

# The Hidden World of Lagos Sanitation Workers: Investigating Livelihood Vulnerabilities and Empowerment Opportunities



**Project Report**  
Project duration: March 2022-July 2023

# Executive Summary

## Background

- Sanitation workers perform tasks associated with the wellbeing of all city dwellers while contributing to aesthetics, cleanliness and optimal functioning of the city itself. Whether as biofil toilets installers, septic tank operators or entrepreneurs operating commercial public toilets, they are indispensable actors in municipal solid waste, or waste water management. Their work is even more important as the world emerges from a time of unprecedented health challenges associated with COVID 19 infection, bringing to global attention, increased consciousness of the need for maintaining hygiene at individual, household levels, neighbourhood and city levels.
- However, in spite of their obvious importance, sanitation workers are generally unrecognised informal workers and operators lacking the social and economic opportunities required for decent living. Minimal recognition has been accorded to them or their work in both research and policy circles in Lagos and other African countries. This study therefore establishes a case for proper recognition of the role that sanitation workers play in urban management and the need to safeguard their livelihoods.
- We addressed questions that are critical to understanding the role of sanitation workers in the waste management ecosystem of Lagos, the institutional frameworks guiding their activities, their lived experiences and livelihood challenges, as well as the innovative practices that have emerged in response to these challenges.
- By focusing on inter-related issues relating to working conditions, socio-economic realities and institutional frameworks, while highlighting innovation and opportunities for empowerment of sanitation workers, the study is aligned directly with SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 8 (Decent Work).

## Aim and Objectives

- The study aims to interrogate the role of urban sanitation workers in Lagos with a view to enhancing their livelihoods and according formal recognition to their critical contributions in the attainment of sustainable development in Lagos. The study objectives were to:
  - Explore and document the various institutionalized approaches for urban sanitation services in Lagos
  - Identify the various categories and socio-economic conditions of urban sanitation workers in Lagos
  - Determine the range of services provided by each category of sanitation workers, including business structures, social support mechanisms and everyday practices

- Establish the key constraints and enablers of sustainable livelihoods among sanitation workers.
- Explore the innovative practices inherent in their response to emergent challenges of health, economic precarity and COVID19

## Methods

- The project relied on a qualitative research design that incorporated policy analysis with layered, deep dives into specific regimes of engagement and field work. We obtained ethical clearance from the University of Lagos before commencing the engagement process.
- We carried out two Focus Group Discussions with waste dislodgers who are government employed paid staff of the Lagos waste-water management office. This was necessary to understand their role in the framework of municipal services, their relationship with government and the key obstacles that limit their impact. Another FGD was held with the members of operators of waste dislodgement trucks at their secretariat in Lekki, Lagos. Field observation visits to the case study sites and mapping of relevant infrastructure. Indepth interviews with 24 public toilet operators across 10 local government areas in Lagos state were also carried out.

## Key Findings and Impact

- We found that sanitation workers are burdened with the stigma that attends their work, they earn low wages and work in conditions that makes them vulnerable to infections, drug abuse and ill-health.
- Without any social security or formalized associations to foster decent and safe work in a sector that is more focused on hard infrastructure, we argue for a more humane approach to supporting sanitation workers.
- Our work has succeeded in connecting the sanitation workers with the Federation of Informal Workers of Nigeria, facilitating an advocacy approach to creating a network of support that will enable sanitation workers access health insurance, improved working conditions and equitable employment benefits.
- A toolkit for sanitation workers was designed and distributed from our engagement with FIWON, Government Agencies and sanitation workers to ensure that health seeking behavior and/or empowerment practices are mainstreamed among all categories of sanitation workers.

The toolkit was designed to capture the challenges of urban sanitation workers and proffer solutions to them. It was printed in posters and shared amongst the project stakeholders for them to display on their premises in order to draw visibility to the project and ensure dissemination of information to those who did not participate directly in the study.

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# PART 1: PROJECT OVERVIEW

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Access to water and sanitation are undeniably basic services that should be widely available in all human settlements, whether they are rural, urban or peri-urban. Lack of access to water and sanitation limits quality of life and contributes to the emergence and proliferation of diseases such as Cholera. Water and Sanitation are also a core component of the Sustainable Development Goals. Several policies have therefore been directed at national, state and local levels to address the challenges of adequate water and sanitation provision, yet outcomes have been very successful. On the other hand, policies tend to combine water and sanitation, but inadvertently, water provision issues mostly leave sanitation overshadowed in terms of details, targets, and budgets. Significantly too, many policies do not address fecal sludge management or consider the entire sanitation value chain, from containment to safe disposal. A most critical component of the Sanitation value-chain are the workforce, but in both literature and policy, the value of their work is not recognized. Lagos, Nigeria's economic and social capital, with 22 million inhabitants is not an exception.

Sanitation workers perform tasks associated with the wellbeing of city dwellers while contributing to aesthetics, cleanliness and optimal functioning of the city itself. Whether as biofill toilets installers, septic tank operators or entrepreneurs operating commercial public toilets, they are indispensable actors in municipal solid waste, or waste water management. Their work is even more important as the world emerges from a time of unprecedented health challenges associated with COVID 19 infection, bringing to global attention, increased consciousness of the need for maintaining hygiene at individual, household levels, neighbourhood and city levels.

However, inspite of their obvious importance, sanitation workers are generally unrecognised informal workers lacking the social and economic opportunities required for decent living. Minimal recognition has been accorded to them or their work in both research and policy circles in Lagos and other African countries. This study therefore establishes a case for proper recognition of the role that sanitation workers play in urban management and the need to safeguard their livelihoods.

We seek to address questions that are critical to understanding the role of sanitation workers in the waste management ecosystem of Lagos, the institutional frameworks guiding their activities, their lived experiences and livelihood challenges, as well as the innovative practices that have emerged in response to these challenges.

By focusing on inter-related issues relating to working conditions, socio-economic realities and institutional frameworks, while highlighting innovation and opportunities for

empowerment of sanitation workers, the study is aligned directly with SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 8 (Decent Work).

## 1.2 PROJECT AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The study aims to interrogate the role of urban sanitation workers in Lagos with a view to enhancing their livelihoods and according formal recognition to their critical contributions in the attainment of sustainable development in Lagos.

To this end, the study objectives are to:

- Explore and document the various institutionalized approaches for urban sanitation services in Lagos
- Identify the various categories and socio-economic conditions of urban sanitation workers in Lagos
- Determine the range of services provided by each category of sanitation workers, including business structures, social support mechanisms and everyday practices:
- Establish the key constraints and enablers of sustainable livelihoods among sanitation workers.
- Explore the innovative practices inherent in their response to emergent challenges of health, economic precarity and COVID19

## 1.3 PROJECT ACTIVITIES

### Methodology

The project relied on a qualitative research design that incorporated policy analysis with deep dives in a layered approach as shown below:

#### Activity 1 (Policy Agenda Setting)

- A desk study on recent trends in urban sanitation (including workers) and on policy efforts to address these trends.

#### Activity 2 (Field work)

- An institutional stakeholder workshop with external support agencies, policy makers, government agencies and service providers to map different institutionalized approaches adopted to address urban sanitation.
- In-depth interviews with categories of sanitation workers in order to collect data about their socio-economic conditions, structure of sanitation enterprises and everyday livelihood practices, as well as enablers and constraints to their sustainable livelihood aspirations.

- Focus Group Discussion with sanitation workers associations in order to understand their role in the framework of municipal services, their relationship with government and the key obstacles that limit their impact.
- Field observation visits to the case study sites and mapping of relevant infrastructure.

#### Activity 3 (Advocacy)

- Engagement with Federation of Informal Workers Organizations of Nigeria (FIWON) to facilitate entry of Association of Sanitation Workers into the federation.
- Engagement with Lagos State Wastewater Management Office (LSWMO) to facilitate structured interface between government and informal sanitation workers and catalyzing their recognition in the waste management value chain.
- Development of Toolkit and posters to enhance health and safety practices of sanitation workers.
- Capacity Development Workshop with Sanitation workers based on emergent work-related challenges that emerge from the study.

#### Activity 4 (Monitoring and Evaluation)

- Team meetings: A Committee of Advisors was set up with representation from the WASH sector, Labour and Academia. They supported the validation of research instruments and participated in stakeholder workshops.
- Validation meeting (i.e closeout meeting): A Multi-stakeholder workshop was organized to bring the sanitation workers, LSWMO officials, CDAs, CSOs and development partners together to consider the outcomes of the research and outline issues for policy action, as well as to fashion out better ways of working together for more sustainable and safe sanitation management in the state.
- Piloting of toolkits: One focus group meeting was with selected sanitation workers to ensure that the toolkits are easy to understand and fit for purpose.

The monitoring and evaluation framework ensured that the project activities and outcomes are relevant and accurate and that the eventual beneficiaries and off-takers of the project outputs actively contribute to the production of knowledge and are carried along at each step. It also ensured that identified gaps are addressed immediately.



# PART 2: URBAN SANITATION, INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND SANITATION WORKERS IN LAGOS

## 2.1 URBAN SANITATION IN CONTEXT

Dense urban environments require consideration of the whole sanitation service chain to ensure safety in waste management processes and to manage the risk of contamination and disease proliferation. This process comprises of fecal waste containment, collection, transport, treatment, and final disposal or reuse. Thus, sanitation in urban environments is a much more complex system that transcends the provision of toilet hardwares (Marx *et al.*, 2013). As a sub-system of the urban space, it is particularly important in cities with pressing issue in slum expansion, where crowded conditions and poor sanitation contribute to frequent outbreaks of disease that threaten inhabitants, in addition to exposing other city residents to health risks. It is also a core component of the Sustainable Development Goals, designated Goal 6 alongside Water and Hygiene with connections to other SDGs in such a way that makes it critical to urban wellbeing (figure 1). The situation of the urban poor poses a growing challenge, as they live increasingly in cities, where proper sewerage management is precarious or non-existent and space for toilets and removal of waste is at a premium. Inequality in access is compounded when sewage removed from wealthier households is discharged into storm drains, waterways or landfills, polluting poor residential areas (Jung *et al.*, 2017). Globally, approximately half of all wastewater is discharged, partially treated or untreated directly into rivers, lakes or the ocean.

A sanitation worker (or sanitary worker) is a person responsible for cleaning, maintaining, operating, or emptying the equipment or technology at any step of the sanitation chain (WHO, 2019). A broader scope outside the WASH sector, is that sanitation workers may also be involved in cleaning streets, parks, public spaces, sewers, storm water drains, and public toilets. This study focusses on those whose daily livelihoods entails emptying latrine pits and septic tanks, cleaning of toilets and sewers, operating pumping stations and treatment plants, as well as those who clear human waste manually, such as solid waste workers, cleaners and transporters as defined by Sperandeo and Srinivasan (2020). Over half of the world's population is now urban, representing some 3.9 billion people, 2.8 billion of which use on-site sanitation systems with pits, chambers, and septic tanks. These systems accumulate fecal sludge and require regular services by sanitation workers to empty, transport, treat and use/dispose of the sludge. Without sanitation workers, the Sustainable Development Goal 6, Target 6.2 ("safely managed sanitation for all") cannot be achieved.

Provision of sanitation services can be done in two ways: onsite sanitation; and network-based solutions (Sandec-UNITAR-WBI 2008). Each of the options has two (2) components: a public good component and a private good component. For the onsite system, the public good component may comprise the fleet of pit or septic tank emptying trucks, intermediate transfer stations when necessary and facilities for treatment and disposal of the materials removed by the emptying trucks as well as the disposal of the effluent (liquid) material from the onsite facilities. The private good component includes a range of onsite facilities such as latrines and septic tanks. For sewerage systems, the public good components are sewers, pumping stations, treatment plants and discharge outfalls, whereas the private part of the system consists of toilets.

Onsite hardware, such as pits and septic tanks, is the predominant containments used in Sub-Saharan Africa cities and other low and middle income countries and these are predominantly unimproved systems ( Odagiri et al, 2021 ). Yet the focus of government agencies, urban sanitation authorities, master plans, and development finance covering 60% of the population remains on incremental expansion of centralized sewers benefitting the small, richer segment of urban populations (Alyse *et al*, 2020). According to the World Health Organization/United Nations Children’s Fund Joint Monitoring Programme (2006), improved sanitation facilities include:

- i. Flush or pour-flush to: piped sewer system; septic tank; or pit latrine
- ii. Ventilated improved pit latrine
- iii. Pit latrine with slab
- iv. Composting toilet.

There is therefore a need for continuous attention on the sanitation value chain, and the operation and maintenance of networks and Wastewater Treatment Plants (WWTP) as well as onsite facilities.

Meeting the goal of universal, safely managed sanitation in urban areas would require approximately \$45 billion annually. This is approximately twice what is needed to achieve universal, safely managed water services. Current expenditure on sanitation is about 25 percent less than expenditure on water, and most countries report insufficient financing to reach their national targets for urban sanitation. However, the welfare of sanitation workers are not always factored in these expenditures. This may not be surprising, given that historically, the emergence of disease outbreaks such as the Bubonic Plague was the driver of increased attention to urban sanitation infrastructure. Such occurrence created an awareness that better managed cities, with improved services, contribute to improved health, governance, cleaner environments, dignity, and economic growth (Mehta, 2009).

Today, it is still clear that human waste must be managed in ways that safeguard the urban environment, including water and food supplies, to maximize development outcomes. The purpose of urban sanitation as a system capable of reducing health risks

by managing factors in the urban environment which can contribute to disease outbreak has become acceptable. One of these major factors is human waste, which is generated in large volumes in urban areas. Urban sanitation workers or sewers who collect such waste and route it to central processing facilities are, therefore, key actors in any city's urban sanitation system, even if they still remain relatively an unknown workforce in most cities.

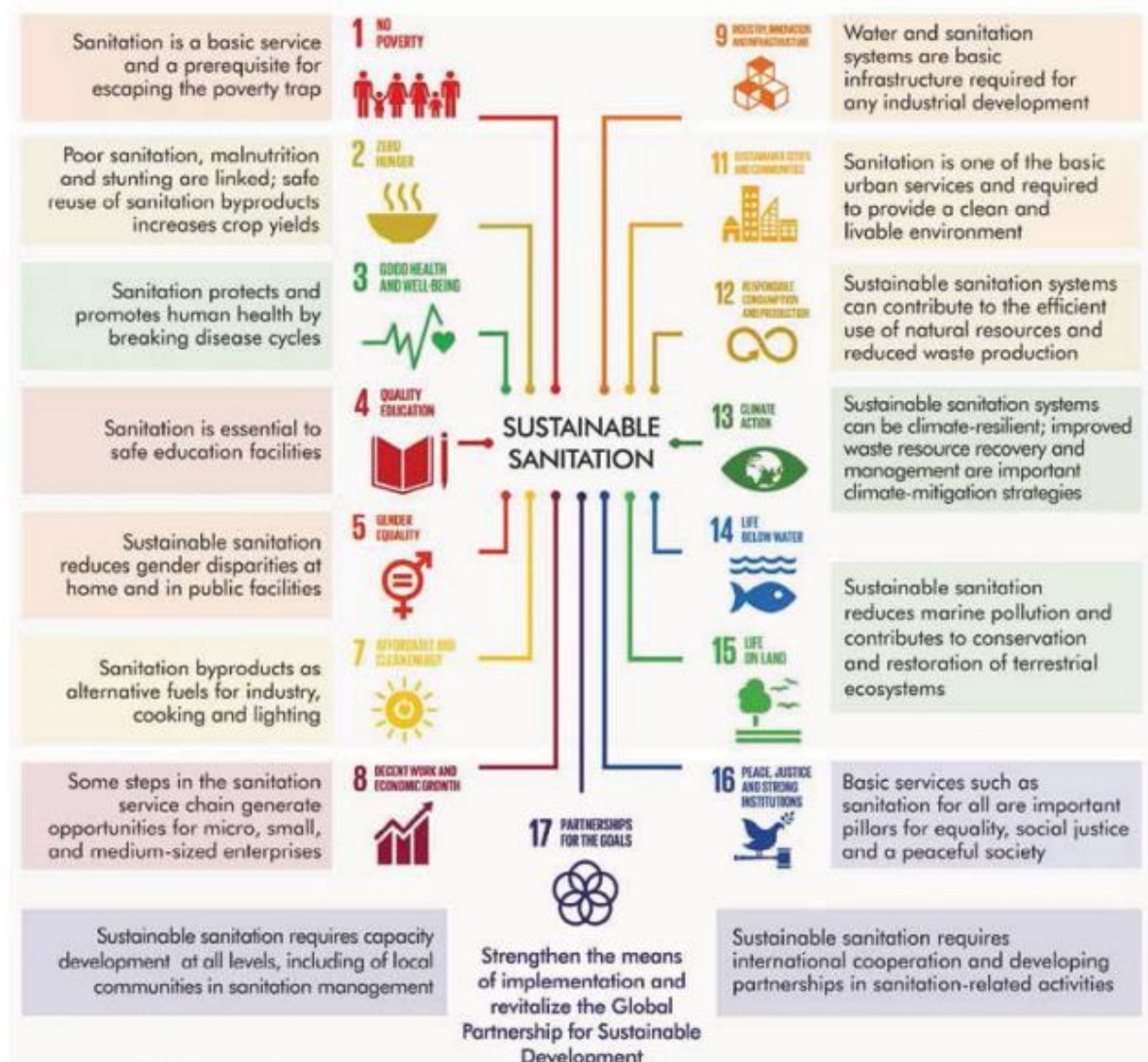


Fig 1: A 2018 illustration showing interlinkages of sustainable sanitation with SDGs. CWIS presents a strong way to leverage sanitation, with interlinkages beyond SDG 6. Source: Sustainable Sanitation Alliance adapted from Abishek and Christoph (2020)

## 2.2 INSTITUTIONAL & OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR SANITATION IN LAGOS

There are some variations on the use of the term "sanitation" between countries and organizations and this impacts the allocation of municipal responsibilities. In many countries, it refers to the maintenance of hygienic conditions, through services such as garbage collection and wastewater disposal. In many countries, responsibility for the provision and regulation of urban sanitation is devolved to local government agencies (such as municipal governments), which often face significant financial and capacity constraints.

A combination of inadequate infrastructure, lack of required human capital, poor investment, and a deficient enabling regulatory environment – amongst other challenges – meant that approximately 80 million Nigerians had no access to improved sanitation facilities. In recent years, the Nigerian Government has strengthened its commitment towards improving access to WASH services, declaring a State of Emergency in 2018 and launching the National Action Plan (NAP), a 13-year strategy for the Revitalization of Nigeria's Water Supply, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) sector, aimed at ensuring universal access to sustainable and safely managed WASH services by 2030, commensurate with the Sustainable Development Goals (World Water Council, 2018). However, there is no framework for fecal sludge management in Nigeria. Previous WaterAid Research on sanitation in three Nigerian states (Kano, Warri, and Enugu cities) show that the current WASH policies across the country make no provision for fecal sludge management or consider the whole sanitation value chain – from containment to safe disposal. The study also revealed that across the three cities researched, there was no anchor government agency for handling sanitation service value-chain. The situation therefore calls for an intentional revisit of the sanitation sector in Nigeria, with the attendant recognition of the important work that sanitation workers carry out for safe and healthy cities.

However, this situation is slightly different in Lagos, which does have the Lagos Waste Water Management Office as the anchor agency for promoting safe collection and disposal of fecal sludge.

The massive increase in waste generation in Lagos, like other Global South megalopolises has been attributed to the phenomenal rise in population, the consequence of relentless in-migration from hinterland communities, the economic opportunities that accompany urbanization and rising levels of disposable incomes (Iwuoha 2013). Similarly, the generation of sewerage has increased with new housing construction and household formations in many parts of the city.

A study on water and sanitation in Nigeria's urban areas discovered three types of toilets in Lagos: flush toilets, ventilated improved pit latrines, and open pit latrines. All of these are based on on-site sanitary conditions (Ayeni *et al.*, 2009). That is, as there was no

central sewer system, human waste from toilets was disposed of on the plots upon which buildings were built.

Only 5% of wastewater in Lagos is treated and the sewage and solid waste management systems of the state are poor. The only conventional sewerage system is in the metropolitan area of Victoria Island, the first commercial area in the state. While there are no major wastewater treatment facilities in the state, Lagos operates five smaller wastewater plants, at primary treatment levels, that serve only 40% of the Lagos metropolis. The state government has about 5-6 sewage treatment plants where the Dislodgers take the waste (LWRC, 2014). Dislodgers are businesses and their operatives who own or work with sewage removal trucks. This doesn't serve the whole population and residents are averse to paying the cost to empty their septic tanks. There is no closed sewerage system in Lagos. The sewerage system in Lagos consists of septic tanks, sewers, and canals. The wastewater from homes empties into the septic tank, the sludge settles while the wastewater leaves the tank and drains into the soil. The sludge is dislodged and taken from homes to discharge points by private sector participants. Discharge points are themselves operated by the Lagos State Waste Management Office (LSWMO).

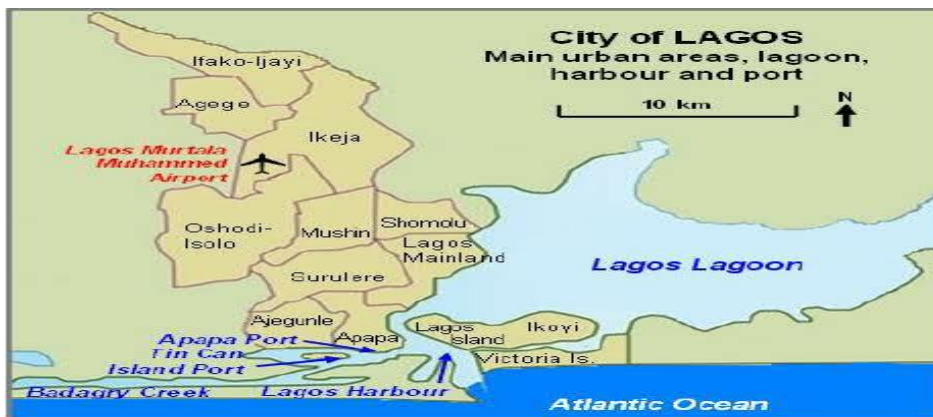


Fig 2: Map showing the main urban areas, Lagoon, Harbour and Port of Lagos

In the last few years, certain government agencies have been saddled with environmental health and sanitation in Lagos. These are:

- The Lagos State Ministry of Environment and Water Resources: This Ministry houses some active agencies such as the Lagos State Waste Management Authority (LAWMA), Lagos Water Corporation (LWC), Lagos Environmental Protection Agency (LASEPA), Lagos State Parks and Gardens Agency and Lagos State Water Regulatory Commission and Kick Against Indiscipline (KAI). Lagos State Wastewater Management Office (LSWMO) which was carved out of the erstwhile sewage department of the office of the drainage services in the Ministry of the Environment in Lagos state oversees wastewater management in the state. State reforms resulted in the creation of a new wastewater



brand that is attractive to the private sector and that will radically reduce bureaucracy to fast track the execution of plans and policies in the wastewater sector in the state.

- Lagos State Wastewater Management Office (LSWMO): The Lagos State Waste Management Office (LSWMO) is responsible for establishment of fundamental wastewater policy reforms that will address all wastewater management concerns in urban, semi-urban and rural areas of Lagos state (Obani, 2013). Furthermore, the office is to carry out monitoring, supervision and regulation of all public and private wastewater infrastructures. It is also responsible for conducting research for the development and implementation of environmentally friendly technologies for wastewater management with emphasis on recovery and re-use (Ayinde, 2014). Services offered include consultancy services on wastewater matters; design, construction, operation and maintenance of wastewater treatment plant facilities; management of wastewater haulage trucks; evacuation and haulage of sewage; provision of public education and monitoring to ensure compliance on wastewater matters; operation and maintenance of wastewater treatment plant; design and construction of sewer grids as well as cleanup services for sewer pipes and manholes.

This is then treated chemically by the LSWMO.

- Lagos State Environmental Protection Agency (LASEPA): The Lagos State Environmental Protection Agency (LASEPA) was created out of the Pollution Control Unit of the department of environment, sewage and water in the Ministry of Physical Planning in 1996. LASEPA is the monitoring agency for Lagos water bodies, in respect to wastewater, solid and liquid waste disposal, groundwater, and environmental issues in the state. It also determines permissible pollution levels, collects baseline data, and reviews and recommends requirements for liquid waste management in Lagos.

- Lagos State Water Regulatory Commission (LWRC): The Water Sector Law of 2004 established the Lagos State Water Regulatory Commission (LRWC) to ensure that water and sewage functions are carried out in the state and to ensure that operators in the sector secure reasonable returns on their capital investments to finance proper implementation.

## 2.3 SANITATION WORKERS IN LAGOS

The government and its established agencies make up the formal sector of urban sanitation services in Lagos state. These agencies mostly include the aforementioned agencies above. Sanitation workers are embedded into both the formal and informal processes of sanitation services in the city. Some of them work directly as paid employees of the state under the anchoring Ministry of Environment and Water Resources, and others work informally, owning and operating commercial public toilets, providing waste dislodging services or being employed by owners of these services. Thus, sanitation work

can be grouped into formal employment and informal employment. Not yet recognized as essential workers, sanitation workers are exposed to severe consequences as a result of the exposure they suffer from debilitating infections, injuries, social stigma and even death every day (Ray and Prasad, 2018). Thus the issues that they navigate as a consequence of their work include occupational safety and health that exposes them to diseases related to contact with excreta; injuries; the dangers of working in confined spaces, legal and institutional issues, as well as social and financial challenges. One of the main issues is the social stigma attached to sanitation work. The working environment of sanitation workers can be life-threatening at various points along the sanitation service chain. The table below assesses the work performed by sanitation workers at each stage of the chain and the associated hazards;

**Table 1: Standard operating procedures for sanitation workers**

<b>Sanitation chain</b>	<b>Work performed by Sanitation workers</b>
Containment	Cleaning toilets in households, public toilets, and institutions (schools, health care and such other facilities)
Emptying	Manual pit or toilet emptying, mechanical emptying
Transport/ Conveyance	Driving of waste dislodge tankers.
Treatment	Liquid and solid sludge handling at sewage treatment plants
Disposal	Manual disposal and mechanical disposal
Safe reuse	Packaging of cakes, mixing in soil, storing in rooms

Sanitation workers are frequently pushed into this profession in order to make a livelihood, and as a result, they may be unaware of the associated health concerns (WHO, 2020). Vulnerable groups across gender, economic, income and ethnic lines are more prone to engage in this form of job and so face discrimination and stigma as a result. Sanitation workers face greater risk of infection, injury and death than do average workers, and rarely have insurance or access to health services.

Human excreta are still collected from some types of toilets (such as bucket toilets and pit latrines) in some parts of Nigeria without the use of mechanical equipment or personal protective equipment. Because the workers labor informally, they have limited legal protection and themselves do not always adhere to occupational health and safety regulations (Mark, 2011). Employees' rights must be acknowledged; workers must be given the freedom and support to organize as a labor force; and their working circumstances must be improved and gradually codified in order to protect workers' health, labor rights and provide acceptable working conditions. An evaluation on the Health, Safety, and Dignity of Sanitation Workers published in 2019 by the ILO, Wateraid,

WHO, and the World Bank emphasizes the need for advocacy and empowerment of sanitation workers, as well as policy, legislative, and regulatory changes.



## **PART 3: PROJECT ACTIVITIES & FIELD WORK**

### **3.1 INSTITUTIONAL POLICY ENGAGEMENT STAKEHOLDER Workshop**

The institutional policy engagement stakeholder workshop marked the first engagement with potential partners and actors in the Lagos Waste-Water Sanitation sector. It was held on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022. The objectives were to mark the institutional approaches, identify the key actors and examine the standing of different actors in the urban sanitation, the issues and solutions proposed for waste-water sector in Lagos and how these will be implemented. The second objective was to examine the nature of the work of sanitation workers, establish who they were and how they carried out their work, the risks associated with their work and how concerned agencies worked with them as partners in the safe treatment of wastewater management in the city. The workshop featured a presentation by the researchers and interaction with the stakeholders present. Participants included the Officials and General Manager of the Lagos State Waste-Water Management Office (LSWMO) and officials of the Lagos State Urban Renewal Agency. There was also representation from the Public Toilet Association, Federation of Informal Workers of Nigerian (FIWON), Federation of slum and informal settlements dwellers, and academics specialized in waste-water as well as Employment Relations researchers.

The workshop helped to validate the fieldwork strategy for the project and showed that attention had been vied towards the infrastructure and processes of waste management, with little information about the workers in the system. Operators of fecal waste dislodgment, public toilet operators and employees and operators of biofill toilets were identified as key workers in the sanitation work and targeted for the fieldwork.

### **3.2 METHODOLOGY**

The project relied on a qualitative research design that incorporated policy analysis with layered, deep dives into specific regimes of engagement and field work. We obtained ethical clearance from the University of Lagos before commencing the engagement process. Further engagements were held with the Lagos State Waste-Water Management Agency, LSWMO, following the successful workshop and the delineation of the specific sanitation workers to interact with during the field work. A visit was paid to the Ministry on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> of July 2022, to enlist the support and connection of the Ministry to other critical stakeholders such as the waste dislodgers whose role in fecal dislodgement was critical in the sanitation process. Research Assistants were thereafter trained for the field exercise, using demonstration interviews with emphasis on ethical considerations of a project of this nature.

On field, in-depth Interviews toilet operators were carried out in order to collect data about their socio-economic conditions, structure of sanitation enterprises and everyday

livelihood practices, as well as enablers and constraints to their sustainable livelihood aspirations. Public toilet operators were targeted for this activity.

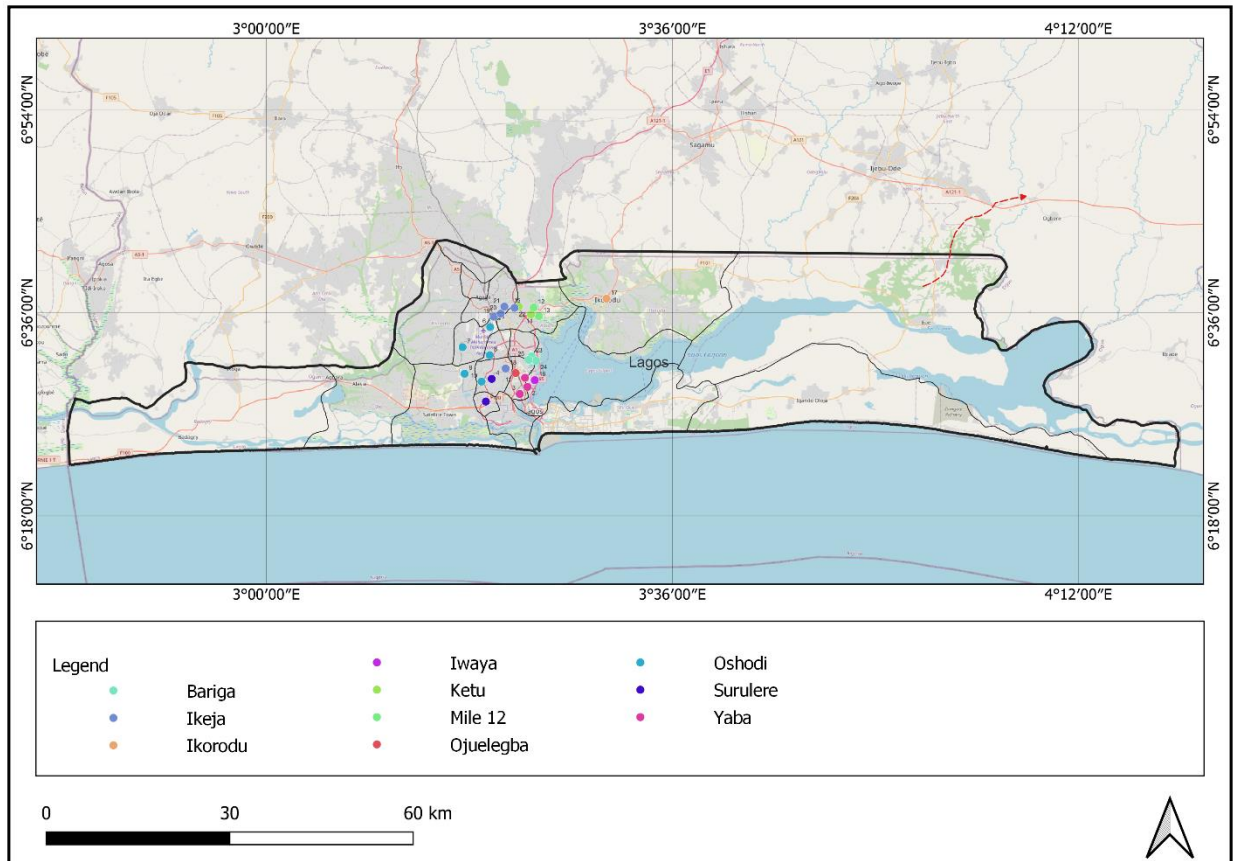
In addition, we carried out two Focus Group Discussion with waste dislodgers who are government employed paid staff of the Lagos waste-water management office. This was necessary to understand their role in the framework of municipal services, their relationship with government and the key obstacles that limit their impact. Another FGD was held with the members of operators of waste dislodgement trucks at their secretariat in Lekki, Lagos. We also carried out field observation visits to the case study sites and mapping of relevant infrastructure

The field work allowed provided a valuable opportunity for socio-economic mapping of urban sanitation workers and a documentation of the sector operations, highlighting social and economic vulnerabilities (income, health, social protection, engagement with government agencies) and inherent opportunities/innovation (sustainability, cooperatives, technology).

## **3.3 FINDINGS**

### **3.3.1 In-depth Interviews with Toilet Operators**

Toilet operators are found in several parts of Lagos. Our work covered 10 Local Governments in the state (fig 3). Locations were purposefully chosen to reflect high density areas, market areas and public transportation concentration areas.



*Figure 3: Map of Public Toilets Sampled across Lagos*

### Demography of Respondents

We encountered more male than females working as toilet operators (58% were males and 42% females). We interviewed 24 sanitation workers across all locations (fig 4). Out of these, only one was an owner of the public toilet facility. Most of the respondents had either a primary or secondary school education, but one respondent indicated having a bachelor's degree. Seventy percent of respondents were married with children and the others were single.

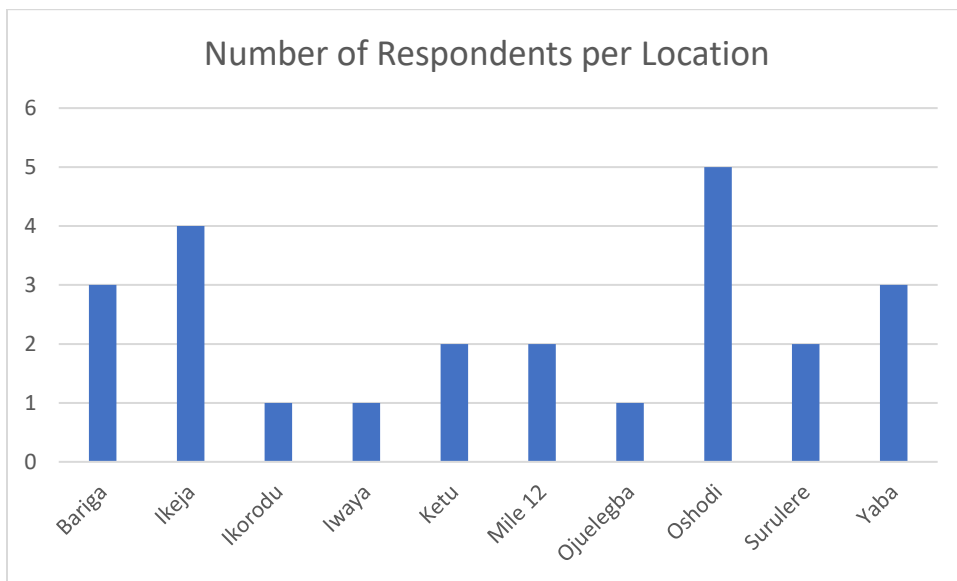


Fig 4. Number of respondents per location.

### Operational Practices

*Choice of Work:* 90% of the respondents said they were engaged in sanitation work because they did not have other employment options. They admitted that they would leave the business if they saw better opportunities. Some of the respondents have been in the sanitation business for a long time and have over 20 years of experience while others are relatively new with little or no experience.

*Stigmatization:* There is widespread stigmatization of urban sanitation workers across the 10 locations where the interviews were conducted. The stigmatization is not specific to any gender and some workers have gotten used to it. Most respondents complained that they were treated badly by customers and society and called names such as “Baba Toilet” or “Mama Toilet”, and other demeaning names, due to the nature of their jobs. However, some respondents did not complain of stigmatization of any form but claimed that people appreciated them for the services they rendered.

*Training Required for the Trade:* Most of the respondents interviewed did not receive any form of training before starting the job, save a few that had prior training in their previous jobs. They claimed that formal training is not a requirement for the job. The only respondent who received training before starting the business said she received her training at the Ministry of the Environment. According to her, she was taught how to wash and clean, and how to use disinfectants during the three-day training.

*Typical Business Day:* The typical working day is similar across all locations: Public toilet workers work for an average of 12 to 13 hours daily, resuming between 5 am and 6 am and close between 6 pm and 7 pm daily. They sweep, wash, and tidy up the environment in preparation for customers. They also clean up the toilets immediately after a customer

uses them. In some public toilets where there is more than one worker, they usually work in shifts of the morning, afternoon, or daily shifts on alternate days.

*Tax/Operational Levies:* The respondents were certain that their employers pay tax, but do not know how much, neither do they know how they go about the payment, nor whom they pay it to. However, the local government and gatekeepers in the community (mostly thugs) receive daily unreceipted payments from them

*Key Benefits of the Business:* The respondents admit that their services play a pivotal role in keeping the environment clean. They recognize the importance of their job and wish they would be appreciated more. The key benefit of the sanitation business to most of them is that they make some money to feed themselves and their family. They can buy some things for themselves and their family, so they derive some form of benefit from doing the business

*Challenges/Setbacks of the Business:* About 70% of the respondents reported cases of maltreatment such as being shouted at or looked down on because of the nature of their jobs. According to them, people tend to maltreat them because they believe that they are at the lowest cadre of employment in society.

*Working Conditions:* Most urban sanitation workers interviewed (85%) complained that they are overworked but underpaid. Despite their abnormal working hours, their salaries don't reflect their hard work.

*Average Monthly Income:* The average salary of urban sanitation workers across all locations varies from 20,000 naira to 50,000 naira (between \$44.90 and \$112.25<sup>1</sup>) monthly, paid in cash. According to most respondents, the salary can only do so much, and as a result, they rely on other sources of income such as cloth washing, petty trading, and electrical work for survival.

*Coping with Vulnerabilities of the Trade:* To manage infections and other health challenges associated with the job, most respondents use self-medication while some go to the hospital for treatment. On sick days, most respondents stay at home to treat themselves. Many respondents admitted to using antibiotics. However, some lamented that they have to come to work even when sick because nobody will do their work for them and to avoid being laid off if someone else replace them. Most of the respondents stated categorically that they would leave the job if they had a better option.

*Registration of Business:* The respondents are aware that the business is registered but do not know under which Agency or Ministry it is registered. They also do not know the associations the business belongs to. This belief largely stems from representatives of some government agencies that come to them periodically demanding licences and/or

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ngn.currencyrate.today/convert/amount-20000-to-usd.html>

payments. They range from the local government to different units within the state Ministry of Environment and Water Resources.

*Assets:* Almost all respondents interviewed (95.8%) do not own assets from the sanitation business. Some respondents claimed to have bought equipment with the income generated from the business. However, one respondent indicated that she was able to buy a plot of land from the proceeds of her toilet business, representing less than 5% of the total respondents. According to her, the public toilet she operated at Oshodi was jointly owned by herself and husband, who works at the Ministry of the Environment.

*Innovations in the Trade:* Respondents are generally not aware of any form of innovation in sanitation services. The few respondents that were aware said that they have seen innovations in the water closet design in the last ten years. According to them, whereas a few years back they used to have the swing flusher which could easily break, the new flushers are at the top of the WC and are more sustainable and way better than before.

*Harassment:* Most respondents said that they don't have any interaction with NGOs, Local or state government, or other businesses. Some respondents complained of frequent harassment by area boys (gangs of street boys) at their toilet facilities. They said that just because they operate a public toilet, the area boys expect to use it for free. When asked how they handle them, most of them responded that they apply wisdom in dealing with them.



Fig 5 Mobile Toilet Facility at Oshodi, Lagos

### Operational Risks

*Awareness of the Location of Waste Dislodged:* The toilet workers were asked how wastes from their operations were dislodged. None of them were aware of this, showing



the disconnection between various categories of waste workers, as well as industry knowledge of the sector by people who work in them.

*Use of Sewage for Agricultural Purposes:* Some respondents admitted that they are aware that people use liquid wastes in the agricultural sector. But most of them said they've not witnessed it, nor have they given out or sold faecal matters for this purpose.

### Social Safety Mechanisms

*Means of Payment:* Most of the respondents (92%) do not operate bank accounts for their business. They are mostly paid by hand, either daily, weekly, or monthly. There is no form of bank account attached to their business, reflecting the lower scale of payment of the job.

*Health Care Options:* No sanitation worker across all the locations where the interviews were conducted has any health insurance or health care plan. They rely on out-of-pocket treatment, meaning that they are very vulnerable to lack of money to treat themselves during emergencies.

*Workers' Union:* All the respondents interviewed do not belong to any association, cooperative, or FIWON. Most of them lamented that they are not allowed to join any association, largely due to the precariousness of their jobs and the unwillingness to be publicly identified as sanitation workers

*Use of Mobile Phones:* Some respondents use mobile phones in the running of their businesses to communicate with their owners and sometimes with known customers to check up on them and probably ask why they have not been coming around. Some, however, do not call their clients because they believe that if people decide to come to their facility, it is because they are around and when they're not around, obviously they will not come.

*Government Involvement:* All respondents confirmed that government involvement in the sanitation business is principally to inspect their facilities. No form of training or equipment is offered by the government. They also affirmed that the government does not train anybody, nor do they provide any equipment.

*Interaction With Various Stakeholders:* Most of the respondents opined that their businesses can be improved if the government or NGOs contribute to the business by providing or subsidizing equipment or training them in the business. According to them, this will make the work less stressful for them.

### 3.3.2 Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with Waste Dislodgers

A focus group discussion was carried out with waste dislodgers at Lagos State Waste Water Management Office (LSWMO) in Ikeja, Lagos on 12th August 2022. We decided to have this meeting at LSWMO in order to assure the office's acceptance of the project, especially since they were interested in collaborating with the project to achieve the goals

of improving the working conditions of the sanitation workers. The respondents were all males, and in the age range of (28 years to 40 years) and had been in employment of the Lagos State Government for an average of 7 years.

### Working Conditions

*Justification for joining the sector:* Some participants noted that they left their trades and crafts work and joined the workforce because trades and crafts did not bring very reliable income. Others joined because their other jobs were not going well due to the bad economy

*Station of Respondents:* All the respondents work at different locations across Lagos: Alausa, Iponri, and so on. The job is in segments; some deal with operations while others act as supervisors.

*Experience and Training:* Most of the participants have been doing this job for the past 13 years. The least experienced has 7 years on the job but only Respondent 3 and Respondent 1 received formal training before starting the job. The training required is majorly mechanical. It involves understanding how to troubleshoot to get free flow every day.

*Number of Workers:* Participant 1 noted there are 5 workers in his place of work, Participant 2 also has 5, while Participants 3 and 4 both have 6 workers each. There was no indication of worker shortages.

*Rotation/Shifts:* There used to be night shifts some years back but not anymore because according to the director, there is not much work to do so no more night shifts

### Structure of Work

*A Typical Day on the Job:* The job requires constant monitoring of the system. Operators are to monitor if there is any downtime. They usually pump at 8 am in the morning and at 5 pm in the evening before leaving the facility. If there are blockages, they go to remove the blockage and throw them away or pack them for the Lagos Waste Management Authority (LAWMA) to pick up. Blockages could be diapers, sanitary pads, etc. They sometimes do not encounter blockages for months. The blockage usually happens if there is a long downtime (no electricity). They go inside the manhole to fix it and prepare it for LAWMA to pick up.

*Available Equipment:* The equipment they have are hand gloves, safety boots, and overalls. They also use nose masks (usually surgical or cloth), although there were reservations that it makes their work slower. They maintained that they do not fall sick as long as they follow safety regulations. Respondent 4, a plant operator stated matter-of-factly that he doesn't allow his workers to go into manholes without Personal Protective



Equipment (PPE) in order to avoid casualties. Sometimes equipment fails, and when this happens, they use their bare hands to work and thereafter wash with soap and hand sanitizers.

As at the time of the survey, no work related death had been officially reported of any sanitation workers, however in 2024, there was a news story of a sewer worker who unfortunately lost his life after getting trapped in the manhole for days.<sup>2</sup>

## Welfare

*Means of payment and alternative sources of income:* All respondents have bank accounts that they use in receiving salaries. They are all paid a fixed salary monthly (based on minimum wage). All the respondents have other sources of income (some of which generate almost the same or more revenue than the toilet operation). However, they maintain that they do not earn enough to have bank savings.

*Workers' Union:* They reported that they were temporary staff and do not belong to any unions.

*Insurance/Health Plans:* There are no insurance nor medical plans for workers because they are temporary staff.

*Assets:* The only person that has assets is Respondent 1 who owns land. All others are renting, and none is currently building a home.

*Future Plans:* The 5-year plan of the respondents is as follows: Participant 1 still sees himself as an engineering specialist in the next 5 years since this job relates to his profession. Participant 2 would like to start an electrical setup, Participant 3 affirmed that he would 'leave the job tomorrow' if he sees a better offer, while Participant 4 is trusting God to help him start something in the coming year

*Key Benefits:* Participant 3 said the benefits of working in the plant are that he has gained experience to design and implement some plants, consultancy benefits, and also financial benefits. Participant 2 said he has gained knowledge in terms of sewage management; learning every day, and there are financial benefits too. Participant 3 said he has gained knowledge about sewage; learnt humility (how to humble himself), and that the job has helped in his marriage in that he doesn't mind assisting his family with house chores. Participant 4 said the job has given him money to feed his family; he has gained experience and he also has connections. They all believe that they are serving society through their activities. They are aware that their work has helped in curtailing a little bit of pollution

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thecable.ng/body-of-sewer-worker-recovered-five-days-after-he-was-trapped-underground/>

*Improvements Required:* When asked what can be done to make their work easier, Participant 2 responded that they should be entitled to rewards, medicals, insurance, and accommodation. He also added that they should be made permanent staff. Participant 1 said that technology should be improved, as the existing infrastructure was built 30 years ago! He went further to say that everything should be automated.

### Challenges

*Sewage Disposal Risks:* Participants at the FGD reported common risks associated with sewage disposal to include: closeness of groundwater or waterpoint to fecal disposal areas, risks associated with transportation of fecal sludge and animal contact with fecal sludge that can be transferred to humans

*General Challenges:* The challenges they face are lack of welfare, no enabling environment, the plant is usually down due to lack of maintenance, no motivation to put more effort and lack of financial security. It is also not rewarding enough and there is no updated innovation. The job is also not reliable because they are not staffed.

*Health Challenges:* The health challenges include diseases like Hepatitis (for people exposed to manholes if proper caution is not taken). The people working in the manholes risk exposing themselves to hazardous health challenges. The degree of illnesses depends on the immune system of the workers

*Gender roles:* There is currently no woman doing this job. Respondents maintain that this is an undignified work for women, and highlighted the heavy labour and cultural barriers.

*Addiction:* There is alcohol addiction and addiction to drugs over time. Most people start drinking after being exposed to odours and gases. They mostly drink gin. Some can't eat without consuming alcohol first.

*Stigmatization:* Participant 3 admitted that nobody knows about the nature of his work. He said he cannot disclose this to friends and family even though it is government work. He added that the job is dehumanizing. Participant 4 said his house is far from where he works (Sango in Ogun state). Some of his friends are aware, but not many people are not aware of the nature of his job. Participant 2 said most people know him for his electrical works, but he does not mind since he is an operator. Participant 1 said some people only know him as an operator at Alausa. They all agreed that there is no prestige in their work, and they are not proud of it.

### Others

*Innovation:* Participant 2 said he's aware of extended aeration systems and biofil systems but does not know how it is installed. He is also aware that they have installed it at Ajah and Lekki. He's aware that government is against it. Our discussion with the Ministry indicated that they have concerns regarding safe disposal of wastes in these systems

and that they need to monitor the pilot scheme for some time before approving for widespread use .

*Use of Sewage for Agricultural Purposes:* Participant 1 admitted that people often come to pack sewage for horticulture and farming purposes. They also use effluents for greening. According to them, they collect the waste for free. Despite this claim, we observed that the extracts from biofil toilets are bagged and sold surreptitiously as manure at about N250 compared to N1000 for cow dung manure. The government agency was strongly against this practice, citing public health concerns.

*Central Sludge System:* Presently there are no sludge village in Lagos state and the current technology in place only allows them to return back to the system. There is limited infrastructure for central sewerage disposal in the city. Septage Dislodger operators are able to use only the available system of disposing to five wastewater plants across the city which operate at primary treatment levels<sup>3</sup>. The FGD with the Septage Dislodgers, reported in section 3.3.3

### 3.3.3 FGD With Septage Dislodgers Truck Operators At LSWMO Lekki Modular Septage Pretreatment Plant (PPP)

The FGD provided a means of knowing how Septage Dislodgers Truck Operators and their workers do their work, the kind of training that goes into the work, the kind of challenges they encounter and some of the ways they get support to address those challenges.

The various districts of Modular Septage Pretreatment Plant are in V.I and Lekki, Mile 2, Odo Iya Alaro, Oregun, Abesan, and Tolu.

Participant 1 reported that he has been in the sewage truck business for close to twenty years and, remarked that, *'people are now starting to realize that it's a business worth investing in if you know how to go about it.'* According to him, sewage workers come in different folds: there are mechanics, drivers, motor assistants, technical support, welder, panels and so on. He also said that not all mechanics work with sewage trucks, because some of them are not comfortable to work with.

They narrated how their association was formed over a decade ago before the involvement of the government gave it more life. He advised that it is imperative that one should have firsthand experience of the job before hiring a project manager, so that when the manager starts bringing bills, one can understand where the bills are coming from. He stressed that the earlier one flows with it, the better one is repositioned to work it out.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://fij.ng/article/special-report-lagos-wastewater-treatment-plant-releasing-toxic-effluents-into-odo-iya-alaro-river/>

On the issue of stigmatization, he lamented that some persons see it like it's not a job, so they feel like if you are doing it, it's because you've lost all hopes or something.

### Safety

*Use of PPEs:* When asked if it is mandatory for employees to wear PPE when they are going out, one responded in the affirmative but lamented that most of his employees get soaked in the job because the PPEs are not very convenient. He also stressed that one could do sewage job, just like all other hazardous jobs out there, and still be clean. According to him, one could maintain good health if one works within the lines of guidance.



Fig 6: Uniformed waste dislodgers at a treatment plant

*Traffic Congestion:* Participants lamented that the ignorance of some car drivers in not understanding that the truck cannot move at their pace, and resulting contestations on the road was identified as an hazard in the business. The other hazard has to do with the behaviour of the truck drivers, which can breach safety rules at times due to negligence.

*Addictions:* Participants admitted that truck drivers do drink, but this is not permitted within the premises. According to him, if one is caught being tipsy, they would be laid off for a while.

*Gender:* When asked about gender diversity, he responded that females are also involved in the business too, but they don't do laborious tasks - they are only investors, as owners of trucks.

### Process of Dislodging

When asked to describe the process of dislodging, participants informed us that there is an accelerator filter inside the tanks. Immediately waste is discharged, particles are filtered in the dislodge, before the waste is moved to a 'dosset,' then they dose it from there before pumping it. And as it is cascading, one will be seeing it. After discharging four to five tanks, the truck boys will enter to remove all those nets with the particles, pack

it out, then make sure it is in order. He explained that sometimes the waste water attracts animals and insects, but sometimes it does not. he presumed that it was probably because his place has space for water, and so much air is coming in, maybe that's why they do not see insects.

After six months, a treatment plant is prone to clogging over time, because sewerage has an amount of sand, from the wind and other sources, going into the pit too. So, if after some time it is not maintained, it will begin to deteriorate. Ideally pumps are supposed to have some space for water, if the clogging occurs, the pump will get bad. They explained that even sewer lines can go dysfunctional if it gets clogged over time.



Fig 7 Modular Septage Treatment Plant in Lekki

### Health challenges

The major issue reported was the prevalence of mosquitos in the treatment area, so that when operators needed to stay the night they had to take appropriate care so as not to be exposed to Malaria. We were informed that colleagues who lived far away usually have to pass the week in their trucks or the secretariat office space to reduce transportation costs. The workers have mobile mosquito net, so they usually set up their nets and sleep under it.

### Levies

Participants informed us that sometimes, they have to pay levies to both Local and State Governments. Most times, the respondents explained that they would revolt against these double payments and often the state government intervenes in their favor. In general, truck drivers would usually pay the local government levies to avoid delays.

## **PART 4: ADVOCACY**

### **4.1 ENGAGEMENT WITH THE LAGOS STATE WASTE MANAGEMENT OFFICE (LSWMO)**

Our engagement for advocacy formally commenced at the 'institutional policy engagement workshop' (see section 3.1), in which key stakeholders in the Lagos sanitation sector participated actively. This was followed by a courtesy visit to the principal government agency responsible for the Sanitation Sector in Lagos, that is the Lagos Waste Water Management Office, LASWMO. During the visit, the Co-investigators, again briefed the Office about the project and the need for the LASWMO to be involved in the process. The meeting was particularly important since field work was about to commence at the time. A committee was set up to support the project, comprising LSWMO and the Co-Investigators, to ensure that the fieldwork reached all relevant actors. This was a significant outing that assured the continued co-operation of LSWMO in the project, with increased opportunities for uptake.

### **4.2 ENGAGEMENT WITH FEDERATION OF INFORMAL WORKERS ORGANIZATIONS OF NIGERIA (FIWON)**

Engagement between FIWON and sanitation workers was proposed as a means of operationalizing various strategies for enhancing social and economic rights of urban sanitation workers. Apart from enabling more structured and beneficial government - worker relationships, the connection was designed to be a mechanism for protecting the legitimacy of informal sanitation jobs, while also providing a pathway for the sanitation workers to enjoy support and business empowerment opportunities under the aegis of FIWON. A toolkit for sanitation workers was designed from this engagement and others previously held to ensure that health seeking behavior and/or empowerment practices are mainstreamed among all categories of sanitation workers. To this end, FIWON successfully organized a workshop with sanitation workers to appraise them of the opportunities that abound if they joined the Federation.



#### 4.2.1 Highlights from the Workshop between FIWON and Waste Water Workers and Public Toilet Operators

The Federation of Informal Workers' Organizations of Nigeria (FIWON) was engaged to organize Wastewater workers and public toilet operators with a view to have them integrated as part of the membership of FIWON and consequently, to become part of FIWON's campaign and programs towards achieving socio-economic rights of informal workers in Nigeria. FIWON designed this workshop to engagement with this category of informal workers achieve better public appreciation of the work they do and the need to have their basic rights as workers, respected. By integrating into the FIWON fold, they will also be able to derive the benefit of being part of a larger network of informal workers while being able to enjoy some of the services directly provided by FIWON, including FIWON's savings and credit schemes as well as FIWON Health Insurance program.

The organizing campaign started in the first weeks of December 2022 and culminated in a Focus Group Discussion held with public toilet operators and waste - water/septic tank evacuators on December 20, 2022 in FIWON's offices. The Dislogers' Association, SWADAN, though invited, did not turn up at the meeting. 10 female operators and 10 male operators participated in the round table FGD.



Fig 8: FGD with Waste-Water and Public Toilet Workers

First, the scope of work of the sanitation workers, some of whom are also investors in commercial public toilets was ascertained.

The public toilet operators and workers manage largely private owned toilets serving members of the public in markets, motor parks, shopping complexes, major bus stops etc. Some of them are however allowed to sell basic groceries, cigarettes, bottled water and soft drinks as a way of augmenting the paltry pay. Mostly women, they complained that they have to always resort to the loan sharks to be able to meet up with the basic demands of transportation, feeding and accommodation. An elderly lady working as a public toilet cleaner in Ikeja claims most of her little pay gets exhausted on transport as she lives in Agbado Ijaye which is many miles away. is little use of PPE while at work while some of them claim they have to buy sanitation materials such as antiseptic solvents themselves. A public toilet manager however complained that sometimes, some of the employed workers refuse to make use of chemicals and solvents provided for use during cleaning of the toilets. An operator (she owns a public toilet in Oshodi) complained about difficult customers who sometimes refuse to pay, would not flush the toilet after use and are quarrelsome. She also complained about escalating costs of inputs especially the antiseptic solvents used to clean up the toilets.

The Wastewater and Septic tank Evacuators comprise drivers, motor boys/evacuators and mechanics operating with water disposal trucks owned by waste dislodging firms. The workers claim that the sector generally is undergoing a serious depression in recent years.

One of the participants, a toilet owner in Oshodi reported being the full owner of the facility. According to her, the toilet is open every day from 7am till 7pm and she had also employed some migrant operators. These operators are given a target of N4,000 daily and they remit the money to her weekly. The money earned over the N4,000 daily target belongs to the workers. While she is also a trader, she is able to have additional income from being a public toilet owner. The only levy she is charged goes to the Nigerian Railway Commission because her toilet stall was on the Railway's space. The challenges that she faces are the people messing the toilet up and not wanting to clean it, she claims some people sometimes just come to the toilet to smoke. Another reason are the people in her surroundings that often complain about the smell and lastly, some people do not pay after using the toilet.

A group of participants from Apapa are waste excavators working in waste dislodgement trucks. According to wastewater and septic tank evacuators, their bosses own the truck that they use and they get paid according to the number of trips that they make per day. Back in the days they used to make 8 trips per day but now, they make between 2 to 3 trips per day because diesel is expensive and so is their charges. They can work anytime be it day or night. Previously, the drivers earn N1,500 per trip and they, the excavators make N1,000 but as at 2022 with the attendant economic challenges facing the Nation, they only make between N1,500 to N3,000 per day. They claim that their bosses do not care about their health and because of that they do not have gloves, masks, boots and other safety apparatus. They face other precarities including physical violence as area boys often beat them up when they are working in the midnight or when their truck is



faulty and they become stuck in their territories. They have no relationship with any government agencies, and they also do not belong to any organization. Their bosses belong to an organization whose name is SWADAN.

A third participant is from the Computer Village in Ikeja, and she is responsible for the toilet maintenance of a plaza and she is being paid by the plaza management. She initially earned N13,000 but she now earns N20,000 monthly. She is responsible for the cleaning of the whole plaza environment and keeping the toilet clean and in good condition. The Ministry of Environment comes to inspect the toilet every Thursday of every week. Because the plaza management pays her, anyone from the plaza uses the toilet for free but she charges outsiders for its use. She used to earn N2,000 daily from these outsiders but now she only earns N500. She also sells drinks to earn additional sources of income. She seeks empowerment to start her own business.

A female participant described her job as an auditor in Greyhound facilities, a public toilet company located near the Bariga market. She works 8am to 6pm daily. She claims the toilet is always closed by 7pm because the people who often use it after then do not clean it up after use. She earns N50,000 per month but the cleaners who works for only 4 hours daily earn N15,000. The cleaners clean the toilet aftercustomers. The Ministry of Environment often come to inspect the toilet once in a while to check if it meets government requirements of cleanliness and maintenance.

The issue of health risks as a result of working in this sector was of interest to FIWON and there was a robust discussion around it. It was discovered that none of these workers have health insurance and one of the excavators claimed that he once fainted while he was in a septic tank and when he was brought out, he had to take medical care of himself with his own money even though the sickness lasted for 3 months. They all have no life savings and most of them even had to start collecting loans from different sources to keep their business functioning. The waste excavators are not given any protective medication at all. They resorted to the use of chemicals that they spray in the septic tanks before excavating the feecal content.

The wasteworkers claim SWADAN does not in any way represent their interests. They also claim that chemicals and other inputs made available to ease their work, by the Ministry of Environment do not always reach them.

This engagement yielded again, the dire circumstances of sanitation workers, making it clear that the workers must be independent organize to be able to really enjoy some basic representation. Secretary-General of FIWON, Comrade Gbenga Komolafe informed participants about the structure, functioning and opportunities of joining FIWON. He informed them about the opportunities available such as ability to obtain health insurances, mount up savings through the Federations' savings scheme and also be informed of trends, threats and opportunities in the sector when they attend monthly meetings. He encouraged them to be part of a formalized Federation for informal workers.

### 4.3 VALIDATION AND PROJECT CLOSE-OUT MEETING

A Multi-stakeholder Workshop was organized to bring the sanitation workers, LSWMO officials, CDAs, CSOs and development partners together to consider the outcomes of the research and outline issues for policy action, as well as to fashion out better ways of working together for more sustainable and safe sanitation management in the state. Specific attendees include: People's Awareness on Health Foundation in Nigeria (PAHFIN), Organized Private Sector on Water Sanitation and Hygiene (OPS-WASH), Lagos State Wastewater Management Office (LSWMO), Lagos State Water Regulatory Commission (LSWRC), Lagos State Urban Renewal Agency (LASURA), Nigerian Slum/Informal Settlement Federation (NSISF), Community Development Association (CDA), and Public Toilet Operators. The meeting held on July 11<sup>th</sup> 2023 at the resource room of the Centre for Housing and Sustainable Development, University of Lagos. The research team provided a well-received account of the objectives of the researchers, the activities carried out to meet these objectives, and the research findings.



*Presentation of Sanitation Toolkit to Stakeholders*

After taking comments and clarifications from the participants, an interactive session to ascertain the direction for improved sanitation sector and improved sanitation worker welfare was carried out. These are the highlights of participants' contributions:

- (i) Adherence to safety standards for sanitation workers must remain unwavering and uncompromised. The creation of safety protocols and integration of safety measures into the daily work routines of sanitation workers must be pursued by government agencies, and this must also include the procurement of PPEs for use by Sanitation workers.
- (ii) The study should leverage into the vested interest of the Lagos State Government and its current involvement with the World Health Organisation's Sanitation Planning activities
- (iii) Lack of health-seeking behaviour by sanitation workers result into their not using PPEs where available, not taking personal hygiene seriously which results into health fatalities. LSWMO should continue to carry out awareness campaigns to enable sanitation workers continuously understand the vulnerability of their work. Adherence needs to be encouraged and use, monitored.
- (iv) Increased collective efforts between the private sector and government could be beneficial, particularly if they are involved in all steps of the Sanitation value-chain.
- (v) The need to focus on sustainability and the dignity of sanitation workers, training them, and including them in policy formulation where it affects them
- (vi) More comprehensive examination of sanitation-related topics, including access to water, housing, open defecation and the unexplored economic benefits associated with sanitation in Nigeria.
- (vii) Adoption of newer technologies that have gained traction in various countries, especially those that are cost-effective and have potential for better health outcomes.
- (viii) The necessity of a structured framework for engagement, focusing on aspects like proper remuneration, evaluation, social inclusion, and combating stigmatization.
- (ix) A proposal for collaboration between academia and the insurance sector to develop a safety template based on hazard assessment, critical points, and control points. This template, should be integrated into insurance schemes to ensure the well-being of sanitation workers.
- (x) the importance of individual and collective responsibility in addressing sanitation challenges. For example, households refusing to permit waste-water evacuators work if they are not wearing their protective gears.
- (xi) Government representatives should direct their advocacy to the appropriate channels to ensure that advocacy leads to concrete actions.
- (xii) Responsibility for any incidents of death and accident involving sanitation workers in their line of work must be taken up and investigated.

## PART 5: MEETING THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

### 5.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS TO ADDRESS RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

*Research Objective 1: Explore and document the various institutionalized approaches for urban sanitation services in Lagos*

Lagos is one of the fastest-growing cities in the world, with a population of over 20 million people. The city's sanitation challenges are significant and exacerbated by rapid population growth and incessant demand for services.

The Lagos State Government is responsible for the provision of sanitation services in the city. The Ministry of Environment and Water Resources is the lead agency responsible for the formulation and implementation of policies and programs related to environmental management, including sanitation. There are other agencies such as the Lagos State Environmental Sanitation Corps (LAGESC) is responsible for enforcing sanitation laws and regulations, including the prohibition of open defecation and littering as well as The Lagos State Waste Management Authority (LAWMA) is responsible for the management of solid waste in the city, including the collection, transportation, and disposal of waste.

The Lagos State Waste Management Office (LSWMO) has operational responsibility for establishment of fundamental wastewater policy reforms to address wastewater management concerns in Lagos. It carries out monitoring, supervision and regulation of all public and private wastewater infrastructures. It is also responsible for conducting

research for the development and implementation of environmentally friendly technologies for wastewater management with emphasis on recovery and re-use. It is expected to also provide consultancy services on wastewater matters; design, construction, operation and maintenance of wastewater treatment plant facilities; management of wastewater haulage trucks; evacuation and haulage of sewage; provision of public education and monitoring to ensure compliance on wastewater matters; operation and maintenance of wastewater treatment plant; design and construction of sewer grids as well as cleanup services for sewer pipes and manholes. With this range of activities, the welfare of sanitation workers falls within the ambit of LSWMO making them the key agency for this research.

In addition to these government agencies, there are other stakeholders involved in the provision of sanitation services in Lagos. These include community-based organizations, civil society organizations, international development agencies, and the private sector. Identify the various categories and socio-economic conditions of urban sanitation workers in Lagos

*Research Objective 2: Identify the various categories and socio-economic conditions of urban sanitation workers in Lagos*

We identified three categories in the sanitation sector of Lagos. These are:

- (i) Government employed workers
- (ii) Informal workers employed by private service providers, and
- (iii) Public toilet operators

The data collected from the fieldwork indicates that most sanitation workers involved in waste water sanitation work are male, and the majority of them are married with children. The educational status of most respondents is SSCE and Primary School Leaving Certificate, with only one respondent having a Bachelor's degree. The study showed that informal workers and government employed workers considered themselves to be temporary in this sector since they are willing to leave if they found better opportunities. There is widespread stigmatization of urban sanitation workers across the locations visited, with reports that they are called demeaning names due to the nature of their jobs. The workers are overworked but underpaid, with working hours starting as early as 5 am and closing between 6 pm and 7 pm daily. The average salary across all locations varies from 20,000 naira to 50,000 naira monthly, which is not enough for the workers to meet their needs, and they rely on other sources of income for survival.

The study shows that most respondents do not receive any form of training before starting the job, save a few that had prior training in their previous jobs. They claim that formal training is not a requirement for the job. To avoid infections and other health challenges associated with the job, most respondents use self-medication, while some go to the hospital for treatment.

The key benefit of the sanitation business to most respondents is that they make some money to feed themselves and their family. Almost all respondents interviewed do not own assets from the sanitation business and engage in other income generating opportunities

*Research Objective 3: Determine the range of services provided by each category of sanitation workers, including business structures, social support mechanisms and everyday practices.*

(i) Government employed workers - Dislodgers at Lagos State Waste Water Management Office (LSWMO)

The range of services provided by dislodgers include monitoring and troubleshooting the sewage system, removing blockages such as diapers and sanitary pads, fixing equipment failures, and inviting private plumbers into the manhole when necessary. They also use personal protective equipment (PPE) such as hand gloves, safety boots, overall, and nose masks to ensure their safety while working. However, they do not belong to any union or cooperatives, and they have no insurance or medical plans because they are temporary staff.

In terms of operations structure, the respondents work at different locations across Lagos, and their job is in segments, with some dealing with operations while others supervise. They are paid a fixed salary monthly based on minimum wage, and they all have bank accounts. Most of them have other sources of income, and some generate almost the same or more revenue than the work they do.

Social support mechanisms are lacking for these workers. They face challenges such as lack of welfare, no enabling environment, plant downtime, no motivation to put more efforts, lack of maintenance, and finance. They also experience stigmatization and a lack of prestige in their job. There is alcohol addiction and drug addiction, and there are health risks associated with the job, such as exposure to hepatitis and other diseases.

The everyday practices of these sanitation workers include pumping at 8am in the morning and before leaving at 5pm in the evening. They constantly monitor the system for downtime and go inside the manhole to fix blockages if necessary. They also improvise by using hand sanitizers to wash their hands if equipment fails.

*(ii) Informal Workers Employed by Private service providers: Septage Desludgers at LSWMO Lekki Modular Septage Pretreatment Plant (PPP)*

The septage desludgers provide a range of services related to sewage management and disposal. They work in different capacities such as mechanics, drivers, motor assistants, technical support, welders, and panel workers. The workers operate sewage trucks and have a process for dislodging waste that involves filtering and dosing the waste before pumping it. They also have to remove nets and particles from the tanks after discharging

the waste. The workers face hazards in the job, including exposure to sewage and the ignorance of some car drivers who do not understand the pace of the truck.

The sanitation workers are required to wear personal protective equipment (PPE), but some find it inconvenient, and there are concerns about the PPE's effectiveness in keeping them safe. The workers face health challenges related to mosquitoes, which are prevalent in the areas they work, and clogging of the treatment plant and sewer lines over time, which can cause deterioration and affect their operations.

The workers receive support from their association, which was formed over a decade ago, and from the government, which has increased its involvement in recent years. However, there is stigmatization associated with the job, and some people see it as a last resort rather than a legitimate business. The workers also face challenges related to paying taxes to both the local and state government and dealing with revolts from the public. There is some gender diversity in the business, with women involved as investors rather than laborers.

### (iii) Public Toilet Operators

The sanitation workers provide a range of services related to keeping the environment clean, especially in public toilets. Their daily operational practices involve sweeping, washing, and tidying up the environment in preparation for customers, as well as cleaning up the toilets immediately after a customer uses them. They work long hours, starting between 5 am and 6 am and closing between 6 pm and 7 pm daily. Some work in shifts. The workers receive a monthly salary that varies from 20,000 naira to 50,000 naira, but they are overworked and underpaid.

This category of workers do not also have access to adequate social support mechanisms. They do not belong to any associations, and are not organized enough to even form co-operative societies. They rely on any other income generating opportunities to add to their basic income in order to make a living. Sanitation workers also face stigma and discrimination, which can make it difficult for them to seek help or access support. They do not receive formal training for the job.

*Research Objective 4: Establish the key constraints and enablers of sustainable livelihoods among sanitation workers.*

Sanitation workers face a range of constraints that can hinder their ability to achieve sustainable livelihoods, as well as enablers that can support their efforts. Some key constraints and enablers of sustainable livelihoods among sanitation workers are:

### Constraints

- (i) Occupational Hazards: Sanitation workers face numerous occupational hazards, such as exposure to waste, chemicals, and infectious diseases, which can impact their health and well-being.
- (ii) Low Wages: Sanitation workers often receive low wages that do not reflect the hazardous nature of their work, which can make it difficult for them to meet their basic needs and provide for their families.
- (iii) Limited Access to Social Protection: Sanitation workers often lack access to social protection schemes, such as health insurance, retirement benefits, and workers' compensation, which can leave them vulnerable to financial shocks and health emergencies.
- (iv) Discrimination: Sanitation workers report facing discrimination based on their occupation, caste, or gender, which can limit their opportunities for upward mobility and access to resources.
- (v) Lack of Training: Sanitation workers report lacking the necessary training and skills to perform their work safely and effectively, which can impact their job performance and career prospects.

### Enablers

- (i) Legal and Policy Framework: Strong legal and policy frameworks can provide sanitation workers with protection and rights, such as minimum wage laws, occupational health and safety standards, and anti-discrimination measures.
- (ii) Collective Organizing: Collective organizing can enable sanitation workers to form associations or unions to negotiate better wages, benefits, and working conditions, as well as to advocate for their rights and interests.
- (iii) Access to Finance: Access to finance can support sanitation workers in establishing their own small businesses or cooperatives, which can provide alternative sources of income and economic security.
- (iv) Skill-building and Training: Providing sanitation workers with training and skill-building opportunities can improve their job performance, enhance their career prospects, and enable them to pursue alternative livelihoods.
- (v) Social Awareness and Recognition: Raising social awareness and recognition of the important role played by sanitation workers in keeping communities healthy and clean can help to reduce stigma and discrimination and increase their social standing and respect.

*Research Objective 5: Explore the innovative practices inherent in their response to emergent challenges of health, economic precarity and COVID-19*

Sanitation workers faced various emergent challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, including health risks, economic precarity, and job insecurity. To respond to these challenges, sanitation workers have implemented various innovative practices to ensure

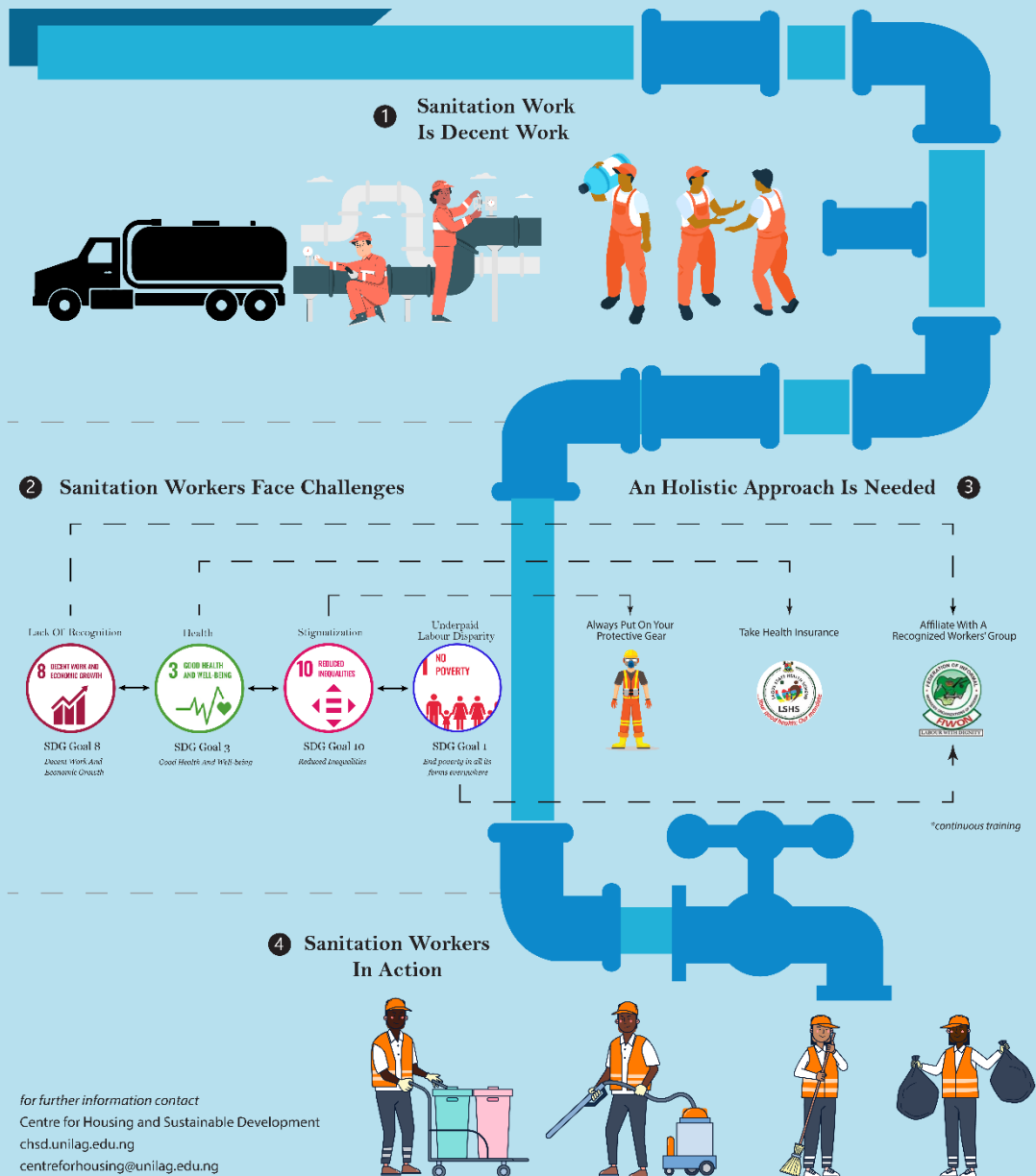


their livelihoods and protect themselves and their communities. Some of these practices include:

- Increased use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Sanitation workers have been using PPE such as gloves, masks, and goggles to protect themselves from the risk of infection while performing their duties.
- Community engagement and awareness: Some sanitation workers, through their other affiliations (for example as member of Nigerian Slum/Informal Settlements federation) had been and collaborating with other community members and the Community Development Associations to raise awareness about the importance of sanitation and hygiene practices, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Diversification of income: Sanitation workers have been diversifying their income sources to reduce their economic precarity, including setting up small businesses such as selling essential goods, or engaging in agriculture. Many sanitation workers acknowledge these secondary sources of income as their main jobs to the public.
- Advocacy for policy changes: Sanitation workers have been advocating for policy changes that would improve their working conditions and ensure their livelihoods, including better access to social protection and health services. This has primarily been a focal action by some private operators of septage dislodger trucks and plans. They have periodic engagements with the Lagos State Waste Water Management Office to streamline the multiple levies they have had to pay to government officers as they go about their work. However, there has not been much progress on this front due to bureaucratic bottlenecks.
- Collaboration with other stakeholders: Sanitation workers have been collaborating with other stakeholders such as local governments, non-governmental organizations, and private sector entities to find innovative solutions to the challenges they face.

**OVERALL, SANITATION WORKERS HAVE DEMONSTRATED RESILIENCE AND INNOVATION IN RESPONDING TO THE EMERGENT CHALLENGES OF HEALTH, ECONOMIC PRECARITY, AND COVID-19. BY IMPLEMENTING THESE PRACTICES, THEY HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SUSTAIN THEIR LIVELIHOODS AND CONTINUE PROVIDING ESSENTIAL SERVICES TO THEIR COMMUNITIES, WHILE PROTECTING THEMSELVES AND OTHERS FROM THE RISK OF INFECTION.5.2 OUTPUT: TOOL-KIT DESIGN AND DESCRIPTION**

# Sanitation Work Is Decent Work



The Sanitation Toolkit was designed to capture the challenges of urban sanitation workers and proffer solutions to them. It is an infographic that uses texts and images to convey a

strong message about the current state of sanitation workers in Lagos and ways to address them.

**Section 1** sends a strong message that “Sanitation Work Is Decent Work”. The sanitation workers shown there are Septage Dislodgers on duty.

**Section 2** highlights the major challenges of sanitation workers which include:

- Lack of Recognition (SDG Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth),
- Health (SDG Goal 3: Good Health and well-being),
- Stigmatization (SDG Goal 10: Reduced Inequality), and
- Underpaid Labour Disparity (SDG Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere)

**Section 3** suggests A holistic approach that should be adopted to address the challenges in section 2. The solutions include:

- The proposed approach to curb Stigmatization is to Always Put On Protective Gear”.
- The proposed approach to address Health Challenges is to get health insurance from the Lagos State Health Scheme (LSHS)
- The proposed approach to address lack of Recognition and Underpaid Labour Disparity is by joining by Affiliating with a Recognized Worker’s Group such as the Federation of Informal Workers Organisation of Nigeria (FIWON).

**Section 4** shows Sanitation Workers in Action, specifically public toilet operators and street cleaners.

The last section shows the logos of the sponsors of this project: Sanitation Workers Project of WaterAid, University of Lagos, Centre for Housing and Sustainable Development (CHSD), Lagos State Wastewater Management Office (LSWMO), Pan African Vision for the Environment (PAVE), and the Federation of Informal Workers Organisation of Nigeria (FIWON).

The initial designs were shared with the Federation of Informal Workers Organisation of Nigeria (FIWON) and the Lagos State Wastewater Management Office (LSWMO) for inputs and corrections. Their feedbacks were invaluable and reflected in the final design of the toolkit.

The inputs of Federation of Informal Workers Organisation of Nigeria FIWON were as follows: *“Looks good. Would be nice to also include those that empty the septic tanks...maybe a pictorial of two people working with one handling a hose to a septic tank truck and the other peeping out of the truck...”*

The inputs of the Lagos State Wastewater Management Office (LSWMO) were as follows:

S/N	Section	Comments
1	Sanitation Work Is Decent Work	The image used does not reflect the Water and Sanitation workers. E.g., the public toilet, Wastewater operators.
2	Sanitation Workers Face Challenges	Their wages do not commensurate with their work. This challenge falls under SDG I (No poverty).
3	An Holistic Approach Is Needed	The holistic approach to SDG 1: Affiliate with recognized workers' group (to facilitate allowance or wages that will be commensurate to their work for a better life.)
4	Additional comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Tool kit 4 should be titled.</li> <li>ii. Pictures should speak to Water and Sanitation workers.</li> <li>iii. Pictures should include gully emptier.</li> <li>iv. Proper PPE to address the Water and Sanitation.</li> </ul>

### 5.3 AGREED ACTION POINTS FOR SUPPORTING SANITATION WORKERS

- (i) LSWMO was enjoined to continue a vigorous advocacy to upgrade the status of sanitation workers to permanent staff of the Lagos State Government. This will allow them to enjoy benefits such as being members of staff co-operative societies, earning a pension, having access to government facilities such as the health insurance, and many more.
- (ii) Advocacy to ensure that those employed as informal workers by private sector businesses are mobilized into a single association, wherein they can lobby for better and safer conditions of service. FIWON is committed to leading this drive.
- (iii) Stronger deployment of PPEs, although this may require working with the Private Sector. Effective deployment followed by monitoring of use would stimulate adherence to the use of PPEs by sanitation workers
- (iv) Stronger and more effective advocacy by all stakeholders to enable sanitation workers understand the health risk embedded in their work and thus increase positive health seeking behaviours.

# PART 6: CONCLUSION, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

## 6.1 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

### (i) Team meetings

The project team identified a select committee of advisors who are experts in the WASH and labour sectors to validate the research instruments, leverage on established networks and to ensure that the projects objectives are being carried out ethically and systematically. They are: Labour representative, Mr Gbenga Komolafe (Federation of Informal Workers Organization of Nigeria, FIWON). Professor Immaculata Nwokoro, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Lagos, representing academia and Mr Lookman Oshodi, Project Director, Artic Infrastructure, Lagos presenting the WASH sector. They actively engaged in all the workshops carried out and offered critical advice on the process of engagement and validation of toolkits.

### (ii) Engagement through FIWON

FIWON has the most significant capacity to build on the findings of this study, particularly with regards to extending membership to the various groups of sanitation workers. FIWON's activities will bring about further effort at organizing, advocacy, representation, and further research into how the work can be improved and those working in the sector can have their standards of work, earnings, improved; safety at work and broad socio-economic rights with specific reference to social protection and greater recognition and respect. It will leverage on the specific information it had shared with some of the sanitation workers in its workshop held as part of this study. For example:

- With N1000 monthly, they could obtain health insurance.
- Attendance at the monthly meetings which held every second Tuesday of every month to keep abreast of happenings.
- FIWON operates a savings pool which workers contribute to and can withdraw from at any time.
- Registration to join FIWON is just N2500 with three passport photographs.
- Familiarization tour round FIWON office so that sanitation workers can get familiar with it should they need to visit again.

FIWON plans to (i) intensify organizing campaign among the waste workers with a view to achieving an independent organization capable of representing the workers and bargaining with employers and interface with other important stakeholders such as the Ministry of Environment, the Commissioner of police as well as other relevant development organizations. (ii) Integrate them rapidly into FIWON so that they begin to enjoy the benefit of health insurance. They have also planned to invite them to the Federation's quarterly free health awareness and medical screening in partnership with a health NGO, to them as a first step towards addressing the terrible exposure to infections which they suffer and to enhance their health seeking behavior.

Thus, FIWON needs to be strengthened in terms of resources and manpower to continue informal engagement with Sanitation workers in order to encourage them to join the Federation. Monitoring of the progress of this project can therefore be routed through FIWON's activities.

It is now being proposed that to bring about the realization of the objectives of sanitation workers becoming registered with the Federation, strategic meetings between the funders, FIWON and the Co-Investigators as well as the Advisory Committee be held quarterly. These meetings will be the core instrument for monitoring progress towards this goal.

## **6.2 CONCLUSION**

The study has highlighted the precarity of Lagos Sanitation workers. It has also shown that along the waste water and sanitation value chain, there is a hierarchy of actors, with the real operators (toilet operators, plant operators) being vulnerable to negative health and socio-economic impacts with minimal social safety mechanisms to protect them. Mobilisation and alignment with the Federation of Informal Workers organisation of Nigeria will go a long way in providing support, solidarity and required information and resources to uplift the social and economic rights of sanitation workers

While Lagos state has an institutional structure to support waste and sanitation management, the convoluted and fractured nature of this structure and failure to adequately fund has incapacitated effective service delivery. Therefore, it is proposed that all sanitation related activities be brought under the purview of the Lagos state Waste water management office for effective management. Furthermore, officers of the office need to be exposed to relevant technical training in order to execute their functions adequately.

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