Background Information
For “The Sanitation Ladder: Next Steps” Thematic Discussion

The Sanitation Ladder: Next Steps thematic discussion is the first discussion in SuSanA's newly launched Thematic Discussion Series. The discussion will run on the SuSanA Forum from 9-27 February 2015. The discussion will be led by three thematic experts, Patrick Bracken, Elisabeth Kvarnström, and Ricard Gine, who will provide sub-topics and leadership for each week of the discussion (3 weeks total). This document provides background information on the topic prior to the discussion.

Introduction

Originally, the sanitation ladder was a tool that sprang from participatory approaches such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation (PHAST). The tool aimed at providing community members with a visual guide to different sanitation options, providing information on a range of factors (e.g. cost, convenience, upgradeability etc.) in order to facilitate household and communal sanitation planning and decision making. These ladders are still in use in some areas. The ladders which developed in this way are centred on particular latrine/toilet technologies, appropriate to the given context, with advancement up the ladder generally accompanied by a more complex technology, theoretically providing improved service. Generally, a set of agreed criteria are used to identify suitable sanitation options. One of the better-known examples of these types of ladder is the Lao PDR Sanitation Ladder, with its 6 steps. These are:

1. Improved traditional practice
2. Conventional pit latrine
3. Lid or cover latrine
4. Ventilated Improved Pit Latrine
5. Pour flush latrine
6. Septic Tank Toilet
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While serving as a basis for communal decision-making, these ladders also tend to have an aspirational character. It was held that households or communities, once on the ladder, would seek to move up the ladder, according to their means. This remains one of the basic tenets in CLTS, although a recent study on the sustainability of the CLTS approach has called this assumption into question.

While the ladder concept was developed to help communities decide on the sanitation service appropriate to them, it has also been used in the opposite sense, to describe the state of existing sanitation services, and subsequently for monitoring sanitation systems. In 2008, the JMP (WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation) adopted a version of the sanitation ladder for monitoring purposes for progress towards the MDGs, based on technological definitions of unimproved, shared and improved sanitation technologies (see below for further details).

In 2011, the paper The Sanitation Ladder – a need for a revamp? by Kvarnström et al raised questions regarding the use of a technocentric sanitation ladder for monitoring or promoting sanitation systems in order to achieve global sanitation targets. Kvarnström's paper criticized the focus on a technology-based sanitation ladder, and proposed the use of a “functions-based” sanitation ladder. This call has to date been taken up by various organisations, however operationalization remains problematic.

The thematic discussion will further discuss this functional sanitation ladder, the goals behind it, what gaps are still present, and how to move ahead towards improving the monitoring of global sanitation goals. This document provides background information on the context to facilitate the ease of discussion.
JMP (Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation)

The JMP is the Joint Monitoring Programme for Water and Sanitation from World Health Organisation (WHO) and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) which currently monitors the progress of the water and sanitation Millennium Development Goals, as well as providing data on WASH across the globe.

More specifically, the JMP is currently the formal instrument to measure MDG 7, target C: “to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking-water and basic sanitation.”

JMP History: During the decade of international drinking water supply and sanitation, 1981-1990, the WHO (under UN mandate) provided progress reports on water supply and sanitation services. In 1990, the JMP was launched by WHO and UNICEF, to provide an improved system for country-level progress monitoring, which also could be used to manage and influence development. Since 2000, the JMP has specifically monitored the progress towards the MDG water and sanitation target. In 2009, the WHO and UNICEF formulated a JMP strategy to address new challenges to monitor drinking water and sanitation, particularly with 2015 approaching (the end of the MDG targets).

How does JMP monitor? The JMP uses country level data to monitor water and sanitation progress on a global level. The JMP focuses on monitoring the outcomes, so the “number of people using improved water supply and sanitation facilities”. The JMP works in coordination with, for example, the UN Water Global Annual Assessment (GLAAS) and the MDG Country Status Overviews (CSOs) to provide estimates.

Who do they collect and use data? The JMP gets its national population-based data from household surveys and censuses, which include, for example, Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS). The JMP also provides questionnaire tools to achieve consistent data and coordinated monitoring. The data is used towards providing estimates to measure progress of the MDG target for each country, which is explained in the next category on the sanitation ladder.

What are the priority areas of the JMP?

- maintaining the integrity of the JMP database and ensuring accurate global estimates;
- disseminating data to stakeholders;
- fulfilling JMP’s normative role in developing and validating target indicators;
- enhancing interaction between countries and JMP

“Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are the world's time-bound [from 2000 to 2015] and quantified targets for addressing extreme poverty in its many dimensions ...while promoting gender equality, education, and environmental sustainability. They are also basic human rights – the rights of each person on the planet to health, education, shelter, and security.”

http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals/
JMP and the Sanitation Ladder

In 2000, with the initiation of the MDGs, for the sanitation goals, the JMP monitored and reported on country level trends of ‘met target’, ‘on track’, ‘progress insufficient’ or ‘not on track’ towards “improved” sanitation facilities. **Improved sanitation facilities** included connection to a public sewer, connection to a septic system, pour-flush latrines, simple pit latrines and ventilated pit latrines. **Non-improved facilities** included public or shared latrines, open pit latrines and bucket latrines.

In 2008, the JMP began to present the figures of access to drinking-water and sanitation through the use of a “ladder” (see image beside for the sanitation ladder⁴). The ladder concept visually shows the movement from simpler sanitation solutions to more advanced ones by moving up a ladder.⁵ The ladder concept was chosen for several reasons, including: to highlight the complexity of the improved vs. unimproved categories of the JMP results rather than as a categorical pass/ fail; to show intermediary stages and recognize intermediate successes; and to decrease discrepancies between country figures.

On a 4-rung ladder from unimproved moving down to improved, the sanitation ladder thus represents Improved, Shared, Unimproved facilities, and open defecation, using the same targets of ‘met target’ etc. as mentioned above. For example, from the 2014 updated report:⁶

More information on the drinking water and sanitation ladders, and a larger image of the sanitation ladder above, can be found here: [www.wssinfo.org/definitions-methods/watsan-ladder/](http://www.wssinfo.org/definitions-methods/watsan-ladder/). Previous JMP reports can be found here: [http://www.wssinfo.org/documents/](http://www.wssinfo.org/documents/)

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⁴ [www.wssinfo.org/definitions-methods/watsan-ladder/](http://www.wssinfo.org/definitions-methods/watsan-ladder/)
Sanitation Ladder Criticisms and Next Steps

Before the JMP began using the sanitation ladder, a strong criticism was that the estimates and judgements on target-reaching were dichotomously based on categories of improved and unimproved. As the JMP addressed this major criticism by utilizing a 4-rung ladder, recent critiques of the sanitation ladder have included:

- Unimproved to improved continuum of categories focus on technology-based indicators
- The technology-based indicators do not include certain technologies such as urine-diverting toilets in the list of approved technologies
- Pre-defined technology-based indicators hampering innovation and creativity
- Losing sight of equity, reliability, quality, sustainability and affordability in order to meet targets
- Pass-fail judgements based on the entire nation rather than performance
- Lack of information of using facilities and hygiene practices

The Sanitation Ladder – a need for a revamp?

In 2011, the paper “The Sanitation Ladder – a need for a revamp?” (Kvarnström et al.) was published, which provided a critique (which is incorporated in the section above) on the JMP sanitation ladder. In addition, this paper provided an alternative option to the sanitation ladder of the JMP, a 7-rung functions-based sanitation ladder, from excreta containment to integrated resource management. See the full diagram of the proposed ladder on the next page.

The authors suggest that different functions can be added as you increase up the rungs of the ladder, which allows the opportunity for the inclusion of new technology and creativity in adapting services for the local context, as well as considering aspects beyond sanitation infrastructure. The goals of this functional sanitation ladder are outlined below in an excerpt from the abstract:

“The proposed ladder is intended as an inspiration for nations, and the JMP, to move towards a function-based rather than technology-based monitoring of sanitation progress... it is argued that such an approach would: (i) actually monitor the public good, which is desired from a sanitation system; (ii) stimulate donors, governments and municipalities to think beyond the provision of certain sanitation technologies; (iii) allow for local solutions to the sanitation problem to be developed; and (iv) spur innovation within the sector.”

The full paper can be found online here: http://forum.susana.org/media/kunena/attachments/2918/TheSanitationLadder_Paper.pdf
Post-2015

The target for reaching the MDGs is 2015. Since 2011, there has been a process to set and determine new goals. This “post-2015” process has led to the development of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which, as of January 2015, continues to be an ongoing process. The SDGs are being positioned to replace the MDGs at the end of 2015. The SDGs are currently a series of 17 goals with a total of 169 separate targets, which build upon the MDGs, adding goals aimed specifically at improving justice and prosperity. Of most obvious relevance to improving access to sanitation and hygiene services is Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

On 19.01.15, Goal 6 had eight identified targets:

1. by 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all
2. by 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all, and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations
3. by 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimising release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater, and increasing recycling and safe reuse by x% [to be decided] globally
4. by 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity, and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity
5. by 2030 implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate
6. by 2020 protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes
7. by 2030, expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water and sanitation related activities and programmes, including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies
8. support and strengthen the participation of local communities for improving water and sanitation management

In addition to fulfilling the targets of Goal 6, reaching these targets will make a considerable contribution to several of the other goals.

Several processes have taken place to move forward with developing the new water and sanitation targets for the SDG. For the JMP, WHO and UNICEF have organised a Strategic Advisory Group and post-2015 monitoring discussion platform on WASH to provide options on WASH goals, targets and indicators to share with UN Member States as they determine the SDGs and targets. A brief timeline of this process includes:

- May 2011, Berlin, Germany: a WASH stakeholder consultation was held to review, identify, and discuss the goals, and reach agreement on a roadmap
  - Five working groups were established from this consultation to further the work and develop options for global goals: Drinking-water; Sanitation (led by the World Bank Water and Sanitation Process); Hygiene; Equity and non-discrimination; Advocacy and communications (added later)
  - The political process was designated to be supported by the Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Water and Sanitation.
- December 2012, the Hague, the Netherlands: Second stakeholder meeting to discuss the outcomes of the working groups and develop options to be brought to the UN General Assembly in September 2013
- September 2013 to present: UN Member States will debate specific proposals for a new, post-2015 development framework and SDGs
- September 2014, New York: At a High-level side event, interim results of discussions, online engagement and research inputs were summarized in Delivering the Post-2015 Development Agenda and presented to UN Member States and the public.
- September 25-27, 2015, New York: The post-2015 development goals will be adopted at the Special Summit on Sustainable Development.

Further reading and information can be found in the Additional Links section below.
Relevant Forum Discussions

There have been a number of discussions on the Forum which have approached the topic of the sanitation ladder and context. The following list is of the most relevant discussions related to the topic:

1. **The Sanitation Ladder - developments**
   Discusses a summary of the history of the sanitation ladder as well as other sanitation ladders which exist, including the WASHCost Sanitation Ladder and LAO PDR Sanitation Ladder.

2. **Proposed indicators for post-2015 global sanitation monitoring?**
   Discussion of the possible indicators which could be used post-MDGs, as well as inputs from some of those involved in the working group processes.

3. **Join Huffington Post blog discussion; We Need to Rethink How We Measure 'Improved Sanitation'**
   A link is provided to the Huffington post article discussing the use of the term “improved sanitation”. One question, currently unanswered, is, in the relation to the revamped ladder, how to “qualify steps 1 to 4 and then steps 5 to 7”.

4. **Post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - Water and sanitation proposed as SDGs**
   Discussion of recent reports and dialogues on the SDG process in relation to water and sanitation, and discussion of the proposed sanitation and water targets, including a post mentioning some points not mentioned in the targets.

5. **New UN Report Dec 4 on the SDGs. Missing the central role of sanitation in development**
   Mention of recent report (Dec. 2014) on the SDGs and sustainable development theme which was released by the UN entitled “The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet” and criticized for limited mention of sanitation.

6. **Review of Sanitation Estimates of JMP**
   Discussion of criticisms on the accuracy of JMP numbers, and what different estimates consider as “improved” sanitation, and where to find official definitions of improved sanitation, and how to get involved in the post-2015 SDG process.

7. **Sanitation – The Numbers’ Game (when JMP figures are different from what exist on the ground)**
   Discussion of the accuracy of the data used for the JMP in the monitoring of sanitation.

8. **The draft SuSanA joint roadmap is now out for discussion!**

9. **Human Rights to Water and Sanitation, sdgs**
   Discussion of the inclusion of the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation in the new SDGs, and the language currently being used for the goals, particularly goal 6.
10. **Should shared sanitation services be considered 'improved' sanitation? (and MDG implications)**

Discussion of whether to include shared sanitation services as improved sanitation in global sanitation monitoring indicators.

11. **Sanitation Sustainability Indicators**

Discussion of PhD research on the sustainability performance of sanitation systems and JMP improved technologies in Zimbabwe and challenges of quantitative data.

Sanitation technology decision tools mentioned include: [Sustainability-based Sanitation Planning Tool](https://www.susana.org/gsearch) (SusTA) a tool designed to select the most sustainable system or the context; [Technology Applicability Framework (TAF)](https://www.susana.org/gsearch) not only technical but also other sustainability related indicators. And in another related thread on the forum, see also the [Sanitation Decision Support Tool](https://www.susana.org/gsearch).

12. **Debate about effectiveness of CLTS, prompted by UNICEF official after Madagascar book launch**

Discussion (within the discussion of CLTS) of whether unsustainable pit latrines are an improvement and whether all non-OD options can be considered a move up the ladder. Discussion of involvement by communities and what is understood by the users themselves and the options and technologies.

The Forum search tool: [www.forum.susana.org/gsearch](https://www.forum.susana.org/gsearch) can be used for searching key words related to this topic to find other related discussions. There may also be relevant discussions in the category [Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), global sanitation indicators](https://www.susana.org/gsearch).

**Additional Links**

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- **JMP Report – Updated 2014**

- **JMP Strategy**

- **JMP Update**

- **Article “Global Monitoring of Water Supply and Sanitation: History, Methods and Future Challenges”**
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Sanitation Ladder

Article: The Sanitation Ladder – a need for a revamp?

Presentation on the article: The Sanitation Ladder – a need for a revamp?

Post-2015

Feb 2014 UN General Assembly Thematic Debate on WASH in the Post-2015 Development Agenda:

Post-2015 Resources and News

WaterAid’s post-2015 toolkit, for understanding and engaging with the post-2015 goal process

World We Want – post-2015 inclusive online dialogue:
http://www.worldwewant2015.org/sitemap

Bibliography


http://www.unwomen.org/~/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/58/ep11-isharay%20pdf.pdf

http://www.wssinfo.org/about-the-jmp

http://www.wssinfo.org/about-the-jmp/mission-objectives/

http://www.wssinfo.org/definitions-methods/
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The discussion is publicly visible for anyone to follow. To contribute to the discussion, it is open at any point during the discussion to anyone who is registered with SuSanA. If you are not yet registered with SuSanA, please register at www.susana.org/register.

This background paper has been prepared for the SuSanA Thematic Discussion Series by the following contributors:

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