

Session Title	The invisible link: dignity, safety and health for sanitation workers	
Date and time	Wednesday, 19th of August, 12.00 – 1.30 pm CEST	
Description of the session / outline	<p>The session focuses on the workforce operating the sanitation chain - those who empty septic tanks and latrines or maintain sewers. Sanitation workers are critical to achieve safely managed sanitation, but oftentimes face terrible working conditions and stigma. We will discuss global practical experiences to protect workers dignity, health and safety.</p> <p><i>Introduction to the topic by the moderator</i></p> <p><i>Opinion Quiz on sanitation workers using Mentimeter</i></p> <p><i>Presentations followed by Q and A</i></p> <p><i>Opinion Poll and discussion on three subtopics</i></p> <p>Policy, Regulation and SOPs, Evidence and Research, Advocacy and Empowerment</p> <p><i>Conclusion by FSMA and FSM6 Announcement</i></p>	
Host	BORDA, FSMA, SuSanA, Worldbank, WaterAid	
Presenters	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Ndeye Awa Diagne</i> 2. <i>Kanika Singh</i> 3. <i>Shobana Srinivasan</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Health, Safety and Dignity of Sanitation workers - An initial assessment (2019) 2. Health, Safety and Social Security Challenges of Sanitation workers in India, during COVID-19 pandemic 3. FSM Operators Skills Challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa

Session notes

- Interactive quiz: What is the most laborious emptying method? Which is not a mechanical emptying method? What does PPE stand for? Arrange PPE equipment from head to toe. What is the biggest challenge to emptying sludge?
- Interactive opinion poll – presenting learnings from FSM 5:
 - Do local authorities benefit from private sector providers working in sanitation? Majority of poll responses - yes. Findings from FSM 5 – yes.
 - What is the condition of sanitation workers in Africa and Asia? Majority of responses “poor” or “pathetic”. FSM 5 – stigmatisation, poor working conditions.
 - How can conditions of workers be improved? Responses – formalisation, training, SOPs, regulation. FSM 5 – certification of training of workers, labour laws, suitable pay, standardisation, dignified working conditions.

Health, safety and dignity and sanitation workers: an initial assessment.

Presenter: Ndeye Awa Diagne

- SDGs have introduced a step-change from the MDGs – the focus is now on safely managed sanitation. The people who provide an essential service – sanitation workers, are often overlooked, “invisible” and ostracised.
- Undertook an initial assessment last year to understand the challenges and raise their profile, promote best practises, determine gaps that need to be addressed. Launched on World Toilet Day.
- Desk review and key informant interviews – case studies in several countries.
- Focus on sanitation workers who perform the emptying and transportation of waste, operation of pumping stations, treatment plants and maintenance of sewers.

Findings

- Key challenges: weak legal protection, occupational and environmental hazards (no PPE, diseases), financial insecurity (being paid in kind), social stigma, discrimination.
- Good practices: formalisation of workforce, mitigating occupational health risks, safeguarding health (insurance, medical check-ups) SOPs, workers’ empowerment (promote associations so they can speak for themselves).
- Areas for action: policy reform, adoption of operational guidelines (assess occupational risk, municipal and national level), build evidence base (address issues of quantification of the workforce, document their challenges), empowerment of sanitation workers.

This is more than a report – built strong partnerships, workers at the centre of the movement, aim to operationalise good practices. Embarking on second phase to try and the fill knowledge gaps identified in first phase.

Health, safety and social security challenges of sanitation workers during COVID-19 pandemic

Presenter: Kanika Singh, WaterAid India

- Presenting findings of a rapid study by WaterAid India.
- Study was undertaken in the last week of May - first week of June during India’s lockdown (restrictions were just starting to be lifted).
- Conducted interviews and secondary reviews. Covered many different types of sanitation workers including those who perform street sweeping, hospital cleaning and domestic waste collection. Aim was to cover all the different categories of workers but due to various challenges were not able to do this in equal proportions.

Key findings

- Awareness of preventive measures in workplace - majority aware of at least two symptoms of COVID-19. Alternatives to face-to-face training, such as online training and video training were being adopted by urban local bodies. PPE reuse and waste handling were not being covered adequately.
- Suitable PPE was not available for most workers, including hospital sanitation workers. Lack of user-friendly PPE led to irregular use. PPE provided by employers was not always adequate. Some workers had to arrange PPE themselves.
- Hand hygiene facilities were lacking. Workers were not washing their hands at all the critical times.
- Less than 20% reported receiving medical check-ups or thermal screening.

- Livelihood implications – 13% of workers were out of work since lockdown started. Most severely affected workers were dry latrine cleaners and rag pickers. Most were informal workers, and most were women. Severe financial constraints and hunger were experienced by some workers. “Hunger is more dangerous than Coronavirus” – dry latrine cleaner.
- Social security – all informal workers were excluded from insurance coverage. There was a gender inequity in terms of insurance – a higher proportion of men had insurance. Only 22% of female workers had insurance.
- Some cash assistance and ration support were being provided to the workers. Some support was targeted specifically towards sanitation workers by urban local bodies, but this excluded informal sanitation workers.
- Challenges for female workers – women’s representation higher among informal workforce, lower coverage in terms of work benefits, insurance etc. Additional difficulties due to menstruation with public toilets closed and longer working days. Additional workload – household responsibilities, caring for children. Gender lens is something to be looked at across all sanitation workers. They are a particularly vulnerable sub-group.
- Case study of Telangana state – initiatives by NGOs, state government and urban local bodies.

Recommendations

- Immediate action: handwashing for all, PPE provision, training on COVID prevention, medical check-ups, social and financial protection e.g. insurance
- Longer term action: R&D on comfortable PPE, formalisation of work arrangements, complete mechanisation of sanitation work with focus on protecting livelihoods of sanitation workers e.g. make them equipment owners.

Q&A

How can handwashing facilities be provided for workers who move across the city? You could possibly use a small system in the vehicles of the workers – we have experimented with these models. Also, provide hand sanitiser to all workers.

Quiz/breakout sessions

- Policy, regulation and SOPS group: Mixed views on the policy environment for sanitation in participants’ countries. Priorities include – formal recognition and regulation.
- Research and evidence group: Lots of data gaps to fill including technologies, number of workers and best practices. Why is it important to fill the gaps? – raise profile of the issue, inform decision making, understand the size of the problem and spread good practices. What is the main research question we need to answer – number of sanitation workers, increasing dignity, improving things at an individual and systems level. Best way to document and disseminate information related to sanitation workers – social media, internet, research networks, short policy briefs.
- Advocacy group: Do sanitation workers receive adequate training – not really/only partially. Promoting empowerment and removing taboos should be improved through government. Would PPE elevate image of workers as well as protecting them? – majority respond yes. Should ground practitioners be better represented in policy and technical conferences? – yes.

Upcoming

- FSM 6 Jakarta, Indonesia. 31st May – 4th June 2021. Hopefully it will be able to take place as planned, but there are detailed contingency plans just in-case.
- Global webinar on safety and wellbeing of sanitation workers during COVID-19 in South Asia on 3 September 2020, 11:30 AM CEST. Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81291488434>. For more details: ShahrukhMirza@wateraid.org)
- World Water Week - similar session but different discussions: <https://www.worldwaterweek.org/event/9064-the-invisible-link-dignity-safety-and-health-for-sanitation-workers>
- FSM Alliance will be launching FSM membership later this year with a focus on sanitation workers. Currently finalising member benefits.