just be feeling lazy.

Question 9: What kind of improvements would you like to see done on sanitation-related content in Wikipedia?

<u>Purpose:</u> To provide guidance on further work needed. Also to understand if people understood how Wikipedia is meant to be used (i.e. what it is supposed to contain and what not; e.g. Wikipedia is an encyclopedia, not a "how to" guide)

<u>Results:</u>

This question attracted 198 responses. People said they would like to see:
- More photos, videos, infographics, colourful maps
- More references, standardised reference list, trustworthy sources, more credibility and references, e.g. "if the sourcing was robust it would be a good source", "I would appreciate objectivity first, rather like Metcalf and Eddy"
- More up to date, current improvements and advances
- Building confidence about its quality
- Regional solutions for sanitation, more info related to African context
- More best practice

Several topics were mentioned to be worked on. I picked out those that I see as most realistic for the encyclopedia that Wikipedia is:
- Sanitation service chain and information on how the components affect each other
- Behavior change (already exists but needs more work)
- Gender components of WASH (already exists but needs more work, see e.g. here: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water_access_and_gender)
- Technological options in WASH
- More information about developing countries. Quote: *"Wikipedia should be more interested to publish articles having developing countries' sanitation-related content."*
- *"More coverage of emerging technologies (briquettes etc)"*
- *"Improvement in statistics of sanitation-related disease morbidity and mortality per country/region"*
- *"More articles in general, especially coming from sector professionals; more on region-specific topics; more entries in sector-relevant languages (Spanish, French, Swahili, Hindi, Arabic, Mandarin etc.)"*
- *"More low-cost appropriate technology that is affordable without subsidy for the target group in low-income areas"*

These two quotes show slightly contradictory positions as to the source of information that should be used:
- *"Wiki should remain as OPEN SOURCE and allow local knowledge too to be uploaded and not just published information as the ONLY source of knowledge"*
- *"The ability to stop people editing who don't have enough knowledge!"*

These comments are referring to the issue of reliability and reputation of Wikipedia:
- *"Wikipedia is widely criticised for not being a reliable source of information. I would like to see Wikipedia improve its reputation for providing reliable, backed-up references for the information the articles contain. Perhaps an*

explanation for how to use Wikipedia correctly could be given at the top of each article - i.e. 'don't quote this article directly, rather use it as a portal to other articles that you can be check before referencing' "

● *"Actually I would like to see it promoted as a professional resource. Currently quite a few roleplayers who receive reports citing Wikipedia reject this and state that they are not looking for "googled" facts but for reliable, professional data."*

Here is a further detailed feedback from one person:

*"**1. Consistency**. Due to user generated content, some pages are good and some are weak. So consistent quality content on sanitation.*

***2. Links.** Wikipedia is great for high level and general info, not so great for deeper insight. So links to more technical or detailed articles, resources, case studies etc would be great. Unfortunately there are so many different platforms for sanitation info and Google is so commercial and limited now, it's hard to sometimes find the specific info one is looking for.*

***3. Timeliness:** Wikipedia is best used like World Book--but that can make info outdated. This may be ok for general users, but keeping information current will make it more useful for WaSH professionals.*

***4. Authenticity:** One challenge with Wikipedia is low confidence in authenticity and accuracy because the source of info is often unknown--unless one checks every reference which is impractical. So putting on each page the names / positions of those who have whetted and validated the information will inspire confidence."*

Another two typical quotes:

● *"To up date the information. To improve the quality of content. To promote the use of wikipedia in the WASH sector. To link with key global and regional WASH web pages ie.: JMP, GLASS, GEMI, SIASAR."*

● *"Often, I see content is disconnected or abrupt. While it is a decent place to start if you are only browsing, it is not a source of reference."*

Question 10: Which other websites do you consult to find information about sanitation or SDG topics (other than Wikipedia)?

<u>Purpose:</u> To understand which other important websites there are for the SDG topics (so that we can potentially link and integrate their content).

<u>Results:</u>
Number of people who gave some website examples: 239

The most commonly mentioned website was actually SuSanA (website + forum). Very roughly, an equally popular answer was Google and Google Scholar.
Typical quotes for this were:

- *Use Google to find material rather than going to a specific website*
- *I google my questions on subject*
- *It varies on the topic. I would use Google and then access the top ranking results.*
- *I think it's a great idea to focus on improving content on Wikipedia. Google leads to various datasets, reports etc depending on info needed. No particular websites.*
- *I use Google searches, primary literature, and NGO/government reports when looking for information on sanitation or SDG topics.*

Many people also mentioned the UN related websites, such as UN SDG sites, UN-Water, UN-Habitat, JMP, WHO, UNICEF, Worldbank, UNDP.

Other well-known sector players' websites were also mentioned but none of them stood out: Eawag/Sandec, SSWM, CAWST, WSSCC, IRC, WEDC, RWSN, IWMI, SEI, universities, SWA.

4. Summary

A short survey was set up with 10 questions and advertised for a period of six weeks. We received 310 responses which were likely predominantly by SuSanA members. The main purpose was to check if SuSanA members had noticed an improvement in WASH related content in the English Wikipedia during the last two weeks. Therefore, Question 6 was the most important question which was: "Have you noticed a change in Wikipedia's sanitation, water and hygiene content in the last year or two? (for the English Wikipedia)?". About one third of the respondents felt that the sanitation content on Wikipedia has improved lately (by agreeing or even strongly agreeing to this statement). We see this as a positive result, given how difficult it is to notice subtle changes in the quality of a Wikipedia article over a two-year period.

57% of respondents said they use Wikipedia weekly or even daily. Respondents use Wikipedia for work and non-work purposes (the most common topic area was countries, regions or towns). The usage of Wikipedia has neither increased or decreased recently for most people (Question 4 results).

The two main reasons selected for rarely or never using Wikipedia were: "The information that I look for is usually not available on Wikipedia" and that they "don't trust Wikipedia" (Question 3 results). The issue of trust came up often also in the answers to some of the other questions (e.g. Question 9 and 10 results). Both of these reasons are something we could tackle in future by adding information on more topics and by adding more reliable sources.

The answers to Question 5 helped to identify the most pressing problem areas with Wikipedia articles. They are: not enough references provided as sources for information and not well illustrated with photos, schematics etc. This matches with Question 9 results.

The answers to Question 7 revealed that 58% of people do use Wikipedia also in other languages. The main reasons why people use Wikipedia in other languages are (a) for using it as a translation aid or (b) to access content that is more specific to the country whose language they speak or understand.

We have currently no plans to work on the non-English language Wikipedias. However, if we have collaborators who speak another language (or if Google Translate works well in that language) and if content is more detailed in another language, one possibility could be to translate that content into English.

When asked if they would donate money to Wikipedia in the future about half of the respondents were undecided; about one third said "no" and only about 16% said yes (Question 8 results). It is not our job to help Wikipedia raise funds but these results could give some indication for the applicability of crowd-funding approaches for SuSanA.

The improvements that people would like to see in Wikipedia articles were mostly about more photos and videos, as well as more references and trustworthy sources (Question 9 results, which also match up with Question 5 results). Some people also pointed out that they would like to see more up to date information, more information related to developing countries or the African context in particular and more best practise examples. It should be noted that "best practice" examples may go against the grain of an encyclopedia which is not meant to judge but just to describe

objectively. However, if we find publications that talk about best practice examples then it would be fine to quote those in the Wikipedia articles.

The central importance of Google came out in the answers to Question 3, 9 and 10. The majority of people let Google help them find what they are looking for, rather than going to websites directly. So it is important for any website to have a good Google ranking. Wikipedia articles tend to rank very high on Google searches. So even if people don't go to Wikipedia directly, they often end up there via Google (unless they have a bias against Wikipedia and skip over that search result, or unless they are not interested in an overview but want to go straight into the details).

The survey also reinforced that we need to help people realise that Wikipedia is not a source in itself. It just aggregates the information from reliable publications and websites and makes it accessible and findable - hopefully in an objective and unbiased way. It has a great potential to provide an overview for any member of the general public. It gives people a convenient access point to dig deeper by using the sources provided in the Wikipedia articles.

Appendix

The forum post that was used to encourage participation on 10 October 2018:

Please take our short Sanitation Wikipedia survey: I am interested to hear your feedback regarding sanitation-related content in the English language Wikipedia.

Here is the survey link:
docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdPTgI9...0vLvJVfHIeQ/viewform

The survey is only 10 questions long and will take about 2-4 minutes to complete. Anyone can fill in the survey, whether you are a user of Wikipedia or not.

This survey is part of a project on knowledge management led by Stockholm Environment Institute and funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (see here).

I am collecting survey responses for about 2-3 weeks (hoping for several hundred replies). After the survey is closed I will immediately post the raw results here in this forum thread for all to see.

Thanks for taking the time to fill in my survey! **Your answers will help guide me on the future direction of Wikipedia editing work that is desired by SuSanA members and others.**

If you have any questions please put them in this thread or e-mail me.

Regards,
Elisabeth

P.S. Previous discussion threads about Wikipedia editing for sanitation content are available here on the forum: forum.susana.org/198-wikipedia .