(150)

An Analysis of the Septage Management Situation in Sri Lanka

Fernando S.*, Drechsel P., Jayathilake N., Semasinghe C.

International water management institute, Sri Lanka
**s.c.fernando@cgiar.org*

Abstract

For Sri Lanka and for many low-income and developing countries septage is not a new addition to urban waste streams. With respect to Sri Lanka less than 3% of the country has access to a sewer network, while the rest of the country relies on on-site sanitation systems such as pit latrines, septic tanks, etc. Nevertheless, these on-site sanitation systems get filled with waste matter from time to time and, as such, needs to be emptied periodically. It is this situation that resulted in the initiation of urban waste stream. However, it needs to be handled with extreme care, as unmanaged septage could result in creating an adverse impact on water resources and human health (an area that has been hugely undermined). At present, septage management is at a neglected state and is one of the most neglected urban waste streams in the country.

The main objective of this research study is to explore the prevailing septage management situation and obtain all sector-related information. To explore the situation, a nationwide field study was conducted covering 41 local authorities (LAs), which constitutes 12% of the total LAs in the country. The present situation was assessed through semi-structured interviews, regulatory reviews and by exploring the challenges faced by the sector, in general, during field visits. The septage management situation in this paper is discussed based on the findings of a cross-country survey.

It was found that 59% of the LA in Sri Lanka has access to a septic truck collection service. From the LAs having access to septic truck services, 6% have the service provided by the private sector and 11% have the service provided from both the private and public sector. It was estimated that only 10% of the produced septage in the country is collected via septic trucks and that the rest (90%) is probably managed manually and/or deposited locally creating an adverse impact on the environment. Informal septage reuse in agriculture is estimated to be around 18% of the collected total amount, and its application has been done not subject to health and safety guidelines. Though the situation is alarming and at an acute stage, only 41% of the LAs (which is the responsible authority) believes that septage management in the country needs to be improved, and only another 7% of the LAs believes in the need of any external assistance to overcome this problem in spite of the low resources available for such a course of action.

It was concluded that: (a) septage collection and treatment services in the country should be improved instantaneously; (b) the awareness among stakeholders and most importantly in the LAs to be improved; (c) resource recovery and reuse (RRR) interest in the informal sector to be restrained by having formal reuse initiatives in place; and (d) considering the recent increased interest shown by the private sector in servicing the industry, to have in place adequate regulatory provisions in relation to septage management.

*The term septage refers here to excreta or faecal sludge collected from onsite sanitation systems such as pit latrines, septic tanks, etc.

Keywords: septage, resource recovery and reuse, collection service