



# OVERVIEW OF SANITATION WORKERS PROGRAMME IN TRICHY

*June 2020*





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## Abbreviations

<b>BMGF</b>	Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
<b>CWIS</b>	City-wide Inclusive Sanitation
<b>DSO</b>	De-sludging operators
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussions
<b>FSM</b>	Fecal Sludge Management
<b>GoTN</b>	Government of Tamil Nadu
<b>IIHS</b>	Indian Institute for Human Settlements
<b>MAWS</b>	Municipal Administration and Water Supply
<b>NNP</b>	Narasimhanaicken-palayam
<b>PPE</b>	Personal protective equipment
<b>PDI</b>	People's Development Initiative
<b>PNP</b>	Periyanaicken-palayam
<b>SHG</b>	Self- help Groups
<b>STP</b>	Sludge Treatment Plant
<b>TCC</b>	Trichy City Corporation
<b>TD</b>	Tetanus and Diphtheria
<b>TNUSSP</b>	Tamil Nadu Urban Sanitation Support Programme
<b>TSU</b>	Technical Support Unit
<b>ULB</b>	Urban Local Body
<b>YS</b>	Youth for Sanitation
<b>YUGAA</b>	Youth Unit Growth Awareness Actions





# Overview of Sanitation Workers Programme in Trichy

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# 1. Overview of Sanitation Workers Programme in Trichy

## 1.1. Introduction

The Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS) and its partners along with the Trichy City Corporation (TCC) have collaborated to improve the health, occupational safety and livelihoods of sanitation workers.

TNUSSP has identified and engaged with different types of sanitation workers employed in urban areas such as Urban Local Body (ULB)-managed workers, school toilet cleaners, public and community toilet cleaners, independent cleaners as daily wage workers, desludging truck operators and cleaners, privately managed solid waste workers, rag-pickers, and railway cleaners.

The initiatives undertaken integrate multiple social, engineering, and behavioural aspects that focus on improving the living and working conditions of this vulnerable section of society. This note provides an overview of the initiatives.

## 1.2. Tamil Nadu Urban Sanitation Support Programme

The Government of Tamil Nadu (GoTN) has been a pioneer in the sanitation sector by recognising the importance of full sanitation coverage as core to improved standards of public health. It has prioritised the full cycle of sanitation, including strengthening of septage management as an economical and sustainable complement to network-based sewerage systems. TNUSSP aids the Government of Tamil Nadu (GoTN) in scaling urban sanitation, especially, Fecal Sludge Management (FSM) solutions across the state.

Launched in 2015 with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), TNUSSP has been set up as a Technical Support Unit (TSU) within GoTN's Municipal Administration and Water Supply (MAWS) department. TNUSSP is working in two urban locations – Trichy city and town panchayats of Periyanaicken-Palayam (PNP) and Narasimhanaicken-Palayam (NNP) near Coimbatore – to test and demonstrate approaches, build credibility for innovations, and understand on-the-ground challenges by working with urban local bodies, private informal sector and diverse urban communities, including urban poor, women SHGs, and sanitation workers.

## 1.3. Trichy: City Wide Inclusive Sanitation

Trichy city has been selected by the BMGF as one of eight cities globally for a City Wide Inclusive Sanitation (CWIS) Programme. CWIS was initiated with the aim of mobilising stakeholders to embrace a radical shift in urban sanitation practices. It rests on four main pillars:

1. Prioritise the human right of citizens to sanitation—equitable and accessible for all.
2. Deliver safe management of human waste along the whole sanitation service chain, from the toilet to safe treatment and reuse.
3. Integrate sanitation in urban planning and renewal, providing livable and sanitary environments.
4. Commit to working in formal and informal partnerships to deliver CWIS.

In Trichy City, the CWIS Programme is working towards demonstrating improvements along the full cycle of sanitation through innovative solutions that deliver safe management of human waste. The Programme engages multiple stakeholders, with a focus on addressing the sanitation needs of the

urban poor, the vulnerable, and women and girls. This includes improving the living and working conditions of sanitation workers, as well as mainstreaming gender intentional sanitation in the City.

The Programme seeks to sustain interventions by institutionalising governance and accountability for delivering inclusive sanitation services. It involves strengthening operational mechanisms within Trichy City Corporation as well as fostering greater citizen engagement.

A key aim of the CWIS Programme is to develop Trichy as a knowledge hub for citywide and inclusive sanitation, by building partnerships with local institutions that disseminate knowledge and function as resource centres.

Guided by Trichy City Corporation, the Programme is being delivered by a consortium of partners (Gramalaya, PDI, YUGAA, Bharathidasan University and Hasiru Dala) led by IIHS.

# Profile of Sanitation Workers in Trichy

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## 2. Profile of Sanitation Workers in Trichy

Despite their importance in keeping systems running, sanitary workers have been under-appreciated and often invisibilised except when a need arises. The public recognise those who sweep the road or collect garbage as sanitary workers, but the extent of their jobs is much broader. At every step of the sanitation chain which comprises containment, emptying, transport and treatment, the sanitary worker plays a key role. There are different categories of sanitary workers working in and around Trichy.

- **De-sludging workers:** who de-sludge pipelines or septic tanks.
- Community and public toilet cleaners
- **STP workers:** who work in decanting stations and STPs.
- **Toilet cleaners in schools and offices:** who are part time or full-time workers cleaning toilets in government or non-government schools / offices.
- **Domestic workers:** who are toilet cleaners exclusively engaged for that purpose, and others who undertake odd jobs related to toilet cleaning and blockage removal.
- **Railway toilet cleaners:** who are workers engaged in cleaning toilets in railway carriages or those engaged in cleaning railway tracks.
- **Informal waste pickers:** who pick up paper, plastic, metal or any other recycling waste from the streets, black spots, informally from homes and landfills.
- **Workers in solid waste management:** who are engaged in door to door collection of waste and those engaged in composting the collected waste.
- Workers unblocking drains

### 2.1. Health and Safety

#### 2.1.1. Occupational Safety

The safety of de-sludging workers which includes physical injury, exposure to harmful gases, contact with fecal sludge and other issues during the de-sludging process, are key concerns. An occupational health and safety study was undertaken to identify these. The study identified a range of underlying issues for safety which included the lack of access to safe de-sludging tools, practice of non-standardised unsafe de-sludging processes, lack of necessary knowledge to handle emergencies, lack of access to appropriate PPE, and the absence of protocols for safe de-sludging. The study adopted the established hierarchy for safety controls pyramid which recommended the mitigation of hazards through elimination and substitution, prevention of hazards by including administrative and engineering controls, and protection against hazards by using personal protective equipment (PPE) (Druley, 2018).

Figure 2.1: DSO's workshop



Source: TNUSSP, 2020

In line with this methodology, the ongoing interventions to address the occupational safety issues for de-sludging workers include the following:

- i) identifying tools and equipment for safe desludging (eg. tools for removing septic tank blockages eliminating manual intervention);
- ii) developing safety and emergency protocols to ensure safe de-sludging;
- iii) identifying and field testing appropriate, accredited PPE;
- iv) making minor adaptations to existing PPE based on field testing to ensure usability;
- v) providing recommendations for customised first aid and emergency kits; and
- vi) conducting training sessions to capacitate workers on usage of PPE, safety tools, first aid kits and safety protocols.

### 2.1.2. Health Camps

The Trichy City Corporation (TCC) conducts health camps periodically across the slums exclusively for sanitation workers. The mandatory body check-up, counselling and awareness, and providing medical services and diagnostics are conducted monthly based on information

sent to the primary health centres mentioning the location in which the health camp needs to be conducted. Based on the circular, the respective health centre organises camps in specific locations. Qualified doctors are deputed to conduct the camps and medicines are provided free of cost to the patients.



Figure 2.2: Health camp conducted for sanitation workers



Source: TNUSSP, 2020

General health camps as well as specialised health camps may be conducted in upcoming months. The list of hospitals willing to conduct specialised camps have been prepared and submitted to the Chief Health Officer. Seventeen health camps have already been conducted, two of which were dedicated to sanitation workers. The team is currently exploring possibilities to find specialised doctors and private trust hospitals who are willing to conduct health camps.

### 2.1.3. De-addiction

Awareness camps to address alcoholism and addiction are planned across the 23 settlements, in addition to individual household counselling and treatment through government approved de-addiction centres. De-addiction centres for women as well as ways to provide protection against domestic violence is being explored.

## 2.2. Social Security and Welfare

### 2.2.1. Access to schemes

Information on welfare and security schemes such as old-age and widow pension, financial assistance for destitutes and the disabled has been gathered to help sanitation workers gain access to them. The potential beneficiaries also include waste pickers, who comprise the informal workforce and have no access to such schemes or monetary aid. Forming self-help groups will help them, especially women, to register for schemes under the Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women. The Youth for Sanitation members will be trained on these schemes as well the application process to help the beneficiaries.

A majority of sanitation workers do not have government ID cards, hence miss out on the benefits of these welfare schemes. TNUSSP is creating awareness among sanitation workers about the importance of enrolling with the welfare board in addition to helping them get ID cards. Efforts are underway to help those workers who are not on the payroll to enrol with the welfare board.

### 2.3. Alternative livelihoods

TNUSSP identified 15 beneficiaries among the non-contractual and informal sanitation workers to help them explore alternative livelihood opportunities through skill development and vocational training. Efforts are underway to connect with organisations that can impart training and create employment opportunities. Initial pilot tests are being conducted with training sessions focused on tailoring. Other vocational training programmes such as phenyl-making, soap-making, mobile phone repair, two-wheeler repair, and beautician training are underway. Assistance for job placements for nearly 230 beneficiaries are in progress.

Figure 2.3: CT caretaker who works also as a shopkeeper



Source: TNUSSP, 2020

Entrepreneurship development programmes are also being planned to widen their livelihood options. Since some beneficiaries tend to return to sanitation work due to lack of education, exposure and social stigma after completing the training, plans are afoot to provide training based on their aspirations and help them identify enterprises based on market demands. This approach helps to identify and grow entrepreneurial and leadership skills in line with the many opportunities available. It also reduces the need to depend on training and placements. Possibilities to help the beneficiaries secure loans to start or upgrade their enterprises are also being explored

## **2.4. Equal Pay**

Despite the gender anomalies that prevail in many occupations, equal wages for equal work has been a practise in the sanitation sector. To create even more awareness, sensitisation sessions for supervisors and advocacy meetings for de-sludging operators were conducted.

## **2.5. Sustainability and Scaling**

Youth for Sanitation (YS) Club is an informal body consisting of volunteers from among the youth in the sanitation workers settlement. It is a platform to enable these youth to get involved in the development of their residential area, with a particular emphasis on sanitation. The following are their responsibilities:

- protect the shared sanitation infrastructure;
- prevent open defecation in the neighbourhood;
- assist the sanitation workers to avail government welfare schemes;
- reinforce the use of PPE among sanitation workers; and
- sustain the initiatives enabled by the project after the programme reaches completion.

## **2.6. Awareness Generation**

There are three types of awareness programs that are being planned:

### **2.6.1. For the general public on:**

- the importance of sanitation workers and the dignity associated with their work;
- segregation and safe disposal of waste; and
- awareness creation regarding laws prohibiting manual scavenging.

### **2.6.2. In sanitation workers settlements on:**

- sanitary practices and sanitation chain;
- de-addiction; and
- legal related to the prohibition of manual scavenging prohibition and other welfare schemes.

### **2.6.3. For safety at work such as on:**

- the importance and usage of PPE; and
- protocols for workplace safety Challenges on occupational hazard and health issues.



A large, light green number '3' is centered on the page. The text 'COVID-19 Response' is overlaid on the middle of the number.

**COVID-19  
Response**



### 3. COVID-19 response

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of sanitation and sanitation workers. It is evident that more support and strengthening of their capacities is necessary.

Awareness material on COVID-19 was consolidated and presented in a pictorial form for sanitation workers so they could easily understand the content. This content was made available in video form through WhatsApp messages as well as textual formats. During the lockdown period, sanitation workers who had access to smartphones were sent videos with messages on symptoms, safety measures and ways to safeguard oneself from the virus. For sanitation workers without a smartphone the content was discussed over phone to help raise their awareness. On relaxation of the lockdown by the government, hard copies of the same were printed and one-on-one awareness sessions were conducted for informal workers.

The CWIS team delivered its first set of PPEs in Trichy in May 2020. The planning, procurement and distribution of the next batch is in progress. Currently, work is ongoing to facilitate the enrolment of sanitation workers with welfare boards, by identifying those who are not yet enrolled. With respect to livelihood loss mitigation, 91 sanitation workers received Rs. 1,500 as financial help through Samhita in Trichy, with another 400 workers to be reached soon. Fifty-one sanitation workers in Trichy who were without ration cards were supplied with ration for one month, in addition to being supported to procure their cards. Discussions with government officials on PPE budgeting, procurement and distribution is about to commence. Safety and hygiene awareness programmes on PPE usage as well as safe equipment in Solid Waste Management are ongoing.





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# Annexure

Annexure 1: Key Findings from Focus Group Discussions  
(FGDs) with sanitation workers

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A3



# Annexure 1: Key Findings from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with sanitation workers

IIHS, along with its partner PDI conducted a series of FGDs among sanitation workers and their families to study their living and working conditions, relationship patterns in the family and at their workplaces, and their perception on gender roles.

The survey revealed that stigma and social discrimination often forced them to conceal their professional identity. However, they did not want to leave the profession mostly due to job familiarity and lack of education.

The survey also found that nearly 80 per cent of the inhabitants lived in their own houses but did not have ownership of the land as it belonged to various government entities such as the corporation or railways.

Around one third of the households have piped water supply and the rest of them depend on public taps and water tanks. Most neighbourhoods seemed to have better access to transport facilities, barring a few where the residents said they walked at least 2 km to reach the bus stop.

It was also found that a majority of the men and some women sanitary workers depended on alcohol to cope with their working conditions. Constant exposure to toxic substances had an adverse impact on their health and many participants reported contracting skin infections, asthma and tuberculosis.

All the participants stated that the Trichy City Corporation (TCC) organises health camps in the neighbourhood twice a year. Besides, they have access to public health facilities as well as private physicians. Anganwadi centres under the Integrated Child Development Services scheme are also functioning in these areas.

Though the sanitary workers are entitled to benefits under the TN government's public distribution system, many seemed to be unaware of such welfare schemes.

Some of the participants belonging to the Scheduled Tribe community reported difficulty in obtaining caste identification certificates and other such documents as they have no proof to produce.

Since women constitute nearly 60 to 70 per cent of the workforce, no major gender-based discriminatory practices were reported. However, domestic violence seemed to be prevalent in most households, although the women were not forthcoming about it.

The survey revealed a generational shift, with the younger members willing to challenge the status quo. The children desire education and aspire for a career in other fields, instead of continuing in the line of their parents' work. However, they do not undermine the importance of sanitation workers or their services. Many of these neighbourhoods have a significant number of graduates and collegegoers, and many work in private organisations.

All the groups stated that their working hours were long, they did not take any leave and were sometimes forced to work on their days off. Often, they were assigned work in faraway wards. Poor remuneration and benefits forced them to take loans with high interest rates.

A majority of the sanitation workers were reluctant to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) during work despite being aware of its safety benefits. Resistance to PPEs seems to arise due to two major factors: inconsistent supply of PPEs – the corporation and contractors provide them only once in a year;

and misconceptions surrounding them – most sanitary workers believe PPEs prevent them from detecting toxic gases in septic tanks. The workers also complained that inadequate supply and substandard quality of sanitation tools such as *milaru* (sweeping stick used to clean roads), basins and blades, often forced them to spend out of their own pockets.

This is found to have caused significant dissatisfaction among the sanitation workers. The cost of the basic equipment is around Rs. 450, and the sanitation workers bear the expenses from their own pocket. They wish that the authorities would supply such supportive equipment as the need arises.

The focus group discussions helped in identifying key issues such as housing, community certificates, employment and skill training, access to basic amenities and financial resources, and neighbourhood improvements, which need to be addressed. (Source: TNUSSP, 2020)











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