



DIGNITY FOR SEPTIC TANK EMPTIERS

ENSURING DECENT WORK CONDITIONS FOR ALL

PHOTOS: COURTESY

Today, the FSM Network in Bangladesh is organising the first national convention for septic tank and pit emptier, as this population group often faces social stigmatisation even while risking their own lives doing work for the community on a daily basis. Almost 100 septic tank and pit emptier will be brought together to share their life stories, and together with government and development officials come up with inclusive ways to improve their situation.

The progress to date on improving access to sanitation and reducing open defecation can be seriously undermined by failing to sustain the use of existing

toilets and the unsafe disposal of faecal sludge. Household sanitation in urban areas consists predominantly (80%) of on-site technologies, i.e. septic tanks and pits. These require regular emptying, but presently most of them are never emptied as they are directly connected to drains or open water bodies. The ones that are, are emptied manually by sweepers and not mechanically. As the urban population is increasing exponentially, there is a need for efficient and effective faecal sludge management (FSM) services. This can only be achieved through better organisation of the current services, and by ensuring improved occupational safety and health standards for the service providers.

The national 'Dignity for Septic Tank Emptiers' convention will be held at LGED Bhaban, Sher-e Bangla Nagar, Agargaon in Dhaka on 7 December 2016. It will be a day-long event, starting with an opening speech by the Honourable Kazi Reazul Hoque, Chairman Human Rights Commission, followed by speeches from septic tank and pit emptier and other special guests. Then issues related to septic tank emptying will be discussed along the lines of the four domains of Decent Work as defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO): Dignity, Equality, Fair Income, and Safe Working Conditions. Suggestions and recommendations will be

collected from septic tank and pit emptier and other stakeholders, after which the event will be concluded by a cultural programme.

About the FSM Network:

The Faecal Sludge Management Network (FSMN) is a common and collective platform for the sector actors to generate ideas, share views, influence policy and practice, and raise a collective voice to meet the challenges in the sanitation sector. The Network engages WASH stakeholders across civil society, the private sector, corporations, academia, the government, and other relevant taskforces, networks, and associations.

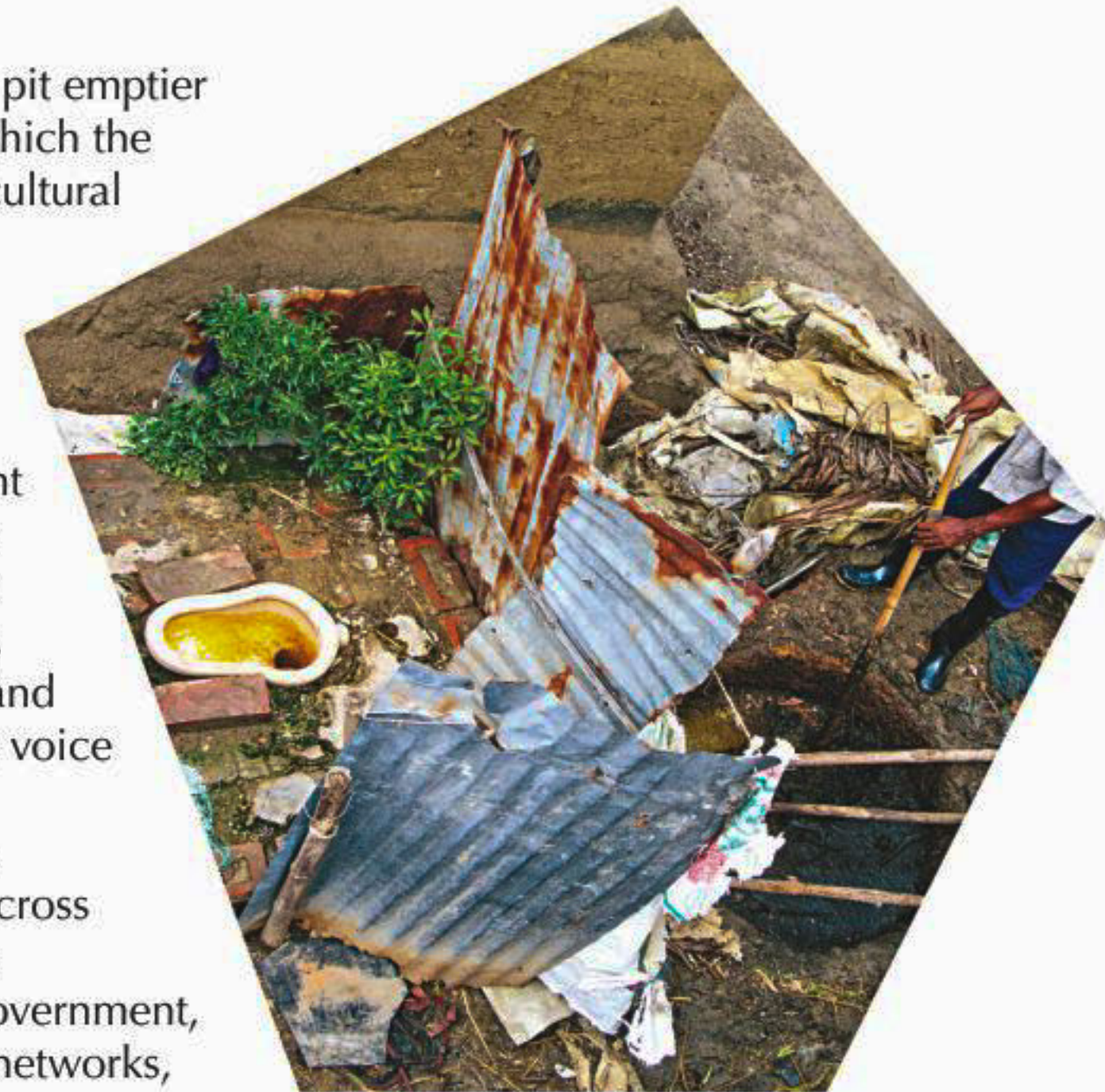
About SNV:

SNV is an international, not-for-profit development organisation working in over 30 countries across Asia, Africa and Latin America. In Bangladesh, SNV is implementing the project "Demonstration of pro-poor market-based solutions for faecal sludge management in urban centers of Southern Bangladesh" in Khulna City Corporation, Kushtia and Jhenaidah Paurashava. The objective is to

work together with local authorities on sustainable city-wide and inclusive faecal sludge management services, leading to improved health and well-being of the urban population and the environment.

Media enquiries:

SNV Netherlands Development Organisation
Ms. Samara Mortada,
Advocacy & Communications Advisor
E-mail: smortada@snvworld.org



HERITAGE

Do you know that our country, which has a predominant Muslim population, owns a number of significant age-old structures built by the Catholic and Augustinian Missionaries and Portuguese traders? It is believed that Christianity arrived in Bangladesh during the 16th century holding the hands of the Portuguese traders and Catholic missionaries who built churches in various parts of the country including Dhaka. At present Bangladesh has a Christian population of around one million where the Roman Catholics are around 40 percent and the different Protestant denominations namely Baptists, Anglicans, Lutheran, Pentecostals and Presbyterians, etc. are 60 percent of the total number. The country has a number of churches; interestingly many of these churches are the oldest standing buildings of their respective areas, first opened to worshippers more than three to four centuries ago.

On the last Sunday evening before Christmas, we opted to visit a church in Laxmibazar, old Dhaka, that has been high on our list of things to see in this part of the city. Located next to

century painting and statues that we have here."

The church might not enthrall you with gigantic domes and an ornate ceiling, but it has a modest, yet beautiful architecture of French-Gothic style. The church building, adjacent to the missionary school by the same name, has seven entrances on the west, each one crowned by Gothic arches and coloured glass skylights. The porch on the north-west corner carries a square belfry originally fitted with a clock and it has an attractive grotto by its side with



AN EVENING IN LAXMIBAZAR CHURCH

FAYEKA ZABEEN SIDDIQUA

PHOTOS: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

the old Municipality office at Laxmibazar and adjacent to Saint Gregory's High School, this three-storeyed church was built in different stages. Historians believe the original church of the order of the Holy Cross was erected in 1897 probably by a Belgian Father Gregory the Great. The original building collapsed in an earthquake that ravaged Bengal, leaving only the eastern half of this building standing. Afterwards, Bishop Hurth rebuilt the church converting the large back veranda into the main prayer hall.

An all decked up Christmas tree, intricate wreaths, fresh flowers, twinkling fairy lights – as we step into the hall – immediately transports us to a celebratory mood of love and unity. We found a large number of devotees are waiting and hoping in prayerful expectation for the coming of Jesus, as Father James Shyamol Gomez celebrates the mass.

"This used to be Archbishop's convent before he moved to Kakrail church. Now the second floor is used by three of the parish priests as our convent and office. We have a prayer hall and a chapel serving the Christian population in the surrounding areas, as well as an important heritage site. We are undergoing preservation efforts and trying to preserve the few 18th

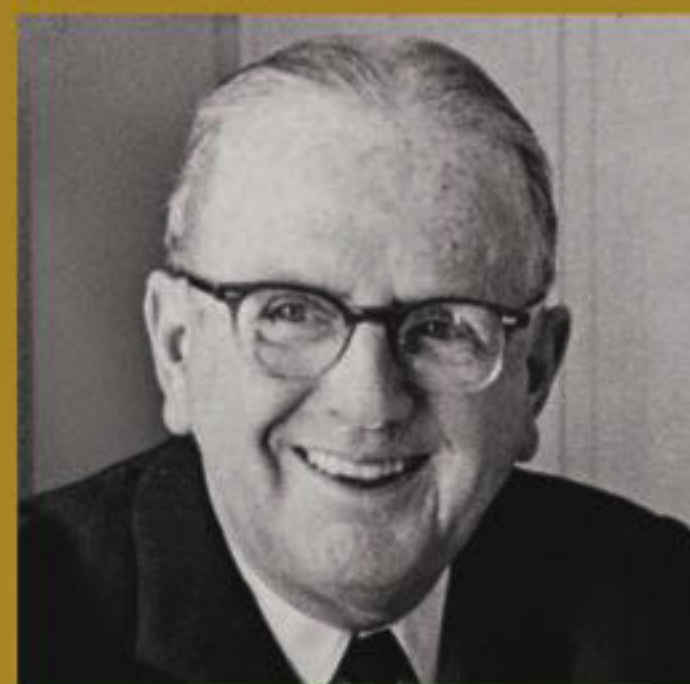
Virgin Mary's sculpture. "When the church was established, besides working as a hub for religious preaching, it also emphasized on the need of having quality education. The Fathers working here founded two schools- St. Gregory's High School and St. Francis Xavier's Girls High School."

As a part of this year's Christmas celebration, Holy Cross Church has started preparing in advance. The Christian community in Dhaka stays united wherever they live, be it Laxmibazar or Kafrul, which have specific community clubs and organisations. "The clubs in these localities start preparing for Christmas in advance. Holy hymns and devotional songs, which focus on the life story of Jesus and his re-arrival on Earth, are arranged during the advent before Christmas. We have three choirs run mostly by our school's teachers and students."



One of the most enduring Christmas traditions is the midnight mass. On every Christmas Eve, we start our services with the singing of carols by the church choir, after which the Christmas mass is held. Christians are dressed in their best, and after the service, they mill around the church, chatting and socialising. Because many people cannot attend the midnight mass, we are holding it earlier, at around 8," Father James continues.

As we were about to leave Father James invited us to come back again to join him for the Christmas celebration. "Every religion has certain set of truth to live by; they all speak of



"CHRISTMAS WAVES A MAGIC WAND OVER THIS WORLD, AND BEHOLD, EVERYTHING IS SOFTER AND MORE BEAUTIFUL."

NORMAN VINCENT PEALE
American minister and author



"CHRISTMAS ISN'T A SEASON. IT'S A FEELING."

EDNA FERBER
American novelist, short story writer and playwright



"CHRISTMAS IS JOY, RELIGIOUS JOY, AN INNER JOY OF LIGHT AND PEACE."

POPE FRANCIS
266th and current Pope of the Roman Catholic Church