

Review Article

Stabilization Pond System and Design Aspects in Wastewater Treatments: A Review

Suresh Aluvihara^{1, 2, *} , **Ferial Pestano-Gupta³** , **Abdul Wahab Hekmat⁴** , **Mustafa Ben Hkoma⁵** , **Mohammad Hamid Omar⁶** , **Jaafar Omar Baomar⁷** , **Al Rabaki Khaled Awadh⁸** 

¹Department of Chemical and Process Engineering, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

²Department of Construction Management, Kabul Polytechnic University, Kabul, Afghanistan

³Division of Natural Sciences, Berbice Campus, University of Guyana, Tain, Guyana

⁴Department of Academic Research Affairs, Paktia University, Gardez, Afghanistan

⁵Libyan Centre for Sustainable Development Research, Tripoli, Libya

⁶Department of Environmental and Water Resources Engineering, Kabul Polytechnic University, Kabul, Afghanistan

⁷Department of Marine Biology, Hadhramout University, Mukalla, Yemen

⁸Department of Environmental Sciences, Hadhramout University, Mukalla, Yemen

Abstract

Stabilization ponds are among the oldest, simplest, and most sustainable wastewater treatment technologies, vital for decentralized systems, rural communities, and developing regions where conventional high-tech solutions are not feasible. These large, shallow basins use natural biological and physical processes for organic matter degradation, nutrient removal, and pathogen inactivation. Treatment depends on sedimentation, anaerobic and aerobic decomposition, and a symbiotic algae-bacteria relationship. During daylight, algae produce oxygen via photosynthesis, supporting aerobic bacterial degradation and ammonia nitrification, while bacteria provide CO₂ and nutrients for algal growth. Solar UV radiation, natural die-off, and predation further inactivate pathogens. Systems are typically arranged in series for efficiency as anaerobic ponds in deep, high organic loading, for preliminary decomposition and solids removal, facultative ponds with intermediate depth, the main treatment unit with both aerobic (upper) and anaerobic (lower) zones for bulk BOD reduction and maturation ponds with shallow, low loading, for effluent polishing and extensive pathogen removal. Design is critical for performance. Key parameters are hydraulic retention time (HRT), which governs treatment efficiency, organic loading rate (OLR), which controls degradation, pond depth, and series configuration. Climatic factors like temperature and sunlight strongly influence biological activity and must be accounted for. Inlet/outlet structures, liner sealing, and land availability are also essential. Advantages include very low capital and operational costs, minimal energy needs, resilience to hydraulic and organic shock loads, effective pathogen removal, and low requirement for skilled labor. Limitations are the large land area needed, potential odor from anaerobic or overloaded ponds, and effluent turbidity from algae that may require post-treatment to meet strict discharge standards. In conclusion, stabilization ponds remain a reliable, cost-effective, and environmentally sound cornerstone of sustainable wastewater management, with ongoing design improvements enhancing their role in global sanitation.

*Correspondence: Suresh Aluvihara (sureshaluvihare@gmail.com)

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Keywords

Anaerobic Pond, Facultative Pond, Maturation Pond, Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD), Fecal Bacteria

1. Introduction

Access to safe water and adequate sanitation remains a critical global challenge, with significant implications for public health, environmental integrity, and economic development. Rapid urbanization, industrial growth, and population increase have led to an escalating generation of domestic and industrial wastewater, demanding effective and sustainable treatment solutions. Conventional mechanical wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs), while highly efficient, often require significant capital investment, high operational costs, skilled labor, and substantial energy input, making them less feasible for many low-income countries and decentralized contexts [1, 2]. In response to these challenges, natural and semi-natural wastewater treatment systems have gained considerable attention. Among these, stabilization pond systems stand out as a robust, cost-effective, and environmentally friendly technology for treating various types of wastewater, including municipal, industrial, and agricultural effluents [3, 4]. Their simplicity of construction and operation, minimal energy requirements, and remarkable efficiency, particularly in pathogen removal, has made them a preferred choice in tropical and subtropical regions where land availability and climatic conditions are favorable [5, 6].

Stabilization ponds, also known as oxidation ponds or lagoon systems, are large, shallow earthen basins designed to

treat wastewater through a combination of physical, biological, and chemical processes driven primarily by natural phenomena such as sunlight, wind, and temperature [7, 8]. The underlying principle involves providing a sufficiently long retention time for microbial communities (bacteria, algae, protozoa, fungi) to break down organic matter and remove other pollutants [9].

Waste stabilization pond system is a natural wastewater treatment method and also that is much suitable and favorable method for both domestic and municipal waste water treatments due to the following advantages of such method.

- 1) Operational cost is very low for that and it is highly depending on the climatic conditions
- 2) Less number of maintenance processes
- 3) Higher efficiency of such system
- 4) Totally natural process
- 5) Higher sustainability
- 6) Only consume the direct solar energy
- 7) Do not need any mechanical or electrical equipment or any advanced skills to operate such equipments

But require large areas of lands sometimes may reusable or may not reusable again [3].

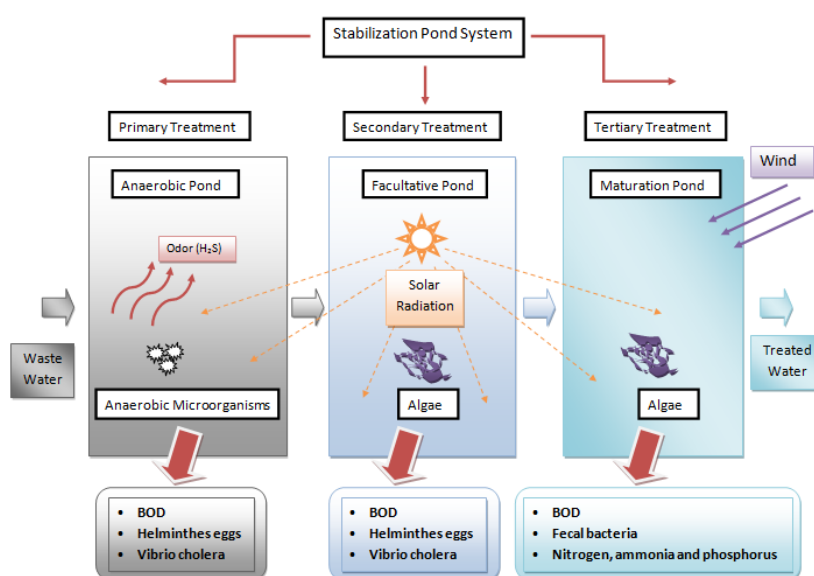


Figure 1. A systematic diagram of a typical stabilization pond system for wastewater treatments. The important thing that this method is quietly applicable for in the tropical and subtropical regions because of the sunlight and the sufficient temperature play a dominant role in such treatment process [5]. The entire stabilization pond system design is subdivided into a few of sub sections as given below.

1.1. Anaerobic Pond (Primary Treatment)

The basic functions of this anaerobic ponds are given in the below.

- 1) Removal of organic matter (BOD)
- 2) Removal of helminthes eggs
- 3) Removal of *Vibrio cholera*

This is the smallest unit in the system of stabilization ponds and its size depends on the parameter of "volumetric organic loading rate" which indicates the amount of organic matter present in such feed/wastewater [2]. That parameter also depends on the design temperature. The typical depth of the anaerobic pond is 2-5 m and at warm climates some higher efficiency can be obtained from such process [10]. Also there can be found some short term or long term environmental impacts from such ponds, such as odor due to hydrogen sulfide, although possible to mitigate [11].

- 4) Odor due to the hydrogen sulfide although possible to mitigate

1.2. Facultative Pond (Secondary Treatment)

The basic functions of this facultative ponds are given in the below.

- 1) Removal of organic matter (BOD)
- 2) Removal of helminthes eggs
- 3) Removal of *Vibrio cholera*

There can be categorized that facultative ponds into two different types as the primary facultative ponds and secondary facultative ponds [2]. The important parameter in the designing of such facultative ponds is the "surface organic loading" which also indicates the quantity of organic matter present in the feed/wastewater. The removal of organic matters is caused by the active algal population [12]. The depth of the pond is about 1-2 m and the maintenance of the algal population in sufficient percentage is much important in this pond system.

1.3. Maturation Pond (Tertiary Treatment)

The basic functions of the maturation ponds are given in the below.

- 1) Removal of fecal bacteria
- 2) Small additional removal of BOD
- 3) Removal of nitrogen, ammonia and phosphorus

Maturation ponds are shallower ponds when compared with other types of ponds and usually the depth is about 1-1.5 m [13]. As the main mechanism of fecal bacterial and viral decay happens by the activity of algae with photo-oxidation, it tends to produce the treated water to the tertiary unit or final disposal [14, 15].

This review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of stabilization pond systems, encompassing their fundamental principles, detailed design aspects, operational considerations, and performance capabilities. It will critically examine the dif-

ferent types of ponds, key design parameters, their effectiveness in pollutant removal, and the associated advantages and disadvantages. Furthermore, the paper will explore contemporary developments and future directions for these vital wastewater treatment technologies.

2. Principles of Stabilization Pond Systems

The effectiveness of stabilization ponds stems from a complex interplay of physical, biological, and chemical processes that collectively achieve wastewater purification. These processes are largely driven by natural forces and facilitated by diverse microbial communities [9].

2.1. Biological Processes

2.1.1. Bacterial Decomposition

Heterotrophic bacteria are the primary agents responsible for the breakdown of organic matter (BOD/COD) in wastewater. In the presence of oxygen (aerobic conditions), these bacteria oxidize organic compounds into carbon dioxide, water, and new bacterial cells. Under anoxic or anaerobic conditions, different bacterial groups perform fermentation and anaerobic respiration, producing methane, carbon dioxide, and other reduced compounds [16].

2.1.2. Algal Photosynthesis

Algae play a crucial role in the aerobic zones of ponds, particularly in facultative and maturation ponds. Through photosynthesis, algae utilize sunlight, carbon dioxide (produced by bacterial respiration), and nutrients (nitrogen, phosphorus) to produce molecular oxygen and new algal biomass [12]. This photosynthetically produced oxygen is then utilized by aerobic bacteria for organic matter decomposition, establishing a symbiotic relationship between algae and bacteria [4].

2.1.3. Protozoa and Metazoa

Protozoa graze on bacteria, clarifying the effluent by reducing bacterial populations. Metazoa (e.g., rotifers, nematodes) also contribute to the food web and the overall biological balance within the pond system [17].

2.2. Physical Processes

2.2.1. Sedimentation

Heavier suspended solids, including settleable organic matter and some inorganic particles, settle down to the bottom of the pond under gravity. This forms a sludge layer where anaerobic decomposition occurs. Sedimentation is particularly significant in anaerobic and facultative ponds, contributing

substantially to initial BOD and SS removal [2].

2.2.2. Dilution and Stabilization

The large volume of water in the pond provides a dilution effect, reducing pollutant concentrations. The extended hydraulic retention time allows sufficient time for various biological and physical processes to occur, stabilizing the organic matter [8].

2.2.3. Solar Radiation (UV Disinfection)

Sunlight, particularly the ultraviolet (UV) component, penetrates the upper layers of the pond and acts as a natural disinfectant, inactivating a significant portion of pathogenic microorganisms [15]. This phenomenon is critical for pathogen removal in maturation ponds [14].

2.2.4. Temperature Effects

Temperature significantly influences the rates of biological reactions. Higher temperatures generally accelerate microbial activity and oxygen transfer, leading to more efficient organic matter degradation [18]. However, extremely high temperatures can also lead to oxygen depletion or inhibit certain microbial processes, while low temperatures severely limit treatment efficiency.

2.2.5. Wind Action

Wind helps mix the upper layers of the pond, promoting oxygen transfer from the atmosphere into the water and preventing thermal stratification. This aids in maintaining aerobic conditions in the surface layers [19].

2.3. Chemical Processes

2.3.1. pH Regulation

Photosynthetic activity of algae consumes CO₂, leading to an increase in pH during daylight hours, which can reach values of 9-10 [12]. This elevated pH can enhance ammonia stripping and contribute to disinfection [15]. During the night, bacterial respiration releases CO₂, lowering the pH.

2.3.2. Nutrient Cycling

Nitrogen is removed through various processes including ammonification, nitrification-denitrification (if anoxic zones exist), ammonia volatilization at high pH, and assimilation by algae and bacteria [19, 20]. Phosphorus is primarily removed

through assimilation by biomass (algae) and precipitation with metal ions (e.g., calcium, iron, aluminum) under appropriate pH conditions [21].

2.3.3. Heavy Metal Precipitation/Adsorption

Some heavy metals can be immobilized through precipitation as hydroxides or sulfides, or adsorbed onto suspended solids and biomass, subsequently settling into the sludge layer [22].

These interconnected processes ensure the effective breakdown of organic pollutants, reduction of suspended solids, and significant removal of pathogens, making stabilization ponds a highly effective and robust wastewater treatment solution.

3. Types of Stabilization Ponds

Stabilization pond systems are typically designed as a series of ponds, each optimized for specific treatment functions. The common configurations include anaerobic, facultative, and aerobic (maturation) ponds, often arranged in sequence to achieve progressive treatment [2].

3.1. Anaerobic Ponds (APs)

Anaerobic ponds are the first in a series, designed to receive raw, high-strength wastewater. They are deep (typically 2.5 to 5 m) to minimize oxygen penetration from the surface and maintain strictly anaerobic conditions [10].

3.1.1. Primary Function

High-rate removal of settleable solids and a significant portion of organic matter (BOD) through anaerobic decomposition happen at this stage, which reduces the organic load on subsequent ponds [2].

3.1.2. Processes

Anaerobic bacteria ferment complex organic compounds into simpler organic acids, alcohols, CO₂, and H₂. Methanogenic bacteria then convert these products into methane (CH₄) and carbon dioxide (CO₂). Settleable solids accumulate at the bottom, forming an active sludge layer.

3.1.3. Characteristics

These ponds are typically designed for volumetric organic loading rates (OLR) of 100-400 g BOD₅/m³. day, depending on temperature.

Table 1. Important characteristics of anaerobic ponds.

Characteristic	Reason
Deep	To exclude oxygen and conserve heat for anaerobic activity [10].

Characteristic	Reason
Odor Potential	Due to the production of reduced sulfur compounds (e.g., H ₂ S) under anaerobic conditions, proper design and operation are crucial to minimize odor nuisance [11].
BOD Removal	Can achieve 40-70% BOD removal, largely through sedimentation and anaerobic digestion [2].
Sludge Accumulation	Significant accumulation of sludge occurs at the bottom, requiring periodic removal (every 5-10 years)

3.2. Facultative Ponds (FPs)

Facultative ponds are the core of most pond systems, receiving effluent from anaerobic ponds or directly raw wastewater if the organic load is moderate. They are shallower than anaerobic ponds (typically 1.5 to 2.5 m) to allow for a stratified environment [2].

3.2.1. Primary Function

The primary site for the major biological degradation of organic matter and significant pathogen reduction is the primary function.

3.2.2. Processes

Those are characterized by three distinct zones as described in the Table 2.

Table 2. Major zones of facultative ponds and relevant processes.

Zone/ Layer	Process
Aerobic Layer (Surface)	Oxygenated by photosynthesis of algae and atmospheric re-aeration. Aerobic bacteria oxidize organic matter [4].
Anaerobic Layer (Bottom)	Formed by settled solids, where anaerobic digestion occurs [2].
Facultative Layer (Middle)	An intermediate zone where both aerobic and anaerobic conditions can exist at different times or locations, allowing facultative bacteria to thrive

3.2.3. Characteristics

Table 3. Important characteristics of facultative pond.

Character	Design Aspects
Organic Loading Rate	Designed for surface OLRs ranging from 50 to 300 kg BOD ₅ /ha·day, highly dependent on temperature [2].
Depth	Optimized for light penetration for algae and oxygen transfer.
Symbiotic Relationship	The crucial symbiotic relationship between algae (producing O ₂) and bacteria (consuming O ₂ and organic matter) drives the treatment process [4].
BOD Removal	Highly efficient, typically achieving 70-90% BOD removal in the facultative pond itself when preceded by an anaerobic pond or designed adequately for raw wastewater.
Pathogen Removal	Significant removal of bacteria and viruses begins here due to natural die-off, predation, and UV radiation [15].

3.3. Maturation Ponds (MPs)

Maturation ponds (also known as aerobic ponds or polishing ponds) are the final stage in a series, receiving effluent from facultative ponds. They are the shallowest (typically 1 to 1.5 meters) to maximize oxygen penetration, light availability for algae, and exposure to UV radiation [13].

3.3.1. Key Processes

Primarily focused on polishing the effluent quality, especially for pathogen removal, but also contribute to further BOD, SS, and nutrient reduction. Predominantly aerobic conditions are maintained by high algal activity. Key processes are described in Table 4.

Table 4. Key processes of maturation ponds.

Key Process	Description
Pathogen Inactivation	High levels of UV radiation, elevated pH (due to algal photosynthesis), high dissolved oxygen, predation by protozoa, and prolonged retention time are highly effective in inactivating pathogens [14, 15].
Nutrient Removal	Algal uptake is a significant mechanism for removing nitrogen and phosphorus. Ammonia volatilization also occurs at high pH [9, 19].
Further BOD/SS Reduction	Continued biological oxidation and sedimentation of remaining suspended solids and algal biomass.

3.3.2. Important Characteristics

Table 5. Major characteristics of maturation ponds.

Character	Description/ Design Aspects
Low Organic Loading	Designed for very low OLRs, as most organic matter has been removed in previous ponds.
Shallow	Maximizes light penetration and UV exposure [13].
Multiple Cells	Often designed as multiple cells in series to enhance plug flow conditions and increase pathogen removal efficiency [23].
Effluent Quality	Produces a high-quality effluent, suitable for discharge into receiving waters or for agricultural reuse, particularly effective in meeting stringent pathogen standards [7].

3.4. Hybrid and Advanced Pond Systems

To improve efficiency, reduce land requirements, or address specific pollutant challenges, various hybrid pond configurations and advanced pond technologies have been emerged.

3.4.1. Pond-Wetland Systems

Combining stabilization ponds with constructed wetlands offers enhanced nutrient removal (especially N and P), improved suspended solids control, and aesthetic benefits [21].

3.4.2. High-Rate Algal Ponds (HRAPs)

Shallow (0.2-0.5 m), intensely mixed ponds designed to

maximize algal productivity and oxygen transfer. HRAPs offer higher organic loading rates, enhanced nutrient recovery through algal biomass harvesting, and potential for energy production (biofuel) [24, 25].

3.4.3. Anaerobic Baffled Reactors (ABRs) or Upflow Anaerobic Sludge Blanket (UASB) Reactors Coupled with Ponds

Pretreatment with high-rate anaerobic reactors significantly reduces the organic load before the pond system, leading to smaller pond footprints, improved performance, and potential for biogas recovery [10].

3.4.4. Integrated Algae Pond Systems (IAPS)

These systems aim to integrate wastewater treatment with

biomass production for various uses, such as biofertilizers, animal feed, or biofuels, transforming waste into a resource [4, 26].

The selection and configuration of pond types depend on several factors, including influent wastewater characteristics, desired effluent quality, land availability, climatic conditions, and economic considerations.

4. Key Design Considerations

Effective design of stabilization pond systems is paramount to ensuring their optimal performance and sustainability. It involves careful consideration of hydraulic, organic, and environmental parameters tailored to local conditions [2].

4.1. Hydraulic Retention Time (HRT)

HRT is the most critical design parameter, representing the average time wastewater remains in a pond. It directly influences the time available for biological reactions, pollutant

degradation, and pathogen die-off.

4.1.1. Calculation/ Mathematical Formula

$$\text{HRT} = V/Q$$

where,

HRT = Hydraulic Retention Time/ days

V= Pond Volume/ m³

Q= Flow Rate/ m³/day

4.1.2. Significance

Longer HRTs generally lead to better treatment efficiency but require larger land areas [8]. Different pond types have different HRT requirements as mentioned in Table 6.

Table 6. Variations of HRT with the pond type.

Pond Type	Typical Hydraulic Retention Time (HRT)
Anaerobic Ponds	Typically 1-5 days, though often designed based on organic loading [2].
Facultative Ponds	Typically 20-50 days are recommended depending on temperature and organic load.
Maturation Ponds	Typically 5-30 days per pond, or a total of 15-90 days for a series of 2-4 maturation ponds to achieve stringent pathogen removal targets [13].

4.1.3. Temperature Influence

Lower temperatures necessitate longer HRTs to compensate for reduced microbial activity.

4.2. Organic Loading Rate (OLR)

OLR is the amount of organic matter (expressed as BOD₅) applied to a pond per unit of volume or surface area per day. It is a critical parameter for preventing overloading and ensuring efficient organic breakdown [2].

Table 7. Organic Loading Rate (OLR) limitations of different ponds.

Pond	OLR Limitations
Anaerobic Ponds	Designed based on volumetric OLR (g BOD ₅ /m ³ day). Typical values range from 100-400 g BOD ₅ /m ³ ·day, with higher values permissible at higher temperatures.
Facultative Ponds	Designed based on surface OLR (kg BOD ₅ /ha·day). Values vary significantly with climate as 150-300 kg BOD ₅ /ha·day for tropical climates and 50-100 kg BOD ₅ /ha·day for temperate climates [2].
Maturation Ponds	Designed based on very low OLRs (e.g., <50 kg BOD ₅ /ha·day) as their primary function is pathogen removal, not BOD reduction.

4.3. Pond Depth

Pond depth is crucial for establishing the desired hydraulic and biological conditions within each pond type.

Table 8. Pond depth for different ponds.

Pond Type	Typical Depth
Anaerobic Ponds	Deep (2.5-5.0 m) to maximize volume for anaerobic digestion, minimize oxygen penetration, and conserve heat [10].
Facultative Ponds	Moderate depth (1.5-2.5 m) to allow for the development of both aerobic and anaerobic zones while permitting light penetration for algal photosynthesis in the upper layer [2].
Maturation Ponds	Shallow (1.0-1.5 m) to maximize light penetration, oxygen production, and especially UV exposure for pathogen inactivation [13].

4.4. Number of Ponds/Cells

Using a series of ponds (e.g., one anaerobic, one facultative, and two or more maturation ponds) enhances treatment efficiency by promoting plug flow conditions and specialized treatment in each cell [23]. Multiple cells in series provide better pathogen removal due to sequential die-off mechanisms and reduced short-circuiting.

4.5. Inlet and Outlet Structures

Proper design of inlet and outlet structures is essential to ensure uniform flow distribution, minimize short-circuiting, and prevent dead zones [8].

4.5.1. Inlets

It should be designed to distribute wastewater evenly across the pond width, ideally below the water surface to minimize odor and short-circuiting. Multiple inlets or a baffled inlet channel are beneficial.

4.5.2. Outlets

It should be designed to draw effluent from the pond surface, ideally opposite the inlet, to maximize the flow path. Adjustable weir outlets allow for control of water level.

4.6. Pond Shape and Dimensions

Rectangular ponds with an aspect ratio (length: width) of 2: 1 to 3: 1 are generally preferred to promote plug flow and minimize short-circuiting [8]. Circular or square ponds may be used for smaller systems. The maximum width might be limited by wind-induced mixing requirements.

4.7. Liner and Seepage Control

Pond bottoms and embankments must be sealed to prevent seepage, which can lead to groundwater contamination and loss of valuable treated effluent [27]. Natural clay liners are common, but synthetic liners (geomembranes) may be necessary in highly permeable soils. A hydraulic conductivity of less than 10^{-7} cm/s is typically required.

4.8. Embankments and Freeboard

Embankments should be wide enough for maintenance access and constructed with stable slopes (e.g., 2: 1 to 3: 1 horizontal: vertical). Adequate freeboard (e.g., 0.5-1.0 m) above the maximum water level is necessary to prevent overflow during heavy rainfall and to manage wind-generated waves.

4.9. Climate and Environmental Factors

As discussed, temperature critically affects microbial kinetics [18]. Design parameters (HRT, OLR) must be adjusted for local ambient temperatures.

Table 9. *Essential climatic and environmental factors.*

Factor	Requirement/ Purpose
Solar Radiation	Essential for algal photosynthesis and UV disinfection. High levels of sunlight are advantageous [15].
Evaporation and Rainfall	Net evaporation (evaporation minus rainfall) directly impacts the water balance and effective HRT.
Land Availability	Stabilization ponds require significant land area, which can be a major constraint, especially in densely populated regions [3].

4.10. Sludge Management

Sludge accumulates at the bottom of anaerobic and facultative ponds. Design should consider the volume of sludge accumulation and provide for future de-sludging operations [2]. This might involve designing multiple parallel ponds or accessible ramps for equipment.

5. Performance and Effluent Quality

Stabilization pond systems, when properly designed and operated, consistently achieve high levels of pollutant removal for various parameters, particularly for pathogens, making them suitable for discharge into receiving waters or for reuse applications [7].

5.1. Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) and Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD) Removal

Table 10. *BOD and COD removals of ponds.*

Pond	BOD and COD Removal Efficiency
Anaerobic Ponds	Significant BOD removal (40-70%) primarily through sedimentation and anaerobic digestion [2].
Facultative Ponds	The main workhorse for BOD removal, often achieving 70-90% reduction, largely due to symbiotic algal-bacterial activity [4].
Maturation Ponds	Further polishing, contributing to an overall system efficiency of 85-95% for BOD and 70-85% for COD [5].

5.2. Suspended Solids (SS) Removal

Initial SS removal occurs through sedimentation in anaerobic and facultative ponds [2]. However, the effluent from facultative and maturation ponds often contains high concentrations of algal biomass, which contribute to the total suspended solids [12].

Typical effluent SS concentrations from well-operated pond systems range from 30-100 mg/L, with a significant portion being algal cells. If stringent SS limits are required, post-treatment (e.g., sand filtration, constructed wetlands, or dissolved air flotation) might be necessary to remove algal solids [21].

5.3. Nutrient Removal (Nitrogen and Phosphorus)

5.3.1. Nitrogen (N) Removal

Ammonia volatilization is significant at high pH (>9) and warmer temperatures in facultative and maturation ponds [19]. Algae assimilate nitrogen (as nitrate, nitrite, or ammonia) for

the growth. Nitrification and denitrification can be occurred to a limited extent if both aerobic and anoxic/anaerobic zones are present and sufficient HRT is provided. Overall N removal typically ranges from 30-70%, though it can be highly variable and less consistent than carbon removal.

5.3.2. Phosphorus (P) Removal

Algal uptake is the primary mechanism, as phosphorus is a key nutrient for algal growth. Minor removal of phosphorous can be seen through precipitation with metal ions (e.g., calcium, iron) at elevated pH [21]. Phosphorous removal is generally lower and more variable than N removal, typically ranging from 20-50%. If enhanced nutrient removal is required, advanced pond designs (HRAPs with biomass harvesting) or integration with other technologies (e.g., chemical precipitation) are necessary.

5.4. Pathogen Removal

This is one of the strongest attributes of stabilization pond systems. They are exceptionally effective in removing a wide

range of pathogenic microorganisms, making the effluent suitable for irrigation [7].

Table 11. Important factors in pathogen removals.

Factor	Concern
Time (Die-off)	Pathogens have a limited survival time outside their host, and the long HRT in stabilization ponds allows for significant natural die-off
Temperature	Higher temperatures generally accelerate inactivation [6].
Solar Radiation (UV)	Direct inactivation by UV light, particularly in shallow maturation ponds, is highly effective [14, 15].
Elevated pH	High pH values (9-10) resulting from algal photosynthesis is lethal to many pathogens [15].
Predation	Protozoa and other higher organisms graze on bacteria and other microorganisms [17].
Sedimentation	Pathogens adsorbed onto suspended solids settle out [2].
Efficiency	Bacteria (e.g., Fecal Coliforms, E. coli)
	Reductions of 3-6 log units (99.9% to 99.9999%) are commonly achieved, especially with multiple maturation ponds in series [6].
	Viruses
	Significant removal (2-4 log units) due to similar mechanisms as bacteria, though generally more resistant [28].
	Protozoa (e.g., Giardia, Cryptosporidium)
	Highly effective removal (3-5 log units) due to sedimentation and filtration by the microbial floc.
	Helminth Ova (e.g., Ascaris)
	Excellent removal (>99%) primarily through sedimentation in anaerobic and facultative ponds, as their large size and density cause them to settle out [17].

5.5. Heavy Metals

Removal of heavy metals primarily occurs through precipitation (at higher pH values) and adsorption onto particulate matter or organic complexes, which then settle with the sludge [22]. Efficiency varies widely depending on the specific metal, pH, and presence of complexing agents. Ponds are generally not designed for high heavy metal removal, and pretreatment might be necessary for industrial wastewaters with high metal concentrations.

6. Operational Aspects and Maintenance

Despite their reputation for simplicity, effective operation

and regular maintenance are crucial for the sustained performance and longevity of stabilization pond systems [2].

6.1. Start-up and Commissioning

Initial filling with fresh water or partially treated wastewater, followed by gradual introduction of raw wastewater to allow for microbial acclimatization.

Monitoring of pH, DO, and initial biological activity until stable conditions are achieved.

6.2. Routine Monitoring

Regular monitoring of key parameters is essential to assess performance and identify potential issues.

Table 12. Monitoring of important parameters.

Monitoring	Parameters
Influent and Effluent Quality	BOD ₅ , COD, SS, pH, DO, temperature, fecal coliforms, and sometimes N and P
Pond Water Level	To ensure design HRT and prevent overflow or drying
Visual Inspection	For scum, sludge accumulation, algal blooms (color), weed growth, embankment integrity, and odors

6.3. Sludge Management

Sludge accumulates at the bottom of anaerobic and facultative ponds, reducing their effective volume and HRT over time.

De-sludging is typically required every 5-10 years for anaerobic ponds and less frequently for facultative ponds [2].

Sludge removal can be done mechanically (dredging) after dewatering the pond or by allowing it to dry out in a separate drying bed. The dewatered sludge is generally stable and can be used as a soil conditioner or disposed of safely.

6.4. Weed Control

Aquatic weeds (emergent and submerged) can grow along the pond edges and within the pond, reducing effective volume, hindering sunlight penetration, and providing breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

Manual removal, mechanical harvesting, or biological controls (e.g., herbivorous fish) are common methods. Herbicides are generally avoided due to potential environmental impacts.

6.5. Odor Control

Odors, primarily hydrogen sulfide (H_2S), can be a problem, especially in anaerobic ponds or overloaded facultative ponds, particularly during start-up or cold weather.

Proper design (appropriate OLR, sufficient depth, multiple cells), adequate pre-treatment, and maintaining aerobic conditions in facultative ponds are key preventive measures. Temporary measures might include chemical addition (e.g., nitrates, iron salts) or aeration [11].

6.6. Mosquito Control/ Prevention

Ponds can become breeding sites for mosquitoes if stagnant water and vegetation are present.

Measures include maintaining clean pond edges, preventing overgrowth of aquatic macrophytes, maintaining sufficient freeboard, ensuring continuous flow, and, if necessary, introducing mosquito fish (e.g., *Gambusia affinis*).

6.7. Embankment Maintenance

Routine inspection and repair of embankments to prevent erosion, seepage, and maintain structural integrity. Mowing grass on embankments prevents weed growth and provides

easy inspection access.

6.8. Safety and Security

Fencing is essential to prevent unauthorized access, especially by children and livestock, due to the drowning hazard. Signs warning of hazards should be posted. Access roads and platforms for monitoring and maintenance should be provided.

7. Advantages and Disadvantages of Stabilization Pond Systems

7.1. Advantages

Earthen basins are relatively inexpensive to construct compared to conventional concrete or steel structures.

7.1.1. Low Operational and Maintenance Cost

Minimal energy requirements (reliance on natural processes), no complex machinery, and less need for skilled labor.

7.1.2. High Pathogen Removal Efficiency

Superior performance in inactivating bacteria, viruses, protozoa, and helminth ova, making effluent suitable for agricultural reuse [7].

7.1.3. Robustness and Simplicity

Resilient to shock loads and variations in flow or organic strength. Easy to operate and maintain, even by semi-skilled personnel [8].

7.1.4. Low Energy Consumption

Primarily uses solar energy for photosynthesis and wind for mixing.

7.1.5. Nutrient Recovery Potential

Algal biomass can be harvested for use as fertilizer, animal feed, or biofuel feedstock [25].

7.1.6. Sludge Stabilization

Sludge produced is well-stabilized and generally less hazardous than sludge from activated sludge plants, often suitable for agricultural use after dewatering.

7.1.7. Environmental Compatibility

It can be blended into the landscape, and in some cases, provide habitat for waterfowl.

7.2. Disadvantages

7.2.1. Large Land Area Requirement

This is the most significant limitation, especially in urbanized or land-scarce areas [3].

7.2.2. Temperature Sensitivity

Performance is significantly reduced in colder climates due to lower microbial activity and reduced algal growth [18].

7.2.3. Effluent Quality Fluctuations

Effluent SS can be high due to algal biomass, and nutrient removal can be inconsistent.

7.2.4. Odor Potential

Particularly from anaerobic or overloaded facultative ponds, necessitating careful design and management, especially in close proximity to residential areas [11].

7.2.5. Mosquito Breeding

If not properly managed, ponds can become breeding grounds for mosquitoes and other nuisance insects.

7.2.6. Public Perception

Sometimes it can be perceived negatively due to association with "raw sewage" or potential odors.

7.2.7. Seepage Potential

Risk of groundwater contamination if liners are inadequate or damaged [27].

7.2.8. Evaporation Losses

Significant water losses can occur through evaporation in arid and semi-arid regions, impacting effective HRT.

8. Emerging Trends and Future

Perspectives

The adaptability and sustainability of stabilization ponds continue to drive research and innovation, leading to several emerging trends and future perspectives.

8.1. Integration with Other Technologies (Hybrid Systems)

The future of stabilization ponds increasingly lies in their integration with other treatment processes to overcome limitations and enhance performance. Examples include the followings.

8.1.1. Pre-treatment with High-Rate Anaerobic Reactors

UASB or ABR systems can reduce organic load significantly, decreasing pond land requirements and generating biogas [10].

8.1.2. Post-treatment with Constructed Wetlands or Bio-filters

To polish effluent for SS, nutrients, and even micro-pollutants, particularly where stringent discharge standards apply.

8.1.3. Electro-coagulation/Flotation with Ponds

To enhance algal biomass separation and SS removal, improving effluent quality for reuse.

8.2. Resource Recovery and Circular Economy

A major paradigm shift in wastewater treatment is moving from "waste disposal" to "resource recovery." Stabilization ponds are well-positioned for this transition:

8.2.1. Algal Biomass Production

High-rate algal ponds (HRAPs) are designed to maximize algal growth, which can be harvested for industrial applications [24].

Table 13. Applications of algal biomass production.

Application	Process
Biofuels	Lipids from certain algal species can be converted into biodiesel [18, 26].
Biofertilizers	Algal biomass is rich in N and P, suitable for soil amendment [25].
Animal Feed	Protein-rich algae can serve as a feed supplement [25].

8.2.2. Biogas Production

Anaerobic ponds and pre-treatment anaerobic reactors can capture methane for energy generation [25].

8.2.3. Water Reuse

The high pathogen removal makes pond effluent ideal for

agricultural irrigation, aquaculture, and industrial uses, reducing reliance on freshwater sources [7].

8.3. Enhanced Nutrient Removal

While traditional ponds are moderate for N and P removal, new approaches are being explored as follows.

Table 14. Modification methods of traditional pond systems.

Modification	Design Aspects
Optimized HRAPs	Design and operational strategies to maximize nutrient uptake by algae [24, 29, 30].
Nitrification-Denitrification in Ponds	Creating specific anoxic zones or integrating with external nitrification reactors to achieve enhanced N removal [19, 31, 32].
Chemical Precipitation within Ponds	Targeted addition of precipitants to remove phosphorus [21, 33, 34].

8.4. Climate Change Resilience and Decentralized Applications

Stabilization ponds are inherently resilient to power outages and require minimal external energy, making them suitable for climate change adaptation strategies and decentralized wastewater management in remote or peri-urban areas where conventional infrastructure is uneconomical [2, 35, 36]. Their ability to handle variable flows and organic loads also contributes to their robustness.

8.5. Advanced Monitoring and Control

The application of real-time sensors, IoT (Internet of Things), and AI-driven control systems can optimize pond performance, predict issues (e.g., odor events), and improve operational efficiency [37, 38].

8.6. Public Perception and Aesthetic Integration

Future designs may increasingly focus on integrating ponds more aesthetically into urban or semi-urban landscapes, potentially incorporating recreational areas or wildlife habitats to improve public acceptance.

9. Conclusion

Stabilization pond systems have proven to be an indispensable and remarkably effective technology for wastewater treatment, particularly for communities seeking sustainable, low-cost, and robust solutions. Their inherent reliance on natural processes biological decomposition, physical sedimenta-

tion, and solar disinfection makes them a highly energy-efficient and environmentally compatible choice. The sequential arrangement of anaerobic, facultative, and maturation ponds ensures comprehensive pollutant removal, with an outstanding capacity for pathogen inactivation, rendering the treated effluent suitable for various beneficial reuse applications.

While they demand significant land area and their performance can be sensitive to temperature, ongoing research and practical implementation continue to refine their design and operation. Emerging trends, such as integration with high-rate anaerobic bioreactors, constructed wetlands, and high-rate algal pond technology, are transforming stabilization ponds from mere "waste treatment" facilities into "resource recovery" hubs, capable of producing energy (biogas), valuable biomass (algae for biofuels and fertilizers), and safely reusable water.

As global populations grow and the imperative for sustainable water resource management intensifies, stabilization pond systems remain a cornerstone of decentralized and resilient wastewater infrastructure. Their simplicity, cost-effectiveness, and environmental benefits solidify their position as a crucial and evolving technology in the pursuit of improved public health and environmental protection worldwide. Continued innovation in design, operation, and integration will further enhance their role in achieving a circular economy for water.

Abbreviations

WWTPs	Wastewater Treatment Plant
UV	Ultraviolet
OLR	Organic Loading Rate
HRT	Hydraulic Retention Time

BOD	Biochemical Oxygen Demand
SS	Suspended Solids
AP	Anaerobic Pond
FP	Facultative Pond
MP	Maturation Pond
HRAP	High-Rate Algal Pond
ABR	Anaerobic Baffled Reactors
UASB	Upflow Anaerobic Sludge Blanket
IAPS	Integrated Algae Pond Systems
COD	Chemical Oxygen Demand
DO	Dissolved Oxygen

Author Contributions

Suresh Aluvihara: Conceptualization, Data curation, Methodology, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Analysis

Ferial Pestano-Gupta: Conceptualization, Data curation, Methodology, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Analysis

Abdul Wahab Hekmat: Conceptualization, Data curation, Methodology, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Analysis

Mustafa Ben Hkoma: Conceptualization, Data curation, Methodology, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Analysis

Mohammad Hamid Omar: Conceptualization, Data curation, Methodology, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Analysis

Jaafar Omar Baomar: Conceptualization, Data curation, Methodology, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Analysis

Al Rabaki Khaled Awadh: Conceptualization, Data curation, Methodology, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Analysis

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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