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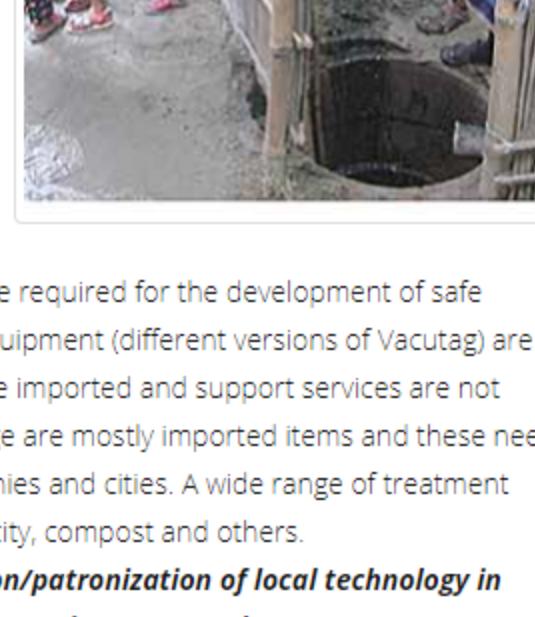DONATE

Human Sludge: National Framework where to focus

Uttam Kumar Saha
April 4th, 2015

Bangladesh has achieved tremendous successes to achieve Open Defecation Free (ODF) status. The WHO/UNICEF-JMP, 2012 joint report says currently only 4% of the population openly defecate. The most important factors of this success were the development and implementation of a National Sanitation Strategy and WASH Sector Development Plan with shared coordinated and functional partnership of all State and Non State agencies including Government, Investor, Civil Society Organization, Research and Academic institutes. Media and community lead approaches to design, deliver projects and programmes.

However the *environmental sustainability of this achievement is at stake* because of promotion of single onsite sanitation technology, mostly pit latrines which now extremely require frequent de-sludging services. In the past large scale sanitation projects hardly considered the safe management aspects of human sludge. Very recently a few attempts have been initiated but there is a need to form an institutional and regulatory framework for coordinated development. The Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperative of Government of Bangladesh has recently formed a consultation workshop and drafted guidelines for the facilitation of district/city/local level workshops.

Key issues for a faecal sludge management (FSM) framework

- **Integrated and Coordinated Approach**: Sustainable Sludge Management Systems need to consider whole service and value chains including containment for temporary storage, collection, transportation and treatment of sludge. The system need to consider stakeholders including utility company, municipalities, private sector, NGOs, research institutes, community organisations of service users and media. Different aspects i.e environmental, social, technical, financial and institutional are also very important. *For this the framework should pay attention to integrated and inclusive approach.*

- **Technology Choices**: Equipment, vehicles and civil infrastructures are required for the development of safe management of sludge. Currently a very select range of mechanical equipment (different versions of Vacutag) are manufactured locally but important accessories (i.e pumps/motors) are imported and support services are not locally available. Similarly, desludging trucks for transportation of sludge are mostly imported items and these need good investment which is beyond the affordability of the utility companies and cities. A wide range of treatment technologies are available to treat the sludge and produce gas, electricity, compost and others. *We appeal to the committee to pay policy attention to the invention/patronization of local technology in consideration of local context which needs less energy, protects the environment and can generate green employment.*

- **Pro poor business approach for protection of informal groups**: Hundreds of pit emptiers are currently involved in the business of faecal sludge. When any users need this service, pit emptiers with their limited and traditional equipment and facilities provide this important service with a minimal service fee and lead their lives with this tiny income. The proposed FSM framework should design a pro poor business approach to protect and formalise the participation of these groups as formal private groups with city authorities and utility companies to deliver improved FSM services.

- **Concessional tariff for disadvantaged service users**: FSM services are required for a wide range of users including individuals and institutional with different socio economic conditions. Emptying services are frequently needed for the urban poor who use shared/community/public toilets who can less afford to buy improved services. For this the proposed service tariff should take care of the concessional/discounted service fee for slum dwellers.

- **Standardization and quality control**: The framework should strongly set the standard for containment, equipment for sludge collection and transportation and technologies for sludge treatment and should highlight the necessity of monitoring and supervision capacity of State Agencies to ensure the standard for customers satisfaction and environmental sustainability.

- **Advance action research**: The framework should keep space for continuous research and development by State Agencies and their Development partners to explore appropriate technology packages, community participation, national awareness raising and market led business modelling.

- **Knowledge management**: The framework should encourage the creation of new or strengthening of existing networks (i.e Sanitation Secretariat and/or National Forum for Water and Sanitation/Urban Knowledge Hub) for knowledge and learning exchanges from good practices and failures to build on.

Last but not least, the framework should recommend the design of national action plans and guidelines for different contexts (mega cities with utility companies/WASA, big and small cities and small towns without WASA, urban/growth centers and rural areas) with milestones and a follow up mechanism to deliver faecal sludge management projects and programmes for the sustainable sanitation.

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   April 8th, 2015 at 5:42 pm

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