

Abstract for FSM 7

Sub theme: Governance and Performance of the Water and Sanitation Sectors

Topic: Human Resources Evaluation and Development

Title: Wellbeing and Occupational Health and Safety of Sanitation Workers in Trichy

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Summary (100 words)

While the sanitation sector has received much-welcome attention in recent years, the safety and well-being of sanitation workers remain neglected. City Wide Inclusive Sanitation (CWIS) in Trichy, implemented by IIHS-led TNUSSP, tried to understand the various challenges sanitation workers face. The programme tried to uplift more than 3,000 sanitation workers through a holistic intervention focusing on social welfare, health, livelihoods, and occupational safety. The paper discusses the learnings from the interventions, shares emerging impacts, and broadly lays out the way forward.

Section II (900 words)

Introduction:

Tiruchirappalli, or Trichy, with a million-plus population, is the fourth largest urban centre and a municipal corporation in the state of Tamil Nadu, India. City Wide Inclusive Sanitation (CWIS) Programme, as part of the Tamil Nadu Urban Sanitation Support Programme (TNUSSP), focuses on ensuring inclusive urban sanitation in Trichy. One of the key components of CWIS is to improve the overall well-being and the occupational health and safety of sanitation workers.

In Trichy, around 81 per cent of households have individual toilets, of which 33 per cent are connected to underground drainage networks. Four-hundred-plus community and public toilets cater to the sanitation needs of informal settlements and the floating population. Seventy-two de-sludging vehicles owned by private operators render Fecal Sludge Management (FSM) services.

More than 3,000 sanitation workers oversee these complex operations on the ground and service the full cycle of sanitation. However, these workers remain vulnerable, and their health, safety and welfare needs are neglected. This paper highlights the efforts in uplifting the sanitation workers from Trichy city and the learnings from the implementation of welfare initiatives.

Objectives:

The programme seeks to improve the overall well-being of the workers in the following areas:

1. Well-being and welfare
 - Facilitate linkage of eligible sanitation workers with various social security schemes
 - Facilitate periodic health camps, especially for informal sanitation workers
2. Livelihoods: Strengthen current livelihoods and support workers and their families to access skill training and alternative/supplementary livelihood options
3. Ensure occupational health and safety

Methods/Process

The programme was initiated by collecting baseline data about the workers, including their demographic details and socio-economic status.

Highlights from the baseline

1	<i>Total number of sanitation workers in Trichy</i>	3,868
2	<i>Sanitation workers part of informal work arrangements</i>	1,230
3	<i>Sanitation workers engaged with ULB (Trichy City Corp)</i>	2,548
4	<i>Sanitation workers as regular staff of ULB</i>	1,218
5	<i>Sanitation workers contracted by ULB for a limited period</i>	1,330

The baseline findings highlighted that sanitation workers are not a homogeneous community and that informal workers constitute almost half of the workforce. Focus group discussions (FGD) and a participatory needs assessment were conducted with sanitation workers and their families to understand their challenges and perspectives on work and occupational safety, livelihood opportunities and health and welfare. This paper speaks about the work done post the assessment.

Highlights from the FGDs

The FGDS revealed a huge disparity in pay as well as other entitlements between formal and informal sanitation workers. The study revealed that sanitation workers were ignorant of social security schemes available under various government departments. Sanitation workers in even formal working arrangements receive only some benefits

from periodic health check-ups, while the occupational health of all sanitation workers is grossly neglected.

Initiatives to improve occupation health, safety and well-being

The programme compiled and published a list of all the social welfare schemes available for sanitation workers in Tamil Nadu, with detailed information on eligibility, enrolment process and documentation requirements. Eligible sanitation workers and their family members were mobilised and linked to a minimum of three schemes. Advocacy efforts with the Labour Department to issue ID Cards for informal sanitation workers resulted in workers being eligible for eight benefits.

To improve access to supplementary income and new skills for sanitation workers and their families, TNUSSP advocated for linkages with flagship programmes of the government and departments that promote livelihood, skill development, and enterprise programmes for the underprivileged.

TNUSSP facilitated routine health check-ups for regular and contractual sanitation workers, in partnership with private hospitals as part of their CSR initiatives in Trichy. CWIS conducted first aid training to address health and safety concerns such as injuries and accidents and provided customised first aid boxes to de-sludging operators on successful completion of the training.

Emerging Impacts:

Well-being and Social Protection

- More than 2,500 sanitation workers were linked with various social welfare schemes, 1,442 workers received insurance benefits, 111 workers received pension, and 128 children of workers received scholarships.
- Four hundred and nineteen informal sanitation workers received occupational ID cards, which further enabled 51 physically challenged sanitation workers to seek supportive aid.
- More than 200 sanitation workers and dependents received consultation through health camps; 195 workers were screened during specialised health camps administered at their settlements.

Livelihoods

- Fifty-seven groups comprising 593 informal sanitation workers formed under the National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM) opened bank accounts, completed training, and received revolving funds; 25 groups received bank loans, and 18 groups have started enterprises.

- Under the Self Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS), 33 workers and dependents received loans and business counselling.

Strengthened Occupational Safety

- A customised first aid training module for de-sludging operators was developed in collaboration with the Indian Red Cross Society and St. John Ambulance.
- First aid training was imparted to all 115 de-sludging operators. Similar training has been imparted to 72 women sanitation workers engaged in solid waste management in 36 micro composting centres. Additionally, workers were trained on proper PPE usage and workplace protocols.

Reflections/ Key Learnings

- Lack of access to information hampers sanitation workers' accessibility to social security schemes. For informal workers, lack of supporting documentation is a key barrier. Convergence of missions and departments can address many of these bottlenecks. Department of Social Welfare, and Labour Department were found to endorse similar social security schemes. Strong advocacy is required to resolve such duplications at the ministry level.
- The FGDs revealed that informal workers borrowed from informal credit operators at extremely high rates of interest. Lack of proper documentation (ID proof and proof of residence) prevented ragpickers from accessing loans from microfinance institutions.
- Government departments require a detailed project report for loan grants. Sanitation workers, often first-generation entrepreneurs, struggle to comply with various technical requirements. Loans are often denied to informal sanitation workers. Bankers must be sensitised to understand the needs of sanitation workers and facilitate access to credit.
- Occupational hazards have long-term health impacts among sanitation workers, exacerbated by their reluctance and inability to access routine diagnoses. The ergonomics and functionality of safety gear, tools, and PPE available are often not suitable for sanitation workers. Workplace safety and PPE designs are not gender sensitive.

Conclusion/ Way Forward:

- Many sanitation workers remain invisible and deprived of their entitlements due to the informal nature of their work.
- Identification of workers, especially the informal ones, remains a challenge.

- A multi-sectoral approach among various stakeholders to improve their health, livelihood and enterprise development, social security, and occupational health and safety must be adopted to support sanitation workers in overcoming their plight.
- Communication about various social protection schemes and application procedures must be available through digital media, which sanitation workers consume the most. A single-window system for applying to social security schemes will be beneficial.