Technical note:
Area-wide programming for safely managed sanitation

Executive Summary

An estimated 564,000 children die from diarrhoeal diseases caused by unsafe sanitation annually. A lack of access to safe sanitation is also a major cause of cholera outbreaks. Despite this recognition, progress towards universal access to a safely managed sanitation service (SMSS) is alarmingly off track. It is estimated that combined efforts need to increase fivefold to achieve the 2030 target. Yet, service delivery projects are often fragmented, mismatched, development partner-led and donor-driven rather than consistent, comprehensive government-led programming designed to strengthen the system as a whole.

A shift is needed from a select number of communities or villages to universal access for everyone in a given administrative area, and from stopping open defecation towards durable and climate-resilient sanitation infrastructure, services and behaviours that support safely managed sanitation services (SMSS).

Area-wide sanitation (AWS) aims to accelerate progress by strengthening subnational government leadership, aligning stakeholders and resources, pushing for universal access to resilient, safely managed sanitation infrastructure and services and prioritizing equity and inclusion in an administrative area. This technical note presents ideas to encourage the necessary shift towards area-wide programming for SMSS at the subnational level.

The note focuses on five 'accelerators'. These are:

1. **governance, planning and coordination** – clearer roles and responsibilities coupled with commitments and actions to ensure safely managed service
2. **financing** – increasing and optimizing funding and loans to ensure the availability of the necessary resources to deliver affordable and resilient safely managed sanitation
3. **data and information** – the collection, analysis and use in planning and decision-making of data and information that track inputs, outputs, processes, and progress
4. **innovation** – supporting new smart practices that improve sanitation service delivery, including programme design, implementation methods and technologies
5. **capacity development** – a better-skilled workforce which improves service levels and increases job creation and retention in the sanitation sector.

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Local governance, planning and coordination

Area-wide plans, strategies and road maps should be developed or realigned towards achieving SMSS. At the subnational level there are opportunities for strengthening local government leadership and commitments; clarifying mandates and strengthening coordination mechanisms and regulatory frameworks; and considering byelaws covering the sanitation service chains. Governance, planning and coordination efforts need to be explicit, with robust policies and strategies to reach all, including those in challenging contexts, and people who are marginalized, ignored and deprioritized.

Finance

The discussion on financing has tended to be at national or household level, with a major gap in formulating strategies at subnational level and documenting what is needed and the actual resources required. Planning and budgeting processes tend to focus on financing the initial construction costs of hardware and omit the financing needed for operation and maintenance, planning processes, coordination, staffing and capacity development and monitoring, evaluation and learning.

Financing strategies and investment plans need to identify costs, in terms of money and time, in reaching all with SMSS. This includes those living in challenging contexts and vulnerable and marginalized households and the funding needed to respond to disruptions due to climate hazards.

Data and information

Data is rarely collected systematically to achieve area-wide SMSS and often collected for project related monitoring and reporting to donors or higher tiers of government. Achieving open defecation-free outcomes fits nicely within the remit of one ministry or department; SMSS cuts across more than one department. Monitoring needs to provide regular feedback on what is, and what is not, working, to allow for adaptation and course correction. Forums and spaces for decision-makers to engage with, and respond appropriately to the data being collected are needed.

Data needs to be disaggregated by both service level and markers of marginalization (i.e., gender, age, disability and health). Quantitative and qualitative data should be collected to assess if services are being delivered in an equitable and inclusive manner and to identify negative impacts such as exclusion, exploitation, coercion and corruption.

Innovation

Innovations need to work at scale, be adaptable to different contexts and flexible to be combined with different activities and interventions to ensure they are practical, inclusive, cost-effective and operate across an administrative area. Work is also needed to adapt and contextualize different innovations to different subnational areas which will have different service government structures, finance available, capacity and service levels. The unintended consequences of innovations on vulnerable populations should also be central to the introduction, testing and rolling out of innovations.

Capacity development

There are severe staff shortages in the groups of workers that are needed to deliver sanitation services in rural areas, across significant functions (oversight and support, construction and community mobilization and engagement, monitoring, regulation and enforcement, emptying and transportation, and operations and maintenance). Those providing capacity development opportunities need to take a coordinated approach within the administrative area, including both formal education and on-the-job training, and including training on identifying, targeting and working with marginalized and vulnerable groups.

Sufficient representation of women, young people and marginalized populations within government departments, the private sector, development partners and civil society organizations and community stakeholders is needed.

Cross cutting actions

In order to achieve resilient, equitable and inclusive outcomes the following broad steps are being proposed:

- developing comprehensive plans, led by subnational governments, covering entire administrative areas, rather than a set of communities
- ensuring the focus is on the long-term safe management of excreta
- costing plans and developing fundraising strategies
- monitoring and learning from data – documenting lessons learned, failures, and sharing examples of good programming
- considering gender equality and social inclusion throughout
- takes a pragmatic approach to the time needed.