

Protecting the health, safety, and dignity of sanitation workers in Tanzania

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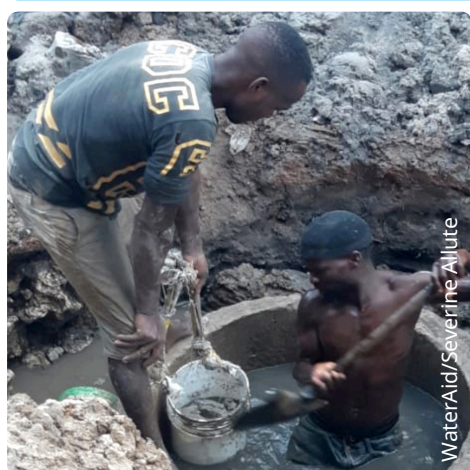
Sanitation workers provide services that are essential to public health, but often under terrible and hazardous working conditions. WaterAid Tanzania's assessment highlighted the challenges they face and put forward the following recommendations for the Government and sanitation stakeholders:

- Advocate for the recognition of sanitation workers.
- Develop the capacity of Local Government Authorities to register sanitation service providers.
- Develop a suitable model for the formalisation of sanitation worker groups.
- Promote innovative desludging equipment.
- Develop an appropriate economic support model for sanitation workers.
- Promote adherence to health and safety requirements.
- Develop national guidelines on safe sanitation services.

Introduction

Sanitation workers provide services that are essential to public health and to reaching the Sustainable Development Goal 6, but often do so at the cost of their dignity, safety, health, and living conditions. A key barrier to providing support for this profession is insufficient evidence on their working conditions.

WaterAid Tanzania commissioned an assessment with the aim to (i) identify occupational hazards associated to sanitation work and risk mitigation measures, (ii) understand the relevant institutional arrangement, regulation, and organizational structures and (iii) formulate recommendations and next steps to overcome identified challenges. The assessment included a literature review and nineteen interviews with sanitation workers, local governments, and regulatory authorities.



◀ A sanitation worker diving into the pit during toilet upgrading.



▲ Sanitation worker operating without any protective equipment in Dar es Salaam.

Three major types of sanitation workers

- Government-employed workers, operating wastewater systems or on-site sanitation systems in government institutions. They have comparatively good infrastructure, tools and personal protective equipment (PPE), facing moderate health and safety risks.
- Private service providers, providing motorised pit/tank emptying services to households. Despite the use of vacuum trucks, use of PPE is rare and unsafe practices are common. Exposure to occupational risks is significant, given profit maximisation by companies and limited enforcement of health and safety regulations.
- Informal workers, providing manual emptying services to households, particularly where inaccessible to trucks and to the most vulnerable households. Not registered or legally recognised, they use rudimentary tools and often work without any protection, facing discrimination and stigma, and risking physical injuries and even their lives.

Five main challenges

- Poor equipment and health and safety practices, leading to occupational hazards.
- Lack of financial security.
- Social stigma and discrimination from wider community and society.
- Informality and lack of recognition (informal workers).
- Poor enabling environment: limited guidance on sanitation services and weak enforcement.

Acknowledgements

This brief was written by Andrés Hueso González, Gloria Kafuria and Maya Igarashi Wood (WaterAid) and is based on the report “Assessment of the Health, Safety and Dignity of Sanitation Workers in Dar es Salaam, Dodoma and Arusha, Tanzania” by Njee, Allute, Joseph and Selemani. Available at: <https://washmatters.wateraid.org/publications/assessment-health-safety-dignity-sanitation-workers-tanzania>

“In communities we are regarded like people that have lost direction, they demoralise us but we have no other means. No one wants to look ridiculous.”

Testimony of an informal sanitation worker

Recommendations

We are calling for the support of the Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly, and Children, the Ministry of Water, the President’s Office Regional Administration and Local Government, and all stakeholders in the sanitation sector to:

- Advocate for the recognition and legalization of sanitation workers, both as groups and individuals.
- Promote adherence to health and safety requirements through better provision of PPE training, inspection, monitoring and legal enforcement.
- Review the model for the formalization of sanitation worker groups, including definitions, structures, registration, equipment and training.
- Strengthen the capacity of Local Government Authorities to fulfil its role of registering, regulating and monitoring sanitation service providers.
- Promote innovative desludging equipment and practices to minimise exposure and physical and health risks.
- Develop economic support mechanisms for sanitation workers, supporting low-income groups, incentivising safe practices and enhancing sustainability.
- Develop national guidelines on the safe provision of sanitation services considering hazards and challenges sanitation workers face.

