

SKILL GAP IN SANITATION SECTOR: CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Synthesis Document: Skilling in Sanitation is the Key to building a sustainable ecosystem

India Sanitation Coalition, IRC and Taru Leading Edge recently organized the third 'Insights' dialogue to understand the significance of skilling workers across the sanitation value chain



SANITATION as a sector lacks a holistic perspective on skill development. There is a dire need to build momentum around creating a broader understanding of critical issues. A single-handed approach will not propel it forward and gathering a 360-degree perspective is the need of the hour. In order to do this effectively, all conversation and efforts around sanitation need to start with the basics. At the onset, it would be to understand and evaluate the significance of skilling in this space and alongside look at other issues like public awareness & demand for skilled sanitarians, the need and efficacy of certification in this sector and also simultaneously gauge the number and ability of trained professionals who can deliver superior services.

DIALOGUE ON SKILLING IN SANITATION SPACE

India Sanitation Coalition, IRC and Taru Leading Edge recently organized the third 'Insights' session on 27 February 2017 in Delhi, as part of the WASH Dialogue Partnership forum. "We talk about skills, what is it? Who is it we want to train? There is a need to go beyond masons, quality of toilets and also understand the significance of skilling workers across the sanitation value chain" says one of the panelists, Manish Kumar, CEO of the National Development Skills Council. Ravi Varanasi from Kohler, Naina Lal Kidwai from the India Sanitation Coalition were the panelists among many others.

In this session, the panel of members along with the participants deliberated on the current skill gap in the sanitation sector. The discussion focused on identifying



key skills required specifically for sanitation and not just mason training, which is typically the standard norm when referring to skill development in the sanitation space.

The panel of members also recognized the need to build a sustainable sanitation ecosystem that is inclusive of varied disciplines like engineers, social workers, planners and communication professionals to meet the growing demand of this sector. The panel also evaluated academic & training courses and found that there needs to be tremendous improvements in training for efficient skill development. The participants of this dialogue discussed the many issues that plague the space and prioritized the key thrust areas vital for skill development that would eventually create organized sanitation markets.

SETTING THE BASELINE TO DEFINE SKILLING IN THE SANITATION SPACE

In the present scenario, there is no clear understanding or definition of 'skills' in the sanitation sector. The National Development Skills Council (NSDC) defines skill as that which directly facilitates employment. It may be a good place to start, however for the sanitation space, it needs further elaborated. Before one frames a definition, it requires a deep understanding of the different rural and urban sanitation sectorial needs, the existing skill gaps and also determining the type of skills that would help bridge the divide. For instance, with rural sanitation, the challenges are around Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) and Social Engineering when compared with urban sanitation where the need is more towards service-based solutions, hard-core engineering and infrastructure development. To address this gap effectively, an institutionalized training system needs to be created both at the state and district level. The aim of this training should be to build labour capacities along

each step of the value chain, improve efficiency and help broaden the work spectrum of communicators/ social engineers, masons, plumbers as well as sanitation officials and other related professionals.

Off late, entrepreneurship with innovative business models has emerged as another focus area in the sanitation skilling space. Entrepreneurship not only generates employment and profitability, but it also helps in creating an efficient service delivery system for public services. Promoting entrepreneurship, however, needs an enabling environment that is well supported by inclusive financing options, linkages with banks, and partnerships with Municipal Corporations along with the private sector.

The sanitation sector has several entrepreneurship models that can be used as a reference point. One of the popular profit-making models is from Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu where every person is paid for using toilets¹. Another interesting skills initiative is from Kohler, which has established a plumbing academy² to train plumbers in delivering round the clock services. It innovatively uses mobile services to train the trainer through voice bytes. Singapore has devised yet another innovative skilling experiment, where private sector entities are encouraged to pay a cess for skill development³, which gets reimbursed when a skilled person gets a job. In support of micro enterprises, NSDC has recently launched an initiative, the Nirvana Fund⁴, created in partnership with the private sector to finance new entrepreneurial initiatives.

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There are several path-breaking examples of entrepreneurship model and it is absolutely vital to document national and global initiatives to augment the sanitation skilling process and showcase the practice all across India.

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Note

#1: <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/07/07/india.toilets/>

#2: <http://www.snsf.org/recent-highlights/616-snsf-foundation-gurgaon-hosted-an-interactive-session-for-the-students-of-plumbing-course-undergoing-training-at-the-kohler-plumbing-academy-aug-17-2016.aspx>

#3: <https://sdl.ssg.gov.sg/>

#4: <https://www.nsdcindia.org/nirvana-skilled>

PROFESSIONALS IN SANITATION – DO WE HAVE ENOUGH TO SERVE THE NEED?

For a sustainable sanitation value chain, an efficient delivery system that comprises of adequate numbers of trained planners, sanitary inspectors and engineers are required to plan, implement and monitor district-level sanitation programmes. However, there are no official estimates for the number of professionals needed in the sanitation sector. Based on a research done by Kohler, the study estimated that there is a gap of around three lakh certified plumbers, apart from mechanical engineers, statisticians, chemists and biologists. The key reason for this gap is because sanitation is currently not seen as a career option.

There are no certified courses available in India and the government has shown little interest to create posts for sanitation professionals. To promote sanitation skilling, different state governments can take steps to set up training institutes across the country. For example, the Government of Tamil Nadu has created positions; specified recruitment rules when employing sanitation specialists and also conducts regular training activities. The different departments (urban and rural) within the government machinery need to ascertain the requirements for sanitary professionals in their jurisdictions (ULBs and districts). They should also clearly define the goals for each type of professional that handle different tasks across the sanitation value chain.

CERTIFICATION AND DEMAND CREATION FOR QUALITY SERVICES

The need for certification across sanitation verticals like construction and plumbing has emerged as a key focus area in order to create demand for qualified

professionals. To facilitate this, NSDC can play a big role in ensuring a certification process for masons and plumbers. Apart from that, technical institutions can take initiatives of developing professional courses in the sanitation space. Kohler's partnership with the Association of International Project Management Officers (AIPMO) for certification of trained plumbers, that provides better employment opportunities, both in India and abroad can be their inspiration.



Manish Kumar | Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer, NSDC India

A sustained effort towards building awareness about the significance of certification and continually creating a demand for such degrees will help to fortify the skilling process. Currently, sanitation jobs are undertaken either based on caste or by communities that are socially or financially marginalised. Initiatives should be taken to eradicate caste-based practices and encourage mainstream communities to pursue this as a career option. This requires a tectonic shift in perspective supported by





a proper selection mechanism to add credibility and transparency to the entire process.

ADVOCACY AGENDA AND THE WAY FORWARD

Stakeholders have identified the following key areas for advocacy:

SECTOR ADVOCACY AND DIALOGUE with the government for creating jobs, initiating degree/diploma courses (adding modules for sanitation in existing courses) and encouraging certifications. Incentivizing individuals who take up sanitation as a career option, for example- highlighting higher minimum wages for sanitation professionals can make the sector attractive for the workforce. Other focus areas include creating sanitation standards within the different allied sectors and ensuring regular training of personnel like municipal officers for efficient delivery of improved services.

SANITATION A RELEVANT SUB-SECTOR

India lacks institution based skilling and scores the least, 2% when compared to Korea (96%), Japan (80%), Germany (75%), UK (68%) and China (40%) in terms of skilled workforce⁵. In the case of sanitation,

structured skill development or professionalization is all the more neglected. There is a need for advocacy in making sanitation a sub sector in the relevant sector councils. NSDC, which has 40 sector skill councils, can provide the necessary support and assistance.

STANDARDIZATION AND CERTIFICATION

Develop training materials to reflect sanitation needs. Customize current materials and seek assistance from the sector skill council to certify the curriculum, for subsequent pan-India implementation in future.

BUSINESS MODEL MAPPING

Documenting sustainable business models specific to different states to be used as motivational tools

AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS FOR CREATING DEMAND

Create awareness among the public about the importance of engaging skilled professionals. The consumer should be able to notice the difference in expertise between a skilled and an unskilled worker, thereby increasing the demand for certified professionals.

The training for workers engaged directly in the sanitation space should focus on providing technology driven solutions as opposed to conventional manual methods.



The participants of this dialogue were of the view that the above-mentioned challenges can be addressed through active engagement and partnership between the government, the private sector and the development agencies. An enabling environment for sanitation skills development in the country can be created by leveraging specific expertise and resources across all the stakeholders.



Source:
#5: <http://www.dailypioneer.com/avenues/only-2-of-indian-workforce-is-skilled.html>

For more information on the “Insights” knowledge series visit the India Sanitation Coalition [website](#).

This document is a product of the Insights Series; developed by IRC, India Sanitation Coalition and TARU Leading Edge.

For further information, please contact:

Vandana Nath, India Sanitation Coalition, vandana.nath@fcci.com | Shipra Saxena, India Sanitation Coalition, shipra.saxena@fcci.com | Ruchika Shiva, IRC, ruchika@ircwash.org | Manu Prakash, TARU, mprakash@taru.co.in