The Power of Collaborative Action:
Journey of the National Faecal Sludge and Septage Management Alliance in India

By 2030, each and every Indian city safely manages its human waste.
State of Sanitation in India

India has seen an unprecedented rate of urbanization in the last few decades and it is estimated that at this rate, more than 50% of India’s population will live in cities by 2030. Currently, 45% of urban toilets are connected to on-site sanitation systems (OSS) which might also require human waste to be removed manually. Additionally, 70% of faecal waste in Indian cities remains untreated and is often discharged in the domestic environment, agriculture fields or in water bodies which is potentially harmful to overall public health and environment. It is also estimated that 1 truck carrying 5000 liters of faecal sludge and Septage carelessly dumped is roughly equal to 5000 people defecating in the open. Untreated sewage can also contribute towards diseases and conditions like diarrhea. Therefore, to ensure public health and well being, environmental protection and sanitation worker safety, the treatment of human waste through safe and effective means such as faecal sludge and Septage management is crucial.

What is Faecal Sludge and Septage Management (FSSM) & Why is it important?

Sanitation is considered synonymous with access to toilets, which, no doubt is an integral part, but not the complete solution for all issues and aspects related to sanitation. A large part of solving for sanitation involves thinking about how human waste is collected, transported, treated and reused after being flushed. In India, there is a unique challenge considering the prevalence of on-site sanitation systems.

Keeping the Indian context in mind, FSSM has proven to be a model which has the potential to tackle India’s sanitation challenge and can be easily scaled up across the country with adaptations as per local needs. FSSM takes a service-chain based approach, which comprises safe containment, conveyance, treatment, disposal/reuse of faecal waste.

Sanitation Value Chain

Containment > Emptying > Transport > Treatment > Reuse/Disposal

- **Containment**: Human waste is contained in an on-site system, possibly together with greywater. Waste is partially treated due to the time it is contained, and is known as faecal sludge or septage depending on the system used.
- **Emptying**: The system is emptied, typically by a desludging truck with a vacuum mechanism.
- **Transport**: Faecal sludge or septage is transported safely in a closed truck.
- **Treatment**: Faecal sludge or septage can be treated either at a Faecal Sludge Treatment Plant (FSTP), or co-treated with sewage at a Sewage Treatment Plant (STP).
- **Reuse/Disposal**: The treated waste can now be safely reused or disposed.

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1 Census Data, India. (2011)
2 Mills and Shah. Development Impact Bonds for Faecal Sludge Management: Opportunities for Innovation and Scale? Presentation by Social Finance and USAID
Journey of the NFSSM Alliance

The National Faecal Sludge and Septage Management (NFSSM) Alliance was formed in 2016 after recognizing the need for collaborative action, unified voice to inform national/state policies, and driving the discourse on FSSM nationally. With support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the NFSSM Alliance came together with the vision that by 2030, each and every Indian city (all 7900+) safely manages its human waste.

With this audacious vision in mind, the NFSSM Alliance brought together 35+ diverse organizations (NGOs, CSOs, Academic Institutions, Think Tanks etc.) working on Sanitation and its allied sectors from across the country. As a community of practice, the NFSSM Alliance has leveraged the strength of its collective network of partners into four critical areas - Inclusivity, Urban Local Body Strengthening, Innovations and Technology, and Communications through four dedicated Taskforces. Additionally, the Alliance is governed by the Steering Committee, which is a body of elected representatives from the Alliance that provides strategic direction to the Alliance priorities and vision. Lastly, as the backbone of the Alliance, Dasra works as the Secretariat by playing a crucial role in strengthening institutional structures of the Alliance, fostering collaboration among partner organizations and facilitating cohesive government engagement to influence relevant policies. Additionally, the Alliance also leads knowledge curation and insight-sharing to enable cross learning among sector experts, governments and other stakeholders.

In the last 6 years, the NFSSM Alliance has strengthened the foundation of India's urban sanitation sector, especially championing inclusive, safe and equitable sanitation approaches like faecal sludge management to ensure human health and dignity, and the health of urban ecosystems.


*Ministry of Urban Development
Engagement with National Government to work towards policy outcomes for FSSM

**Strengthening Govt. Relationships**
- Engaged with 10+ national government ministries and agencies to recommend policy additions on FSSM, spotlight government leaders who are champions of Inclusive Sanitation and to collaboratively generate knowledge for the sector.
- Scaling FSSM through a joint report published with NITI Aayog to be disseminated with 4000+ ULBs
- Informing State Policies by sharing recommendations to Haryana State Finance Commission on utilizing grants towards FSSM
- Engaging with the Odisha State Government to advocate for an Inclusive Sanitation Policy which was developed by the Alliance and is due to be integrated into the State’s Sanitation Policy

**Managing Ecosystem Partnerships**
- Increased engagement with key ecosystem players like multilaterals/ funders to synergize and streamline efforts for sustainable impact. The NFSSM Alliance has also been able to influence sector outcomes by providing expertise to key ecosystem players which aligned with their priorities on sanitation like ADB, USAID, World Bank)
- Provided sector expertise to inform and enable private sector participation in the sanitation ecosystem for better outcomes. Additionally, active engagements with government stakeholders to provide recommendations on improved private sector participation has been a key enabler. Lastly, the Alliance also supported an Industry Association -Sustainable Sanitation Industry Association (SSIA) for enhanced private sector action towards Inclusive sanitation outcomes

**Mainstreaming Inclusive Sanitation**
- Establishing the NFSSM Alliance as a thought leader in Sanitation by increasing visibility of Inclusive Sanitation and its impact, driving the sector’s narratives and taking the Alliance’s unified voice to key stakeholders
- Leveraging Communications to spotlight sector experts and marginalized communities, amplify the Alliance’s priority areas and enable cross learning
Over the last 5 years, the NFSSM Alliance has collectively worked towards Policy and Government Engagement for Safe Sanitation outcomes towards achieving SDG 6.

Engagement with National Government

Worked with the national government to draft the National Policy on Faecal Sludge and Septage Management (2017)—the first of its kind globally and inaugurated by Vice President of India, Shri Venkaiah Naidu.

Support Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs directly through Project Management Unit to provide technical assistance on safe sanitation, including focus on FSSM in Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0, Swachh Survekshan indicators etc. A ranking exercise which to assess areas for their levels of cleanliness.
Published joint report with NITI Aayog on leading best practices in FSSM through 27+ case studies in India, reaching 4000+ Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)

Engaged with 15th Finance Commission to empower ULBs and ensure inclusion of FSSM in sanitation grants to ULBs + increase focus on Wastewater Treatment in Union Budget 2021
A snapshot of the NFSSM Alliance’s Impact

10+
Ministries and Govt. Agencies engaged to further FSSM Agenda including CPHEEO: Central Public Health & Environmental Engineering Organisation, NMCG: National Mission for Clean Ganga and MoHUA

19+
States drafted specific guidelines as a result of National FSSM Policy passed by Alliance

35+
Knowledge Products and policy recommendations developed; disseminated to 400+ stakeholders

450+
Faecal Sludge Treatment Plants to be built; with 141k crore INR allocated towards FSSM

5000+
Instances of cross learning among 30+ partners in India

MoHUA: Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
NFSSM Alliance has established key focus areas as a collaborative to drive forward sector outcomes by informing policies, generating knowledge, enabling cross learning and building key narratives amongst external stakeholders to further the Inclusive Sanitation Agenda

1. Municipal Strengthening for Improved Urban Services
   - Engagement with elected representatives focused on Sanitation to ensure better outcomes. Additionally, implementing initiatives that will lead to better representation of community-level leadership in decision making positions
   - Knowledge documented used to inform recommendations to the 15th Finance Commission to prioritize FSSM in grants
   - Alliance is working towards empowering ULBs administratively and financially, leveraging State Finance Commissions for effective utilization of sanitation funds

2. Prioritizing Sanitation Workers’ Health & Safety
   - Mainstreaming PPEs in the emptying, conveyance and treatment part of the sanitation service chain
   - Emphasizes need for effective control measures to avoid occupational hazards and enable safe service delivery by codifying and amplifying best practices, developing policy recommendations
   - Alliance is working closely with local governments to inform policy on sanitation workers’ safety, rights, benefits, and capacity building

3. Mainstreaming Sanitation’s Role in Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation
   - Mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in WSH towards comprehensive recommendations on institutional, financial, M&E, Infrastructure and Communication aspects for DRR preparedness and mitigation; the recommendations formed a base for the Alliance’s recommendations to CPHEEO on inclusion of a DRR lens in SBM 2.0.
   - The Alliance is also nurturing WSH-climate thought leadership to build political will to budget for disaster resilience and sanitation by codifying knowledge on the impact of climate change on sanitation, the impact of sanitation on environmental change and to inform national priorities along with building narratives linking sanitation and climate change
4. Fostering Innovation and Technology in Sanitation

- Focusing on step-by-step guides for practitioners to implement co-treatment in sewerage treatment plants with excess capacity along with addressing a lack of standard planning guidelines at city and state level
- Identifying challenges with respect to Greywater management, insanitary toilets and using this to gauge the scale of the problems, develop definitions, and then work collaboratively to develop solutions that can be integrated within FSSM

5. Furthering the agenda of Inclusive Sanitation by leveraging Communications

- Focusing on highlighting stories of individuals making a difference at the frontline across the sanitation value chain during the COVID-19 pandemic that led to a stronger consideration of the impact that local leaders can create on the lives of the most marginalized
- Visualizing Realities: Creating a ‘Bank of Community Voices’, highlighting and spotlighting communities and their role in Sanitation

Way Forward for the NFSSM Alliance

The NFSSM Alliance’s aspiration to strive for Inclusive Sanitation in every city in India requires a collaborative systems change approach. With this vision of driving change, the Alliance is prioritizing the following focus areas that will play a key role in contributing to this vision:

**Building Capacities of Local Leadership**
Considering Sanitation is a state-driven subject, it is crucial to strengthen local leadership for better outcomes. Orienting government leaders on inclusive sanitation and nurturing them to financially strengthen capacities within local, state and national governments for better first-mile service delivery for the most vulnerable communities.

**Enabling Dignified Livelihoods**
Enabling financial and occupational empowerment for workers through emphasis on sanitation workers’ safety, formalization, access to benefits and better representation in decision-making roles.

**Monitoring Services**
Codifying best practices on existing monitoring and ICT tools and creating awareness around the importance of utilizing them to help identify gaps in service delivery to the most vulnerable.

**Spotlighting the interlinkage between Climate Change and Sanitation**
Mainstreaming the interlinked nature of sanitation and climate change to explore solutions that contribute towards climate change mitigation while also adapting city sanitation to be disaster resilient.

**Codifying, Amplifying Knowledge on Inclusive Sanitation**
Generating knowledge to increase visibility of Inclusive Sanitation and mainstreaming human-centric narratives of the sector. Establishing the Alliance as a Thought Leader in the sector by codifying and amplifying knowledge along with spotlighting community voices to key external stakeholders.
NFSSM Alliance’s diverse organizations work across 14+ states and union territories to ensure safe and inclusive sanitation and accelerate implementation by providing technical support to governments in India.