



**SANITATION**  
FOR MILLIONS



Curtain call for Caretakers:  
**the Hausmeister concept**

# Curtain call for Caretakers: the Hausmeister concept

## Taking care of toilet maintenance

Universal access to adequate sanitation is one of the under-appreciated achievements of many societies – and unfortunately remains a distant dream for millions. Even in countries where there is no home without a toilet, public institutions tend to have facilities that are part of the unseen fabric of civilisation. Familiar signs guide the way to public conveniences that are usually open to patrons and passers-by, free of charge. For most people, the experience of a quick visit only lingers if the facilities were particularly unpleasant. Signs of previous use (or misuse), leaking taps and broken flush or door handles are frowned upon: the unglamorous job of a caretaker is noticed mainly when it is not performed well.

Some groups of people, wherever they live in the world, are vulnerable to falling through the gaps of society, and hence public service provision. For the displaced and homeless, for example, a well-maintained public toilet may be more than an occasional stop gap. The solution to their sanitation problem is not as simple as matching existing ‘free’ toilets with people in need of one. Public toilets must be cleaned, and occasionally repaired, or suffer their own version of the tragedy of the commons. In order to create a safe and sustainable sanitation solution, the overlooked and undervalued caretaker moves to centre stage.

The ‘Hausmeister’ (German for caretaker) concept for facility management and maintenance, which has been implemented by the GIZ programme ‘Sanitation for Millions’ in Jordan, is built around this idea. Sanitation for Millions is a multi-donor programme implemented by GIZ that seeks to extend access to adequate and equitable sanitation for all, especially for disadvantaged groups. Its aim is for small yet effective changes to improve sanitation, making best use of facilities that already exist, whilst addressing the core issues of responsibility and funding.

### Sanitation for Millions

Jordan is one of three countries *Sanitation for Millions* has been working in since its inception in 2016 (next to Pakistan and Uganda). The programme is supported by the *German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)* as lead donor, the *Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation* (whose funds are earmarked for Uganda and Jordan), the UK-based solidarity fund *Water Unite* and the *Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade*.

*Sanitation for Millions* works along four lines of intervention:

- Fostering access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene in public institutions
- Improving the sanitation and hygiene situation at household level
- Developing capacity of sanitation service providers
- Monitoring and evaluation as well as financing to work sustainably towards transformational change.

By the end of its current term (2022), *Sanitation for Millions* is hoping to reach out to further countries where the need on the ground meets the willingness to act.

The Hausmeister concept was originally conceived by GIZ's WASH+ programme for schools in Jordan to address the problem of toilets in poor condition being one of the invisible barriers to inclusive education. With school security guards' brief extended to hands-on 'facility management', neglected toilet blocks were soon beginning to make the grade. Better sanitation for school-age children is an excellent start, but what about the adults? Sanitation for Millions was quick to note that Jordan boasts some 7,000 mosques that are, if not regularly attended, at least open to all. Another small leap of imagination envisaged their part-time workforce of muezzins (the men appointed to lead the call to prayer) as the next generation of Hausmeisters. This note presents the Hausmeister concept as an example of best practice for operation and maintenance (O&M) of sanitation facilities in public places of worship in Jordan.

### The call of the mosque: enter the Hausmeister

Jordan has reached high levels of household sanitation provision, though infrastructure is increasingly under pressure: long renowned for its generosity towards refugees, Jordan is hosting an estimated 1.4 million of its Syrian neighbours displaced by the ongoing crisis. Extremely scarce water resources must now be shared amongst a population that has risen to more than 10 million. Public sanitation facilities are in high demand, with many people turning to washrooms at mosques – not only to answer the call to prayer, but also the call of nature at other times.

Especially where mosques are conveniently located near markets or bus stations, a frequent flow of visitors has a noticeable impact on general wear and tear as well as consumables, money for which is in short supply. Whilst mosques fall under the authority of the Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places (MoA), in practice, their upkeep is funded through donations. Running water, soap and toilet paper, but also cleaning materials and replacement parts are dependent on the means and generosity of the local faith community. The ministry's budget covers personnel costs, but rarely stretches to meeting O&M responsibilities, such as repairs. With no cash to hire external help, spare capacity would have to be found within the system, amongst existing formal employees (or, as the case may be, volunteers).

An obvious candidate would be the mosque's own muezzin. Usually the position is filled with men who have retired from another job (chosen for their clear voices rather than necessarily their DIY skills). With the right approach, these faithful servants of the mosque and their community might be persuaded and equipped to play a part in sanitation as well as salvation.

### A concept built around a toolbox

The basic premise of the Hausmeister concept lies in institutionalising preventative maintenance at the local, regional and national level. Whilst at the mosque muezzins need bespoke training and a basic set of tools to carry out small repairs, technical backstopping and oversight are required from regional directorates and the central ministry. Sanitation for Millions customised its capacity development and practical support to the different roles and responsibilities on all three levels.

*Training for muezzins:* A training manual for plumbing works in mosques was developed in close cooperation with the MoA's Construction and Maintenance department to serve as a practical reference for the budding Hausmeisters (see box below for download links). Muezzins were invited to attend a five-day practical training course, a series of which were offered in nine Awqaf directorates in six of the twelve Jordanian governorates (see map below).



Pictures © GIZ / Philipp Breu 2019

To date, 607 muezzins have successfully completed training and can now competently install and repair pipes and fittings, fixtures, and drains. Each trainee received a toolbox containing a starter set of spare parts, as well as a copy of the manual. A total of 1,300 copies have been made available to the ministry for future distribution.

Taking care of toilets – especially those used by other people – is not generally a job that attracts large numbers of volunteers. Whilst muezzins are official government employees through the ministry, the intricacies of Jordanian labour law do not allow for a quick extension of duties to include facility management and maintenance. Finding alternative incentives to motivate staff to take on additional, unpaid duties was a key consideration of the project. Thought and effort was put into the official awards ceremonies during which participants of the training sessions received their Hausmeister certificates to demonstrate the recognition and appreciation of their new commitment. The event was covered in the local media, and a representative of the Ministry of Water and Irrigation acknowledged their contribution to the Jordanian water and sanitation challenges. In addition, the plumbing training opens an opportunity for the participants to supplement their income: they can make use of their new skills by offering their services as qualified plumbers in their local communities.



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Sanitation for Millions, in close cooperation with MoA, has been facilitating and funding the training as well as the toolboxes. Jordanian GIZ engineers developed the training manual and participated in the training sessions.

The training manual is available in Arabic from <https://www.susana.org/en/knowledge-hub/resources-and-publications/library/details/3342>

*Training of trainers:* Muezzins on average serve for ten years, and a third of the first trainees had retired within the year. Noting the high turnover of muezzins as a risk to the sustainability of the concept, the training needed to be anchored within MoA. To ensure continuity, 27 members of the ministry’s technical staff have been trained as trainers. With qualified in-house trainers ready to go, MoA will be delivering training to a further 300 muezzins during the next programme phase. An additional 300 toolboxes have been purchased in readiness. Training will be extended within the ministry and scaled up to include directorates that are currently not part of the scheme.

*Mobile Maintenance Units at directorate level:* However skilled with a pipe wrench, every new Hausmeister-muezzins will encounter problems that are too big to handle for just a man with a toolbox. In this situation, assistance can be requested from the regional Awqaf directorate, who will send out a mobile maintenance unit (MMU). Nine such units, each manned by two technicians and a driver, can now be called upon to help with any medium-sized maintenance and repair works required in the sanitary facilities of a mosque. An MMU typically visits up to four mosques per day. Whilst MoA has taken note of age-related risks and nominated younger ministry staff as technicians for the MMU teams, not every directorate has maintenance staff as yet.



Sanitation for Millions, has purchased and handed over three MMUs, adding to the existing small fleet of six provided by GIZ's 'Water in Religion'

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*Coordinating and monitoring at ministry level:* An overall monitoring strategy and coordination of all O&M activities – including ensuring the availability of tools and materials, as well as organising further trainings – is currently under development. Ultimately, plans are for a dedicated Facility Maintenance and Management Unit within MoA to oversee and scale up the implementation of the Hausmeister concept. Budget allocation procedures need to be strengthened. For the time being, Sanitation for Millions is assisting with monitoring and coordinating MMU maintenance activities, mapping the wider O&M situation in the field, and evaluating the cost-effectiveness of interventions.

### The Hausmeister checklist: key points

Recruiting and training muezzins as Hausmeisters has proven a simple and effective way of increasing the sustainability of public sanitation facilities. There are further positive benefits of securing good O&M: well-maintained facilities in the community help with increasing awareness about the need to conserve precious water and changing people's water use behaviours, especially in rural areas.

For the concept to work in practice, the following should be considered:

- , a trained professional on-site to deal with small-scale maintenance prevents O&M from escalating, leading to major cost savings.
- Competent and motivated local staff need the right tools and access to technical backstopping. The latter can be provided by mobile maintenance units equipped with plumbing and maintenance tools and materials.
- MMUs can be efficiently shared between different areas in the country. Logistics must be considered to ensure that they can be readily deployed: this includes their geographical distribution as well as more mundane aspects, such as parking spaces.
- Training must be tailor-made and carry some prestige. It should include training of trainers to become self-sustainable, and it must be complemented with capacity development activities for technical management at ministry and directorate/regional level.
- The impact will be maximised if micro-level interventions are complemented with systematic planning, coordination and monitoring at the macro (ministry) level. A dedicated and well-staffed administrative unit with responsibility for overseeing the concept, accountability for its assets, follow-up and reporting is highly recommended.

## The rise of the Hausmeisters – a successful O&M concept is looking to extend its reach

‘A stitch in time saves nine, or as the Arabic equivalent suggests “fixing the known is better than waiting for the unknown” – proverbs have long promoted the wisdom of preventative maintenance. With the Hausmeister concept Sanitation for Millions has applied this age-old insight to the ongoing sanitation challenge in Jordan. Muezzins have been added to the cast of players that help provide safe and sustainable sanitation in the community, taking some pressure off the water crisis.

The Hausmeister concept is already catching on in schools throughout the region (see box below), and it would lend itself to being transferred to other institutions and countries. *Sanitation for Millions* would like to invite interested parties to get in touch to discuss the potential applications for the next generation of – male or female – Hausmeisters working in educational and religious institutions.

Following on from the successes of the WASH+ programme for schools, GIZ is training more school guards to take on a facility manager role, both under Sanitation for Millions and the ‘Improved Learning Environment at public schools in host communities in Jordan’ (ILEPS) project. School toilets – seldom fondly remembered as sanctuaries of cleanliness – are buckling under the strain of double shift teaching that was introduced. A pragmatic facility management and maintenance concept is not just seeing to the ‘troublesome’ O&M side of sanitation, but contributed to a more positive school environment overall. More recently, the concept has been exported to Lebanon, where it forms an essential part of the ‘Sustainable Facility Management at Public Schools’ (SUFA) project.

Funded by



BILL & MELINDA  
GATES foundation



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**giz** Deutsche Gesellschaft  
für Internationale  
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

### Published by

Deutsche Gesellschaft für  
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

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### As at

July 2020

GIZ is responsible for the content of this publication.

### On behalf of

Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation  
and Development (BMZ)

### Division

Division 312 – Water, Urban Development, Mobility

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