UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

*SDG 6.2: A Pipedream without a Professional Sanitation Workforce*

21st March 2023, 8 am EDT, Zoom


By bringing together diverse partners, representatives of workers and sanitation businesses in South Asia, Africa, the *session* highlighted successes, lessons, and existing efforts. Drawing from these varied experiences, the session submitted a *commitment* to improve the quality of life for all sanitation workers.

**Key Issues discussed.**

- Sanitation workers provide indispensable services across the full chain of sanitation, and are critical for the achievement of SDG 6. Their rights and wellbeing need to be brought to the center of SDG 6

- There are different kinds of workers, playing various roles, and with varying employment types. Any intervention must recognise this diversity and cater for the most vulnerable workers, who tend to operate informally.

- Workers being part of decision-making spaces is crucial to ensuring that their perspectives are heard and incorporated into policies and practices.
Global advocacy, country-level policies, and on-the-ground implementation must go hand in hand to achieve the desired outcome. Collaboration among sanitation actors, along with capacity building is essential to create a unified voice among the range of actors.

Key recommendations for action:

- **Towards improved social protection**: Strengthening social protection can address barriers faced by workers. Governments must prioritise and implement policy changes and protection measures to empower workers, along with occupational safety. International organisations have a significant role to play in supporting sanitation worker rights through their programmes, normative functions and advocacy, as exemplified by the World Bank’s labor management procedure, or ILO’s conventions.

- **Towards improved occupation safety and health (OSH)**: Supporting governments to review and extend the effective application of national labour inspection systems to sanitation workers. Supporting governments develop minimum national OSH standards for fecal sludge management workers.

- **Towards strengthened livelihoods**: Supporting workers to make their own choice regarding their profession, either to transition towards more formalised and safer roles, run sanitation businesses or transition to other professions. Advocating for better working arrangements (fair contracts, timely wages, entitlements, leaves) and good working conditions with access to sanitation facilities. Recognise and strengthen sanitation based entrepreneurs through training and enabling equal opportunities in the market.

- **Towards agency and recognition**: Addressing the intergenerational inequity pertaining to sanitation workers and their families. Empowering the younger generation with education, better roles in the same profession or alternative employment opportunities. Empowering and enabling sanitation workers to form their own federations and associations, enabling them to advocate for their well-being as recognized in ILO conventions and national legislations.

- **Towards action by multiple stakeholders**: Working together to obtain accurate global data on the current workforce, especially the informal workforce and the required workforce size to achieve SDG 6.2. This data will be instrumental in making a case for improved protection and safety measures and promote knowledge sharing.