



Water Programme Newsletter

June - August 2022

Dear Friend,

This summer has been very eventful and packed three months at CSE. The summer is also perhaps one of the hottest summers we have had in India and other parts of the world. The importance of water therefore in this time and age of climate change – has been driven home to all.

A State Level Advocacy event on Septage Management – Transitioning to City Wide Inclusive Sanitation (CWIS) was organised in Lucknow on the 29th of July, 2022. A status report was released in the presence of the Secretary, Department of Urban Development, Sh. Amrit Abhijat and Director, Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) and Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) Ms Neha Sharma and Director General, Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), Ms Sunita Narain. The report highlighted the last mile issues in the completion and operationalisation of 62 Faecal Sludge Treatment Plants (including Co Treatment Plants) coming up in Uttar Pradesh. The following recommendations were made and were accepted by the state government:

- **Last mile physical connectivity:** Most of the plants are in the completion stage. Timely release of final payments, following quality control checks, is required. All-weather road connectivity to FSTPs will ensure access for desludging trucks and tankers.
- **O&M cost recovery by private operators:** Financial viability of the FSTPs will be a challenge if the desludging fee charged from households is kept very high — as per the tender document, a desludging fee of Rs 2,500 is to be charged from a household. It discourages households from regular desludging.
- **Adequate quantity and frequency of sludge at treatment facility:** These systems are based on biological processes, and hence an adequate quantity of sludge as per the design and in a regular frequency is a must. An effective and affordable desludging plan is required for each town.
- **Dedicated septage management cell/nodal officer at the state level:** Such a cell/ officer, preferably in the Uttar Pradesh Department of Urban Development (DoUD), can help coordinate all work related to overseeing construction, quality control and quality assurance, O&M, policy rollout, planning and monitoring. This will go a long way in the sustainability of the work done and in the effective upscaling of septage management all across the 734 towns of UP.
- **Enabling policy, capacity development and behaviour change communication:** Desludging bye-laws are needed at the state and ULB levels. These bye-laws should promote regular desludging of septic tanks at a minimal fee, and ban indiscriminate dumping of sludge in the open. A capacity-building strategy should embed the current work priorities including designing, operation and maintenance (O&M) work, integrated wastewater and septage management (as per SBM 2.0), occupational health and safety, social and community behaviour change.
- **Avoid the indiscriminate combination of hybrid septage treatment chains in FSTPs:** The design of the septage treatment systems should be simplified into a few standard chains and offered for bidders to choose from. They can apply any technology but should avoid using an indiscriminate mix of mechanical and natural treatment technologies in one system/chain.

CSE did a **National Consultation on 1st August, on Emerging Water and Sanitation Priorities and the Learning collaterals of Water Sensitive Urban Design and Planning (WSUDP), Green Infrastructure (GI) and City Water Balance (CWB)**. The consultation provided valuable feedback on the focus and priority for research and capacity development work of CSE going forward from 2022. The national consultation was also followed up with a set of online webinars on WSUDP, GI and Ground Water Management courses.

Key highlights of the National Consultation and Webinars on Learning collaterals of WSUDP, GI and CWB:

- The evolution of urban water and wastewater management discourse faces a crisis of legitimacy, in its global south and India adaptation. It was all right till we used these global frameworks as advocacy tools for pushing the urban water conservation and wastewater management priorities in India.
- A techno-managerial approach to conceptualising, implementing and capacity building of the global Water Sensitive Urban Design and Planning (WSUDP) and Green Infrastructure (GI) approaches; misses out on the diversity and inequity context of urbanising India and the global south where these concepts need to be seen as part of a Grey-Green-Blue infrastructure development priority. Not Grey vs. Green and Blue infrastructure.
- The fallacy of the assumption is that cities of developing countries, with a majority of low-income settlements - can somehow straight away jump from grey infrastructure to green infrastructure creation. What is needed is a combination of green and grey urban infrastructure, to address both water conservation as well as water and wastewater service levels in low-income settlements.
- Big infrastructure projects: underground metro train tunnels, underground parking lots, damage the very aquifers we are trying to tap under WSUDP.

On 17th August, CSE released a **Compendium of Best Practices in Rural Water and Sanitation**, in the presence of the Secretary, Ministry of Jal Shakti, Ms Vinny Mahajan and the Director General, CSE, Ms Sunita Narain. The one-day workshop brought together presenters from different states of India, to share lessons on Rural Sanitation, Grey Water and Faecal Sludge Management experience and best practices in India.

Meta Issues raised in the Compendium were the following:

- **The nutrient and Water cycle mix up:** There is an urgent need to address the mix-up of the nutrient cycle contaminating the water cycle. Our growing quantities of faecal sludge are not being harvested for nutrient recovery but are being dumped in our rivers and water bodies. Leading to huge nutrient loss that should go to the agriculture sector. And creating a problem of treatment of polluted water.
- **Focus on the reuse of treated bio-solids and wastewater missing:** There is an urgent need to move beyond ODF and safe containment of faecal sludge in toilets, to the harvesting and treatment of faecal sludge, and its reuse in agriculture. If this is not addressed then all initiatives being undertaken today to set up Faecal Sludge Treatment Plants in rural areas will be undone. Treatment without reuse is not a solution to the problem. It adds to the problem.

Water–source sustainability

- India has moved from monitoring its rural water supply from villages to habitations. Focus has been on water supply provisioning and water quality. Slippages in rural drinking water coverage have been a norm since DDWS started monitoring the data. What is therefore urgently required is that each plan for water supply is linked with a plan for the sustainability of the water source.
- O&M of water supply systems at the village level – cannot be done by third-party service providers as in our big cities. This has to be managed locally by the VWSC and Panchayat. Behaviour change for this should be an important activity to be promoted by JJM. Jharkhand Women VWSCs

We look forward to strengthening our Urban Water capacity development work and learning content, with a reach out to ground-level experiences and research in the coming year.

Your suggestions and feedback are most welcome. Please do share them with us at: sww-aaeti@cseindia.org

Best regards,
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