



International
Labour
Organization

► **South Asia Sub-regional workshop on Decent
Work for Sanitation Workers (Virtual)**

11-13 October 2021

Report of the discussions (final)



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Introduction

The workshop brought together representatives from governments, employers' and workers' organizations from Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka to discuss decent work challenges and opportunities, actions taken by governments and social partners to address them, as well as to develop strategies that ILO, governments and social partners can adopt to create opportunities in the sanitation sector and address the decent work deficits. The workshop was part of a series of activities on [*global advocacy for health, safety and dignity of workers in sanitation*](#) organised by the ILO as part of the Initiative for Sanitation Workers.

The workshop was organised around three thematic questions which were discussed in national group discussions by the participants before drafting a summary report to present in the plenary for discussion by participants from other countries. These plenary discussions were used to develop concrete actionable recommendations for the ILO, governments, and social partners.

Scope and aims of the workshop

The objective of the capacity-building workshop was to strengthen synergies and generate ideas for joint action in order to mobilize the stakeholders in the world of work toward a national or sub-regional policy/strategy on improving working conditions of sanitation workers and their participation in social dialogue.

For the purpose of this workshop, "sanitation workers" were workers employed for cleaning toilets or emptying tanks/pits, to clean and unblock sewers and manholes, and for transportation of faecal matter and work at disposal and sewerage treatment sites. The ILO published a background note on the subject.

Day 1: 11 October 2021

Opening Session

The Director of the ILO's Sectoral Policies Department in Geneva, Ms **Alette Van Leur**, welcomed the participants and stressed that sanitation workers were key workers in society who provided essential public services. At the same time, they faced multiple decent work challenges including injuries, fatalities, stigma, discrimination and overall inadequate and unsafe conditions of work. She called on social partners to pay attention to the often-deplorable plight of sanitation workers and called for concrete efforts to promote decent work in the sector. She observed that the Covid-19 pandemic had unmasked many pre-existing flaws in the labour market and that the ILO was working with its partners to better understand and effectively respond to challenges related to the Covid-19 pandemic. She noted that the multiple challenges facing sanitation workers had started receiving the long-overdue attention in recent years and that the ILO was proud to have participated in the initial assessment carried out in 2019 together with the World Health Organization, the World Bank, WaterAid and SNV.

The Director of the ILO DWT-New Delhi, Ms **Dagmar Walter** recognized the contribution of sanitation workers towards essential public services to societies. Their role upheld the maintenance of the sanitation service chain. But for many, in the context of South Asia, this came at the risk of performing their work facing several hazards without proper equipment and protective gear, which leads to serious injuries and even death. Further, the social stigma around sanitation work could not be ignored. Despite their services being essential, and even contributing to larger objectives set in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 6 and 8, serious concerns prevailed about the well-being of sanitation workers in the region.

Sanitation workers faced a high degree of economic insecurity, mainly due to the informal nature of their employment, as reflected in the employment and labour force surveys' data in South Asian countries. Most of the sanitation workers lacked any form of social security cover. Governments in most South Asian countries had recognized the problem of sanitation workers and enacted laws and policies to provide safeguards against health hazards, and the stigma experienced by them. Most South Asian countries had legally or administratively banned manual cleaning of dry toilets, pit emptying, sewerage cleaning, and other related work, but the work persisted. In India, the Government launched the Swachh Bharat Mission aimed at making India open defecation free, clean, and sanitized. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment had the mandate to work on the rehabilitation, social security, and livelihood of manual sanitation workers. Similarly, there were legal frameworks in most of the South Asian countries.

The challenge was to understand the reasons behind the persistence of harmful manual sanitation work. There was a need to take immediate steps to transform the working methods and eliminate hazardous and unhygienic working conditions. The priority should be to protect the lives and livelihoods of sanitation workers and provide them with safer and healthier working conditions instead of only focusing on the transition to mechanical methods.

She hoped that participants would be inspired by the [Global Call to Action for a Human-centred Recovery](#) and the [ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work](#) that emphasizes the importance of Increasing investment in people's capabilities, increasing investment in the institutions of work, and Increasing investment in decent and sustainable work.

Presentation of the Background Note

The [background note](#) examined the situation of sanitation workers in South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) through a decent work lens. The paper defined sanitation workers to include those who empty septic pits and tanks, provide transportation of faecal sludge, perform sewer maintenance, and work in treatment plants. It also included a summary of relevant International Labour Organization (ILO) instruments that could provide a basis to address the main challenges to decent work for sanitation workers.

The paper found that sanitation workers were a relatively small percentage of total workers. In some countries, workers over 60 years old were more likely to work in manual sanitation than in others, while the participation of women was different in the respective countries.

Formal sanitation workers receive up to three times higher wages than informal sanitation workers who are poorly paid and vulnerable to extortion. Wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE) was uncommon among manual pit-emptiers because they were either unaffordable or uncomfortable, or because emptiers were unaware of the benefits of wearing PPEs. As a result, manual emptiers often came into direct contact with human faeces, as well as other items commonly found in latrine pits, including sanitary products, sharp objects, and other solid waste, leading to injury and illness, infection due to cuts and abrasions and excreta-related parasites and vector-borne infection, skin disorders and respiratory diseases.

The paper found that sanitation work was characterised by informality with neither job contracts nor social security for the workers, be it in the public or private sector. There were more sanitation workers employed in the private sector than in the public sector, nevertheless, public sector workers also lacked social protections.

Attempts by the low caste sanitation workers to move away from sanitation work to seek alternative livelihoods were often opposed while members of the high castes boycotted their efforts to start, for example, a tea stall or run auto-rickshaw. The self-employed sanitation workers reported humiliating treatment including some household owners refusing to offer them drinking water when they asked for it, and when they would pay money, they often had to put it on the ground to avoid the touch. Discrimination against sanitation workers was partly a result of cultural and religious notions. The bulk of sanitation workers come from the majority religious community of the country, for example, Hindu in India and Nepal, Muslim in Bangladesh and Afghanistan, and Buddhist in Sri Lanka. The caste-religious interface was common in some countries: for example, the Hindu ex-untouchables and former untouchables who converted to other religions such as Sikhism, Buddhism, and Christianity constituted a sizeable proportion of sanitation workers in India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. There is also a wide variation in the distribution of sanitation workers by education level.

Most countries in the region had ratified the ILO's eight fundamental Conventions while many others had not ratified the other Conventions that were relevant to this workshop, but had adopted laws of general application. The lack of attention to sanitation workers remained a challenge.

India had neither ratified nor enacted a law related to the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No. 87), and the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98). Afghanistan had adopted laws relating to forced labour, freedom of association and right to organise, but had not ratified the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No. 87), and the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98). Bangladesh had adopted a law relating to minimum wage but had not ratified Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and had

not domesticated the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) despite ratifying it. Maldives had not domesticated both the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No. 87) and the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98). Nepal had not ratified the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No. 87).

Theme Question: Facing the Challenge

What are the main risks that sanitation workers face, the main challenges and opportunities that participants face in addressing the risks, and the gaps in knowledge regarding sanitation workers?

Panel Discussion: Initiative for Sanitation Workers

The Chief Technical Advisor of the Initiative for sanitation workers delivered a presentation on the work of the Initiative led by the ILO, the WHO, the World Bank, and the INGOs WaterAid and SNV. The Initiative conducted an initial assessment in 2019 that gave rise to the *Global Advocacy for Health, Safety and Dignity of Workers in Sanitation* with three objectives:

- a) Political prioritization: Supporting the inclusion of sanitation workers' rights in government and civil society political agendas at the national and local levels.
- b) Influencing the WASH and labour sectors: Mainstreaming of sanitation workers' rights in WASH sector implementation and monitoring programmes and in the labour sector initiatives.
- c) Addressing knowledge gap: Supporting research initiatives and products that address knowledge gaps.

The Initiative had 14 activities which included the ILO South Asia workshop on sanitation workers; national and global commitments; strengthening sanitation workers' organizations/networks; World Bank investments in urban sanitation projects; information dissemination at events; building and disseminating content; supporting engagement with informal sanitation workers; developing a research agenda; incentivising research; review of procedures, guidelines, and local regulations; review of technological innovations; data gathering checklists; quantification and health evidence; and developing an online platform. Key updates on the Initiative included the progress made in the implementation of the activities; developing the research agenda on sanitation workers' issues; and incentivising research at masters and PhD levels. For example, the Initiative had issued a call for expression of interest in Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, India, Bangladesh, and Nepal to organisations formed by sanitation workers (unions, cooperatives, associations, etc.) and those organisations already working closely with sanitation workers.

How does the initiative benefit the work of the ILO constituents and how can the ILO constituents support the work of the initiative?

WaterAid observed that in most countries, local authorities had no understanding of the size of the sector in terms of employment. The magnitude of the knowledge gap was reflective of how neglected the sector was. The Initiative was trying to bridge the knowledge gap which will not only help employers understand the concerns of workers or assist workers to organise but will also help local authorities develop evidence-based regulations and policies for the sector. The local authorities working together with workers were better positioned to put the topic on the respective national agendas.

The World Bank was developing an online platform to act as a repository of evidence and research related to sanitation workers. The platform was also a discussion forum. As a repository, the platform was open to anyone with useful information on sanitation work to deposit on the platform. The World Bank was also working with SNV to develop guidelines on best practices in different localities to include in the repository. The other initiatives were related to technological innovations relevant to occupational health, safety, and dignity of workers; local regulations, guidelines, and procedures to support workers; and health evidence.

SNV also echoed the concern about the large data gap on sanitation work. The Initiative was compiling different emerging technologies and identifying the different kinds of occupational hazards that can be minimised using such technologies. On the mobilisation and networking front, the SNV had, for the last five years, been hosting sanitation workers meetings.

A representative from the Self-Employed Women Association (SEWA) participated as discussant of the panel. She welcomed the awareness recently raised about sanitation workers. The image created around “manning the manhole” should be changed when talking about the dignity of sanitation workers. Manual scavenging should not be allowed to continue in the age of great technological innovations. Sanitation workers, who are critical to climate change mitigation, were mainly contract workers with no incentives and social security. SEWA proposed to conduct a pilot project on the chances of robots taking over the role of manual scavengers.

The designs of PPE should be specific to the nature of sanitation work and must be equipped with oxygen masks. Consideration should be given to the next generation of sanitation workers who are either not in school due to financial constraints or are discriminated against when they are in schools. Skills development and upgrading for these children would increase their participation in the labour markets. As cities grow and populations increase, emphasis must be placed on systemic change, effective city and town planning, and technologies should be designed to the advantage of sanitation.

Summary of National Discussions

India

In India, participants observed that the basic problems facing sanitation workers were historical and could be summed up in three categories:

- i. Ownership of the problem: that is, who owns the problems faced by sanitation workers? Is it at the centre (federal government) or the state level? Participants argued that sanitation was a state subject. In India, the centre directs policy and laws which are then implemented at the state level but, in most instances, the challenge was in the interpretation and application of policies and laws by the various states.
- ii. Sustainability: the need to consider developing sustainable solutions when looking at problem resolution of the challenges facing sanitation workers, be it short-term gains or long-term gains in promoting decent work. Different statistical sources indicate that a sanitation worker dies every three to five days: this makes working towards short-term gains imperative while the country develops sustainable long-term solutions
- iii. Time frame: linked to sustainability and short-term gains, time frame relates to the immediate, short-term, and long-term strategies. For example, issues related to the provision of PPE should be resolved in the immediate future.

The participants raised three main issues:

- i. In India, both socially and economically, sanitation workers come at the bottom of the caste system. Historically, it has been drilled in them to believe that their role was to become sanitation workers. The challenge was on how to change the narrative for them, to make them understand that they have a constitutional right to seek after alternative livelihoods available to them.
- ii. Sanitation work in India comprises emptying, cleaning, and transportation of faecal sludge, but not treatment. Therefore, a large part of the sanitation value chain should be mechanised. The mechanisation of the sanitation value chain should consider re-skilling and transitioning them into other jobs.
- iii. Accountability for implementation of correct sanitation process: Linked to the problem of ownership, a clear understanding of who owns the problem would help to address the question of who should account for the decent work deficits existing in the sector.

Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, the main challenges sanitation workers face include:

- i. Lack of mechanisation - sanitation workers conduct their work manually.
- ii. Risk of physical injury and even death.
- iii. Presence and exposure of sanitation workers to poisonous gasses.
- iv. Working in confined spaces with limited ventilation and air circulation.

The challenges faced by participants from Bangladesh in addressing the risks sanitation workers face include:

- i. Lack of coverage in national labour laws
- ii. Lack of access to education
- iii. High illiteracy levels among sanitation workers
- iv. Lack of social security
- v. Social stigma
- vi. High incidences of poverty among sanitation workers

The knowledge gaps related to:

- i. Lack of adequate data on employment levels and conditions of service
- ii. No guidelines including those relating to OSH at work
- iii. Lack of training and skills in the sector

Nepal

In Nepal, the following were identified by participants as the main risks facing sanitation workers:

- i. Informality
- ii. Discrimination
- iii. Lack of social security
- iv. Stigmatisation

The challenges faced by participants in addressing the risks facing sanitation workers include:

- i. Lack of laws protecting sanitation workers
- ii. High incidences of poverty among sanitation workers
- iii. No minimum wage coverage
- iv. Lack of union representation because of informality and fear of joining unions that could cause them lose jobs.

The knowledge gap in Nepal relates to the lack of data on employment and working conditions and the formalisation of the sector would present an opportunity to improve the working conditions of sanitation workers.

Pakistan

In Pakistan, sanitation workers:

- i. are paid less than minimum wage
- ii. are contract workers kept under exploitation
- iii. work with no safety equipment
- iv. die while working due to toxic fumes
- v. lack of social security
- vi. lack training
- vii. lack compensation for workplace injuries

Other risks include the highly informal nature of the sector. Participants identified opportunities in areas of ratification of OSH-related Conventions and the absence of an OSH training manual for sanitation workers. They stressed the importance of formalising the sector and the need to mechanise it through the adoption and application of modern technologies.

The participants identified the lack of data and the presence of a training manual for sanitation workers as some of the areas that would assist in bridging the knowledge gap.

Maldives

In the Maldives, sanitation work was reserved only for foreigners and undocumented migrants who in most cases are men. They experience xenophobic attacks from the local people due to their immigration status. They are paid less than minimum wage, not organised and mostly informal. They lack social security, governance systems and laws to protect and regulate their work.

The challenges faced by participants in addressing the risks facing sanitation workers in the Maldives include the lack of:

- i. proper immigration documents among sanitation workers
- ii. targeted governance systems
- iii. laws protecting sanitation workers

The opportunities for promoting decent work in sanitation include formalisation of the sector, establishing of proper governance systems, documenting the undocumented migrants to fully recognise and integrate sanitation workers into society, and strengthening of monitoring systems. Participants also urged the Maldives government to ratify and domesticate the [Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 \(No. 187\)](#), the [Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 \(No. 155\)](#), the [Migrant Workers \(Supplementary Provisions\) Convention, 1975 \(No. 143\)](#), and the [Migration for Employment Convention \(Revised\), 1949 \(No. 97\)](#) to protect and promote the rights of migrant workers working in the sanitation sector.

The knowledge gap was a challenge especially in understanding employment levels, education and training levels of sanitation workers and working conditions. They suggested that awareness programmes and strengthened monitoring and inspection mechanisms would help narrow the knowledge gap.

Discussion

The condition of sanitation workers across the region was the same in terms of challenges, risks of injury and infection, social stigma and isolation, illiteracy, and poverty. Greater advocacy for decent work was crucial to improve the living standards of sanitation workers who provide an essential service but are denied a minimum wage and lack social protection. Sanitation work should remain in public ownership and need long-term financial investment to be able to effectively respond to the needs and interests of sanitation workers.

Take-home points

In conclusion, the participants summarized the risks and challenges faced by sanitation workers in the sub-region to include:

- i. Informality
- ii. Lack of personal protective equipment (PPE)
- iii. Lack of recognition of the work of sanitation workers
- iv. Lack of adequate national laws and their application
- v. Risks of physical injury and illness
- vi. Lack of alternative livelihoods for sanitation workers
- vii. Exclusion of sanitation workers from the labour force
- viii. Lack of social security
- ix. High incidences of poverty and illiteracy
- x. Social stigma and discrimination
- xi. Lack of union representation
- xii. Lack of ownership of the problem and accountability
- xiii. Poor sustainability of interventions

► Day 2: 12 October 2021

Panel Discussion: The ILO's Experience: What are the relevant and useful experiences that ILO has learned?

The specialist on fundamental principles and rights at work from the ILO Decent Work Team for South Asia (DWT) highlighted the global role of the ILO and the importance of its normative instruments in promoting decent work. He highlighted the relevance of the four pillars of the [ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work](#) and the accompanying Conventions to the sector

- i. Child labour: Effective abolition of child labour
- ii. Forced labour: Elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour
- iii. Discrimination at work: Elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation
- iv. Freedom of association and the right of collective bargaining

He explained that the sector was riddled with different forms of discrimination (i.e., caste, religion, gender, immigration status, ethnicity etc) and the ILO had done a lot of work to address the problem of discrimination at work. The concept of discrimination relates to human development and discriminatory laws designed to confine certain groups of people to a particular occupation should be repealed and updated to conform to international instruments on human dignity and non-discrimination.

He noted that the ILO had done much to combat forced labour, like developing indicators and creating awareness. He observed that certain occupations like manual scavenging may not fit into the legal definition of forced labour, but the social construct of the occupation provides a different perspective. For example, manual scavengers are socially forced to remain in the occupation because they have no other choice – they are excluded from the labour market. The social context under which manual scavengers operate meets the two elements of forced labour: involuntariness and the threat of penalties. It could be argued that manual scavengers are forced to work in this occupation by virtue of their social standing in society and the penalties of discrimination and social stigma they face when they try alternative livelihoods.

He argued that child labour exists in the sector. Children are not given alternative opportunities through education but are groomed to continue in the occupation of their parents. Child labour has become a tool to perpetuate demeaning practices of manual scavenging from an early age. Children are psychologically and physically conditioned to accept manual scavenging as their fate and occupation. ILO was working to fight child labour and break the intergenerational cycle of the practice.

The specialist on OSH and labour inspections from the DWT highlighted the different hazards associated with sanitation work such as physical, biological, chemical, and ergonomic hazards, as well as lack of welfare facilities, long working time, and incidences of violence and harassment.

He observed that it was important to improve working methods and procedures at the source. The measures should include the use of safer work procedures and easy-to-apply sewer cleaning tools, adequate PPE for workers at no cost to workers, the use of participatory training methodologies, and putting in place necessary social security measures. He highlighted some of the good practices of OSH in Faecal Sludge Management (FSM) that include risk identification, awareness-raising, training, chemical use, record keeping of occupational accidents, and the inclusion of Occupational Health and Safety in the local government agenda. He further observed the emerging technologies in the sector which are helping deliver safe and efficient sanitation services and are gradually replacing the practice of manual emptying.

He identified laws and regulations, enforcement and inspection, workplace OSH committees, small enterprises/informality, and accident/disease reporting systems as some of the priority areas to include in integrated national/state OSH programmes. He cited the ILO Conventions on OSH, particularly the [Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 \(No. 155\)](#), the [Occupational Health Services Convention, 1985 \(No. 161\)](#), and the [Promotional Framework for OSH Convention, 2006 \(No. 187\)](#) as some of the important instruments to refer to.

The specialist on Employer Activities from the DWT noted that many employer organisations have not engaged with employers in the sanitation sector. There was consensus that the sector faces many challenges such as invisibility, OSH challenges, social stigma, and discrimination. The issues facing sanitation workers were complex and historical in some cases and there were no quick fixes.

The application of national laws was a major challenge. For example, the application of the specific laws in India was low and some social partners (workers' and employers' organizations) did not even know about its existence. He argued that informality was not necessarily the absence of legal protection. Some countries had laws, but the benefits of such laws do not benefit workers. He recommended that awareness campaigns were particularly important to inform workers about the existing laws.

The ILO (New Delhi - CO) specialist on Worker Activities emphasised that sanitation workers need to be empowered so that they can raise their voices, protect their right to collective bargaining, and protect themselves. The trade union and worker organisation in the sanitation sector were near non-existent due to informality, social isolation, and discrimination.

Theme Question: Supporting Good Practices

What actions have governments and social partners taken to address these risks and challenges?

Summary of National Discussions

India

The participants from India agreed that contractual workers should be treated at par with sanitary workers and that privatisation had increased precarity. Participants acknowledged that there had been some efforts by unions to promote workers' rights and decent work practices especially during the Covid-19 pandemic which brought to light the plight of these workers. There was also a growing demand to formalise the sector. Trade unions were continuously involved in decent work campaign activities

Bangladesh

The government had undertaken legal reforms including the enactment of Water Supply and Sewerage Authority Act, 1996 which promotes the construction and maintenance of sewerage systems; and the City Corporation Act, 2009 which mandates the management of refuse. In November 2017, the local government adopted an institutional regulatory framework that provided local government with clear guidelines to follow to provide better sanitation services.

Employer participants observed that there were not many data on the sanitation sector and that they had not given special attention to it. Consequently, employers had no active initiatives in the sector except for general sensitization activities especially on the use of PPEs.

The participants from Bangladesh noted the prevailing low wages in the sector and urged governments to extend the fundamental principles and rights at work to sanitation workers.

Government should also provide social security and take steps to reform rules and regulations especially those related to outsourcing and contract work.

Nepal

In Nepal, there are Constitutional provisions to protect workers' rights. The Labour Act also promotes decent work through labour inspections. The country has also developed a national OSH policy that cover all sectors including sanitation work but acknowledged that certain laws and regulations should be amended or updated to respond to the challenges of sanitation workers.

Pakistan

In Pakistan, the pharmaceutical industries, including hospitals, had developed sanitation programmes as per strict Standard Operating Procedures. The sanitation workers are hired by third parties and are given social security. Public sector sanitation workers have good collective bargaining agreements and have, through their unions, negotiated good working conditions including safety and health. Employers in the formal sector have taken steps to provide sanitation workers with PPE and relevant OSH facilities. Workers are trained on health and safety issues. The ILO should work especially for the sanitation workers in collaboration with other social partners.

Maldives

In the Maldives, employer organisations had conducted some awareness programmes and workshops on hygiene. The government had taken steps to amend labour laws and regulatory frameworks to protect the sanitation sector in greater Maldives but acknowledged that the outer islands, which do not have proper waste management systems, were still lagging in adopting and enforcing the labour standards. Government policy to have proper sewer systems. The government was also developing insurance policies that would include sanitation workers. The main companies operating in the sector have developed operational procedures and standards and workers were continuously trained on safety guidelines. The government was looking at introducing a minimum wage and social protection measures for sanitation workers.

Participants stressed the need to change people's mindset to accept sanitation workers and give them the dignity they deserve.

Discussion

The participants observed that in some countries, labour laws had been diluted or replaced with Codes and regulations which have subjected workers to exploitation. Most of the sanitation workers were unaware of the existing labour laws mainly due to high illiteracy levels. There was a need for trade unions to find ways to organise sanitation workers by including them in awareness programmes.

In general, labour laws exist in most countries and some governments had started taking steps to develop programmes specific to sanitation work. The high illiteracy levels present a big challenge for workers to comprehend existing legal texts in some countries.

Take-home points

The take-home points from the discussions included:

- i. Informality and precarity of employment
- ii. Lack of personal protective equipment (PPE)
- iii. Risks of physical injury and illness
- iv. Lack of social security
- v. Social stigma and discrimination
- vi. Lack of recognition of the work of sanitation workers

- vii. Lack of specific national laws and uneven application of those that exist
- viii. Lack of alternative livelihoods for sanitation workers
- ix. Exclusion of sanitation workers from the labour force
- x. High incidences of poverty and illiteracy
- xi. Lack of attention to discrimination based on gender and other factors, such as migration status and ethnicity/caste
- xii. Lack of union representation
- xiii. Lack of ownership of the problem and accountability
- xiv. Sustainability of interventions
- xv. Knowledge gap and lack of data

► Day 3: 13 October 2021

The day started with a 2016 promotional video for the World Toilet Day which featured the Director-General of the ILO who stressed that water is work, in that, it requires workers for its safe and clean delivery while at the same time creates and improves conditions of work. He emphasised the central role of fresh water in achieving sustainable development goals and highlighted the clear and direct link between the creation of quality jobs and the availability and sustainable management of water. He observed that millions of people working in the water sector are neither recognised nor protected by basic labour rights.

Theme Question: Mapping the Road Ahead:

What strategies can the ILO, governments and social partners adopt to create opportunities in the sector and address these challenges?

Open Discussion

During the Open Discussion, the following strategies were proposed by participants:

- i. Advocate for decent work for sanitation workers and link their work to SDG 8
- ii. Survey the immediate issues faced by sanitation workers
- iii. Awareness programmes
- iv. Governments to enact specific laws for sanitation workers
- v. Create a WhatsApp group to exchange views on the subject
- vi. Link SDG 6 (water and sanitation), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), and SDG 11 (sustainable cities)
- vii. More research on awareness among workers about laws
- viii. Use data to change people's attitudes
- ix. Advocate for the formalisation of the sector
- x. Develop long-term commitments to encourage and support workers to organise. The process of organising is a long road and it always requires long term commitments from external advisers that walk hand in hand with workers
- xi. Establish a coordination committee at the national level
- xii. Create workers helpline
- xiii. Research on the impact of privatisation (PSI)
- xiv. Research on the impact of toilets being provided
- xv. Encourage even smaller companies to adhere to best practices and international standards
- xvi. Promote skills development to improve their participation in the labour market
- xvii. Enhance and demand the full ownership of government responsibility of these services
- xviii. Find creative and socially accepted names to replace socially degrading names associated with sanitation work (e.g., "pickers of recyclables" in Brazil)
- xix. Governments to provide PPE and uniforms
- xx. Bring sanitation workers to schools as ambassadors of sustainability and environmental protection
- xxi. Bring allies onboard such as those in agriculture
- xxii. Provide access to training opportunities
- xxiii. Research on the status of sanitation workers in the context of Covid-19
- xxiv. Capacity building of women sanitation workers

Summary of National Discussions

After national group discussions, the countries proposed country-specific strategies to create opportunities in the sector and address the decent work deficits.

India

The participants from India identified the following strategies:

- i. Reconsider privatisation strategies
- ii. Accelerate efforts in the campaign against garbage profiteering
- iii. Attain parity of contractual and regular workers
- iv. Resist the growing trend of replacing laws with Codes

Bangladesh

The participants from Bangladesh identified the following strategies:

- i. Formulate and implement policies as well as identify areas of priority that promote decent work of sanitation workers
- ii. Make strategies to properly implement national laws
- iii. Take steps to consult social partners
- iv. Liaise with international partners
- v. Update national laws and regulations
- vi. Implement standards
- vii. Take steps to strengthen labour inspection systems
- viii. Carry out campaigns across various media platforms
- ix. Identify risks in the workplaces
- x. Train sanitation workers
- xi. Take the initiative to transport and store sludge in a safe manner
- xii. Document accident and death data
- xiii. Establish OSH committees in the workplaces
- xiv. Fulfil government demands
- xv. follow OSH guidelines
- xvi. Provide PPE to workers
- xvii. Participate in OSH training and campaigns

Nepal

The participants from Nepal identified the following strategies:

- i. Conducting research to understand the structure of the sector and its challenges
- ii. Organizing sanitation workers with assistance from the ILO
- iii. Developing OSH national standards
- iv. Identifying and recognise a sanitation worker
- v. Developing targeted guidelines for sanitation workers
- vi. Promoting social dialogue between sanitation workers, their employers, and governments
- vii. Ensuring safe working conditions for sanitation workers
- viii. Providing training for sanitation workers
- ix. Reporting work-related accidents to government
- x. Promoting fundamental principles and rights at work for sanitation workers
- xi. Participate in training

They also urged the ILO to:

- i. Create a sub-regional knowledge platform to share best practices
- ii. Promote social protection for sanitation workers
- iii. Assist in the application of the policy work done by the ILO including capacity building

Pakistan

The participants from Pakistan identified the following strategies:

- i. Adopting specific laws for sanitation workers at the provincial level
- ii. Protecting the right to organise of private-sector employees
- iii. Developing an ILO Convention specific to sanitation work

Maldives

The participants from the Maldives identified the strategy of designing training and education programmes for sanitation workers.

Main Strategies to create opportunities and address challenges that sanitation workers face in the sub-region

The Office presented the following summary of the proposals presented during the workshop, which the participants adopted as a roadmap for future action:

- i. Governments should take full ownership and responsibility of sanitation services
- ii. Governments and employers should provide and maintain adequate PPE and uniforms to workers at no cost to the workers
- iii. Participants should advocate for decent work for sanitation workers and link it to SDG 6 on water and sanitation, SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, and SDG 11 on sustainable cities
- iv. Advocating for the formalisation and professionalisation of sanitation work
- v. Developing long-term commitments to encourage and support workers to organise
- vi. Conducting research on the impact of privatisation on working conditions of sanitation workers
- vii. Conducting research on the status of sanitation workers in the context of Covid-19
- viii. Promoting skills development to improve the participation of sanitation workers in the labour market
- ix. Finding creative and socially accepted names to replace the socially degrading names associated with sanitation work (e.g., “pickers of recyclables” in Brazil)
- x. Appointing sanitation workers as ambassadors of sustainability and environmental protection and creating opportunities for them to speak in public spaces such as schools
- xi. Creating linkages between water and sanitation, public health, and food systems to build alliances
- xii. Promoting information and knowledge sharing on best practices at the sub-regional level

Closing Statement

The Deputy Director of the ILO DWT for South Asia, Mr **Satoshi Sasaki**, closed the workshop with a call to continuing the ongoing framework/network of support provided by a group of international agencies including the ILO, WHO, WB, WaterAid, and SNV which act as the basis for strengthening the voice of sanitation workers to be reflected in the international and regional arena, sharing information among the countries and deliver the support through concerned parties at the country level. Looking at the issues from the development perspective, it was useful to consider the importance of sanitation workers role from the environmental perspective. To break the cycle, there was a need to put an end to children of sanitation workers inheriting the stigma. Therefore, it remains necessary not to limit the discussion to labour issues only but to also consider education for the next generation and providing for them an enabling environment to access alternative employment opportunities.

Strategically, it was necessary to consider short-term gains and long-term solutions in the quest to address decent work deficits in the sector. There was a need to address both aspects, designing the short-term gains and contributing to the long-term solutions. He acknowledged that the most difficult part of the work was to change the mindset and perception of sanitation work in society. He assured participants of the ILO's continuous communication with stakeholders and committed to reflecting the discussions in the programme and policy formulation at the country level in coming years.

► **Appendix: List of Persons who participated in the workshop**

Names	Title	Designation	Organisation
Mr Md. Humayun Kabir	Joint Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment	Government representative	Bangladesh
Mr Md. Kamrul Hasan	Deputy Inspector General (Safety)	Government representative	Bangladesh
Ms Mariyam Areefa	Ministry of Economic Development	Government representative	Maldives
Ms Animath Nashmy Fazeel	Ministry of Economic Development	Government representative	Maldives
Mr Sujan Jojju	Senior Factory Inspector	Government representative	Nepal
Mr Umesh Yadav	Senior Divisional Engineer	Government representative	Nepal
Ms Shaista Gul	Section Officer, The Ministry of OPHRD	Government representative	Pakistan
Mr Farooq Ahmed	Bangladesh Employers Federation	Employer representative	Bangladesh Employers Federation
Mr Muhammad Habibur Rahman	Senior Legal Officer, Bangladesh Employers Federation	Employer representative	Bangladesh Employers Federation
Ms Natasha Patel	CEO	Employer representative	India Sanitation Coalition, All India Organization of Employers (AIOE)
Adnan Haleem	Secretary General, National Federation of Maldivian Employers	Employer representative	National Federation of Maldivian Employers
Ms Shahida Mariyam Mohamed	Vice President, National Federation of Maldivian Employers	Employer representative	National Federation of Maldivian Employers
Mr Hansa Ram Pandey	Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FNCCI)	Employer representative	Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FNCCI)
Mr Zaki Ahmed Khan	Employers' Federation of Pakistan (EFP)	Employer representative	Employers' Federation of Pakistan (EFP)
Mr Vajira Ellepola	Employers' Federation of Ceylon (EFC)	Employer representative	Employers' Federation of Ceylon (EFC)

Md. Fajlur Rahman	Dhaka WASA Jatiotabadi Employees Union	Worker representative	Dhaka WASA Jatiotabadi Employees Unione
Mr Jammu Anand	President	Worker representative	Nagpur Municipal Corporation Employees Union
Ms Reema Nanavaty	SEWA India	Worker representative	SEWA India
Mr Manaliben Shah	Vice President, SEWA India	Worker representative	SEWA India
Mr Adil Shariff	General Secretary	Worker representative	Indian National Municipal and Local Bodies Workers Federation
Mr Ram Prasad Poudel	Local Level Employees Union	Worker representative	Local Level Employees Union
Mr Nar Bahadur Shah	President	Worker representative	Local Level Employees Union
Mr Abdul Rahman Aasi	President	Worker representative	Public Sector Employees Federation of Pakistan
Mr Rasheed Khan	Authorities Labour Federation, Pakistan	Worker representative	Authorities Labour Federation, Pakistan
Mr David Boys	Deputy General Secretary	Worker representative	Public Services International
Mr Kannan Raman	Sub-regional Secretary for South Asia	Worker representative	Public Services International
Mr Godsen Mohandoss	Campaign Coordinator	Worker representative	Public Services International
Ms Daria Cibrario	Local and Regional Government Officer	Worker representative	Public Services International
Ms Sonia Maria Dias	Waste Specialist	Worker representative	Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and organising (WIEGO)
Mr Kabir Arora	Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and organising (WIEGO)	Worker representative	Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and organising (WIEGO)
Mr Rajeev Munankami	Multi-Country Programme Manager, Urban Sanitation Program	International Organisation	Netherlands Development Organisation
Ms Alette van Leur	Director of SECTOR	Secretariat	ILO-Geneva
Ms Dagmar Water	Director of Decent Work Team	Secretariat	ILO-New Delhi
Mr Satoshi Sasaki	Deputy Director of Decent Work Team	Secretariat	ILO-New Delhi

Mr Oliver Liang	Sector Specialist	Secretariat	ILO-Geneva
Mr Carlos R. Carrión-Crespo	Sector Specialist	Secretariat	ILO-Geneva
Mr David Kapya	Sector Specialist	Secretariat	ILO-Geneva
Mr Taher Mohammad	Sector Coordinator	Secretariat	ILO-Geneva
Mr Sultan Ahmmed	Facilitator	Secretariat	ILO-New Delhi
Mr Ravindra Peiris	Facilitator	Secretariat	ILO-New Delhi
Mr Shahabuddin Khan	Facilitator	Secretariat	ILO-New Delhi
Ms Divya Verma	Facilitator	Secretariat	ILO-New Delhi
Mr Balasingham Skanthakumar	Facilitator	Secretariat	ILO-New Delhi
Mr Asmi Musthafa	Facilitator	Secretariat	ILO-New Delhi
Mr Sujan Jojju	Facilitator	Secretariat	ILO-New Delhi
Mr Razi Mujtaba Haider	Facilitator	Secretariat	ILO-New Delhi
Tsuyoshi Kawakami	Occupational Safety and Health Specialist	Secretariat	ILO-New Delhi
Insaf Nizam	Specialist, Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work	Secretariat	ILO-New Delhi