



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*

Sanitation, health and hygiene in rural Tajikistan:

Towards the development of a national sanitation strategy

May 2022



*This document provides a summary of the full policy report: *Sanitation, health and hygiene in rural Tajikistan*, authored by Shukhrat Igamberdiyev, May 2022

The Tajikistan Water Supply and Sanitation (TajWSS) project is a Swiss government initiative, funded through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and implemented by Oxfam in Tajikistan in partnership with UNDP.



While data show an overall improvement in access to hygiene and sanitation in Tajikistan, the reality is not consistent with this trend, especially in the rural context. The trends fail to capture the 1) poor conditions of sanitation facilities (ageing and/or obsolete infrastructure), 2) poor and unregulated design of sanitation facilities, and 3) poor operation and maintenance (O&M) of sanitation facilities (such as septic tanks and latrines). The water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)-related health indicators show that the population of Tajikistan (both urban and rural) remains at high risk of water-related diseases with attributed mortality rates significantly higher than many other countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States region.

The present policy report suggests that improvements in sanitation and hygiene can accurately be assessed when ‘**quality**’ requirements are taken into account across the entire **sanitation value chain** (including quality control, containment, removal, treatment, disposal, O&M and hygiene promotion). As such, improving sanitation and hygiene conditions in rural Tajikistan is no easy task because of the overwhelming number of issues that need to be addressed. This policy report, therefore, highlights the following **three distinct and systemic problems** that need to be overcome to enable better sanitation services: 1) poor understanding of the ‘sanitation’ concept (at policy, regulatory and service levels), 2) lack of a comprehensive strategy for rural sanitation interventions, and 3) inconclusive sanitation models implemented in rural areas. Despite the reported benefits and progress made to date, the **sustainability outcomes of sanitation interventions are at large inconclusive**. The development interventions so far can be characterised by various **phases of test-and-trial exercises** (pilot demonstrations).

Unfortunately, to date the financing/funding support to rural sanitation and hygiene has been mostly provided by development partner projects (International NGOs and development partner agencies), while government support has not extended beyond district centres (maintaining centralised sewerage systems). Sanitation facilities in rural communities, in particular at household level, are treated as a private affair with intricate links to government regulations. Rural sanitation facilities remain highly unregulated and therefore lack guidance for construction design, and generally application of norms and standards across the sanitation value chain.

The sanitation models implemented so far are yet to address the economic side of sanitation and hygiene – with affordability at its core. Without due progress on affordability, it is difficult to ensure quality shifts to an improved sanitation and health situation in rural Tajikistan. This policy report, therefore, suggests that effective and long-term sustainable sanitation improvements in rural areas require initial financial support from both the government and development partners. For that purpose, development partners’ more recent interventions, over several phases, have attempted to deal with the economic problem – a sanitation model that would be applicable in rural Tajikistan would have to be affordable and therefore cost effective. In doing so the interventions included:

- reducing the costs of sanitation products (the various materials required to construct a sanitation facility). This involved also stimulating local production of sanitation products that are cheaper than those imported, i.e. a market-based approach (sanitation marketing)
- applying community-based/decentralised sanitation solutions (master-plan approach, decentralised wastewater treatment systems)
- supporting local businesses to provide services of removal, treatment and disposal of wastes
- introducing alternative technologies for 'improved latrines' (squat and ventilated improved pit (VIP) latrines, flush toilets, dry toilets, EcoSan, Eco-Vapour and SaTo pans)
- taking approaches to safely reuse human waste.

This policy report stresses that formulating a vision for rural sanitation and hygiene must be based, first and foremost, on evolving rural experience. In particular, **the outcomes from the application of various sanitation models in rural communities must inform the discussions at national level to develop a comprehensive strategy.** The following summary of challenges, opportunities and policy recommendations must be at the core of the discussions.

Challenges and opportunities

Despite achievements by a growing number of rural schemes, there are still **challenges** that can be summarised as follows:

- Development projects have introduced various sanitation models in rural Tajikistan to improve sanitation and hygiene. While experiences from these interventions have evolved with considerable improvements, they are still characterised by a test-and-trial phase. Some models (such as Eco-San toilets) have reportedly proven effective in improving on-site sanitation and hygiene conditions; however, their experience in addressing the remaining stages of a value chain approach (waste management) remains inconclusive.
- Costs related to developing improved sanitation facilities and systems remain too high for rural communities, and attempts to reduce the costs of services and products have not yet been successful. In particular, the burden of the costs involves the final stages of the value chain, namely removal, transportation, treatment and disposal of human waste. Availability of sanctioned and appropriate polygons (landfills) with any sort of treatment facility is a common development issue.
- Rural sanitation and hygiene remain unregulated which results in poor construction design and incompliance with norms and regulations. Service provision is voluntary and non-systemic; enforcement mechanisms lack institutional support.

Consequently, there are several **opportunities** that authorities, development partners and potential service providers will need to follow to improve sanitation and hygiene in rural Tajikistan:

- Outcomes from applied models must be duly published with all their shortcomings, lessons learned and successful experiences in order to launch discussions at national level (policy dialogue). Policy reform is a lengthy process that first requires a sufficient amount of evidence from the field.
- The sanitation market remains weak and needs to be developed to support potentially increasing demand. The sanitation marketing approach needs comprehensive support from development partners, and the government should provide incentives for the private sector to promote WASH products and provide services under concessional requirements.
- The reuse of safely treated human waste is perceived as an economic product in some parts of Tajikistan, but replication requires appropriate education, promotion and support. Government service providers have the right potential to launch such an initiative.

Policy recommendations

Despite sanitation having been part of many development projects in the past 20 years, it has become the focus of the policy agenda only recently with endorsement of noted laws and by-laws, norms and standards and relevant national programmes. In spite of this, those policies have only covered wastewater and sewerage aspects – not a prevalent part of sanitation in rural Tajikistan. In effect, national laws and programmes have not yet duly responded to the needs of rural sanitation and hygiene.

National authorities do recognise the shortcomings in the governance systems, and adequate funding from state budget and due support from development partners are crucial to achieve notable progress in quality improvements in sanitation and hygiene. The following policy recommendations derive from the above discussion:

- National authorities in close cooperation with development partners must closely monitor sanitation interventions in rural Tajikistan. Experiences must be well documented, with successful examples, lessons learned and shortcomings. Then discussions at national level must be launched and unresolved issues must be dealt with as feasible (economics, policy, legislation, norms and standards).
- Based on the rural experience, national authorities in consultation with development partners must identify a set of suitable context-based sanitation models for different regions and areas of Tajikistan, and consequently develop a comprehensive strategy and programme for replication.
- The limited public (state) funding that is currently available must be used to establish some of the models using the sanitation value chain approach at community level, once experiences demonstrate maturity for replication.
- Comprehensive state support mechanisms need to be developed that consider provision of pro-poor subsidies (direct and indirect), tax alleviation schemes and access to preferential financing, among other aspects.
- Since developing and maintaining waste polygons (landfills) is a sophisticated, complex and costly undertaking, the government has the potential to promote public–private partnerships with more government responsibility for safe treatment and disposal, while private service providers would handle safe removal, transportation and reuse. The necessary business plans will need to be developed with support from development partners and with consideration of successful experiences worldwide.
- The development of a comprehensive sanitation development strategy must be based foremost on findings from demonstration activities in rural Tajikistan.
- Policy and regulatory framework improvement must take place incrementally, and on a case-by-case basis once experiences from rural settings point towards an applicable model.

From immediate to long-term perspectives, the policy agenda should promote the following priorities suggested by the presently agreed Sanitation Development Plan:

Immediate and medium-term priorities (up to 5 years)

- Complete the institutional and regulatory reforms needed to implement the sanitation programme, such as clarifying the responsibilities of the government and the specific agency that would facilitate the development of the sanitation sector; approve the relevant legal documents under preparation.
- Revise the existing norms and standards and, where necessary, determine alternative structural norms and standards, strengthen sanitation governance and regulatory frameworks, and endorse the ownership and managerial responsibility of community-based schemes.
- Intensify WASH education campaigns, capacity building, behaviour change and sanitation marketing activities, including the development of the supply chain.
- Develop financing tools for on-site sanitation, including revolving funds and targeted subsidy schemes.
- Define with development partners a joint and coordinated sanitation sector support programme.
- Launch rural sanitation pilot projects focusing on safe sludge management, decentralised wastewater treatment, greywater systems and adequate school sanitation (including handwashing facilities) that could be tested in one region of the country before being translated into a national sanitation strategy and expanded nationwide.

Long-term priorities (until 2030 and beyond)

- Develop a comprehensive **national sanitation strategy**, based on findings from the demonstration activities.
- Secure the appropriate financing and fund channelling.
- Replicate the successful rural sanitation pilot projects.
- Ensure proper monitoring and evaluation of sanitation activities.
- Enforce the new sanitation and environmental regulations.

Tajikistan Water Supply & Sanitation Project (Phase III)

Executive Summary



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