Background
Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) held its third global High Level Meeting (HLM) convened by UNICEF and hosted by the World Bank in Washington DC on 11 April 2014. The meeting was preceded by a Sector Minister’s Meeting (SMM) also convened by UNICEF and hosted by the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), on the 10 April 2014. In all, 45 developing countries (“countries”) attended or were engaged in the HLM process and attended one of these meetings; including ministers responsible for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) from 42 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America (see box).

Ministers responsible for WASH brought statements on progress against 2012 HLM commitments and prepared 309 new structured commitments to the SMM. Twenty one ministers of finance and 35 ministers responsible for water and sanitation attended the HLM itself. Sixteen donors and development banks (“donors”) – including many of the largest WASH financiers, the World Bank, Japan, UK, the US and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation – were also in attendance, six at the level of Minister or head of agency. Donors tabled 70 specific new commitments. The 2014 HLM was one of the largest high-level political dialogues on sanitation, hygiene and water ever held. High-level speakers gave 85 prepared interventions and in total, 379 individual commitments were tabled over the two days. A series of short papers have been prepared to summarize the discussions, as well as analyze trends and implications.

Countries involved in the 2014 HLM process

Donors involved in the 2014 HLM process
African Development Bank, Australia, Austria, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Canada, European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States of America, World Bank.

1 For the purposes of brevity, donors and development banks are referred to in this document as ‘donors’ and developing countries as ‘countries’. Within the SWA partnership, development banks are not considered donors and in most cases are in fact lenders rather than donors. However, in this document donors and development banks are referred to as ‘donors’ to indicate all external agencies providing finance.
Purpose of this short summary

This four-page summary\(^2\) is the first in this series and provides the main messages from the HLM and SMM. The audience is SWA partners who want a short assessment of the outcomes of the event and a summary of the meeting highlights.

Preparatory process

The High Level Commitments Dialogue (HLCD) encompasses: the High Level Meetings; the preparatory process that countries and donors conduct in advance of the SWA High Level Meeting to develop context-specific commitments; and the annual monitoring of the commitments. The HLCD is designed to encourage an on-going political dialogue at the national, sub-national and global level and is focused on achieving results on the ground to encourage accountability in the sector.

In preparation for the 2014 HLM, 45 countries and 16 donors engaged in a five-month preparatory process facilitated by the SWA Secretariat. Subsequent participation in the meetings and tabling of commitments was consistent, with only small variations\(^3\):

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<td><strong>Countries</strong></td>
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The Secretariat led the preparations by developing and sharing detailed guidance and support on the preparatory process.

Over 130 directors and senior technical officers from line Ministries and development partners participated in a series of twelve preparatory webinars. Countries conducted an internal sector dialogue to review their sector plans and bottlenecks to develop SMART\(^4\) commitments.

All 37 countries that tabled 2012 HLM commitments reported on the progress achieved over the past two years, demonstrating strengthened accountability. Networks representing over 700 individual civil society organizations (CSO) were engaged in the preparatory process at national level; helping to hold governments accountable for commitments made in 2012 and lobbying for new commitments.

Sixteen donor countries and agencies engaged the preparatory process; the donor process was coordinated by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Donors had three face-to-face meetings (Stockholm, Geneva and London) to prepare for the HLM and created four internal papers to guide donor preparation of commitments.

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\(^2\) See last page for a full list of other papers in this Series.

\(^3\) For a full list of countries, please see the List of Delegations Participating in the 2014 HLCD.

\(^4\) SMART commitments are: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound.
The heads of state from developing and donor countries received a joint letter signed by H.E. John A. Kufuor, Chair of SWA, and the UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson encouraging them to support preparations for the HLM.

Conclusions to the 2014 HLM process

Following a more mature HLCD, the 2014 HLM was SWA’s most ambitious, best-prepared and most-well attended HLM to date with the highest political attendance, more ministers of finance and greater donor and development bank engagement. The SMM featured strong substantive content and focused, SMART country commitments.

Ten main messages from the HLM:

1. **A turning point in recognizing the importance of WASH, especially sanitation**: Attendance at the HLM by the most influential people in international development indicates the high-level of political acceptance of the importance of WASH. Sanitation has also never before had this level of global political attention. Whilst not a fait accompli, water and WASH appear to have high-level support to be included in the post-2015 SDGs. The opening of the HLM by the President of the World Bank, the UN Secretary General and the former President of Ghana marks a turning point in acceptance; a coming of age of the WASH sector. WASH is recognized as a cornerstone to public policy for the health, education, environment and social sectors. The challenge now is in making in the case for prioritization at country level amongst competing priorities, as well as delivering on the ground at a large scale.

2. **Remarkable coherence in approach**: Considering the complexity and different components of WASH, the many agencies involved and the diversity of contexts in which services need to be offered, there is a remarkable coherence of approach and understanding of problems. Having a common high-level political platform and a common global monitoring system has helped build a commonality of language as well as high-level of agreement on priorities and approaches amongst participating countries and agencies.

3. **Work still to be done to improve aid-effectiveness**: Delivering the rich set of commitments, which were tabled, requires working together. Country commitments were often developed in collaboration with donors and agencies, resulting in cohesive plans. However, donor commitments do not necessarily reflect country priorities. At the SMM and HLM, country ministers requested donors to commit to a much closer alignment with national planning processes. This is echoed by the OECD assessment of aid-effectiveness in the WASH sector that was presented at the SMM; which highlights significant shortcomings in support to programmatic, rather than project approaches.

4. **Strong case for increasing financing for WASH**: The case for investing in WASH was made most persuasively: US$1 invested in water and sanitation returns an average of US$5; the GDP loss due to poor sanitation is 0.9% to 2.4%; sanitation was shown to achieve a 50% reduction in externalities. All ministers of finance who spoke at the HLM recognized that sanitation and water are sound and vital investments. The unprecedented high presence of ministers of finance – representing 20 countries – in the meeting itself recognizes the greater appreciation of the sector’s importance and the need to increase investments. Sixty per cent of countries tabling
Statements of Commitments included specific commitments to increase national budgets significantly. Whilst several donors had stated that substantial new commitments would only be made after the post-2015 agenda is defined, overall levels of WASH commitments are rising or at least being maintained at current levels. Some new donor commitments were made and, significantly, the World Bank, the biggest development bank investing in the sector, indicated that it intends to increase its financing of WASH, particularly sanitation.

5. **The health case for investment in WASH has become even stronger:** Ministers responsible for sanitation and water made a clear public health case for significant increases in WASH investments. Recent evidence that poor hygiene and sanitation are a major cause of stunting has strengthened this case. Poor sanitation, hygiene and lack of access to safe water are one of the biggest killers of children in developing countries. This conclusion speaks to a stronger collaboration between the WASH, nutrition and health sectors.

6. **Better focused and SMART commitments as well as greater inclusiveness are likely to have more impact:** The main output of the 2014 HLM – the 379 country and donor commitments – provides a strong basis from which partners can achieve results at scale. The efforts invested to develop a focused, SMART set of commitments, by a broad set of stakeholders provides a basis from which partners can clearly advocate for results, better implement actions and effectively monitor progress. SWA partners are now well-positioned to translate commitments into results on the ground and improve transparency and accountability in the sector. Progress on implementing 2014 HLM commitments would make a very significant impact in meeting national and international goals. Country commitments largely focus on: (1) more and smarter financing; (2) improving planning processes; (3) improving sector coordination; and (4) building the capacity of sector institutions. Country commitments reflect local priorities and give a clear indication of areas where SWA partners can provide support. There is an alignment between these commitments and the SWA partnership’s already-established priorities. In statements and speeches, donors largely re-affirmed prior commitments, sought to increase the political prioritization of WASH and strengthen national planning processes. Many expressed support for a distinct WASH or water Sustainable Development Goal for the post-2015 agenda. Further analysis of country commitments is forthcoming.

7. **Bold vision towards universal access and the elimination of open defecation:** Twenty-three country Statements of Commitments expressed a bold vision of action to make progress towards universal access to safe water and sanitation. Achieving the 309 specific and measurable commitments made by countries, along with the 70 commitments made by donors, will move countries on towards making this goal a reality. Building on regional fora, such as commitments made at AfricaSan and SACOSAN, 18 countries stated in their vision that they aim at eliminating open defecation by or earlier than 2030, and 4 countries stated that they aim to considerably reduce it.

8. **Evidence that targeting inequalities is a central challenge:** Recent UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water (GLAAS) and WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program for Water Supply and Sanitation (JMP) data show that a central problem in the WASH
sector is targeting growing inequalities in service delivery. While notable exceptions were shared, (for example Ethiopia, Cambodia and South Africa have achieved outcomes which have benefitted the poor and disadvantaged at a large scale), the HLM heard clear messages from many speakers on the greater need to (1) adopt legislation and have regulatory frameworks recognizing the human right to water and sanitation; (2) to collect, disaggregate and analyze the data on who has been left behind; (3) to act upon the data and undertake actions which focus on the most marginalized; and (4) to set targets for reducing inequalities and put accountability and management mechanisms in place.

9. **Building systems that last**: Ministers endorsed a shift from focusing primarily on capital investment in infrastructure to considering the policy, capacity and cost implications of managing services through their full life cycle. Sustainability depends on strong institutions at national and local levels. Twenty-six countries made practical commitments to increase the capacity of sector institutions. Twenty-nine made pledges to improve coordination between sectors and seventeen to increase decentralization. The meeting also heard of many innovations that can improve service management and functionality. Approaches include better analyses, using tools such as UNICEF’s Bottleneck Analysis Tool, WASHBAT, smarter data collection and management using IT mobile-to-web applications, sustainability compacts and sustainability clauses in financing contracts.

10. **Reaching out to other sectors**: The meeting recognized that improving WASH is fundamental to making progress in many other sectors. A strong case was made to invest in WASH to: improve educational outcomes for girls, improve nutrition, conserve the environment and to mitigate against climate change. This implies that the WASH community must continue to build strong linkages and coordination mechanisms with other sectors. Many speakers alluded to the need for greater engagement with the private sector; both to SWA in terms of contributing ideas, energy, and skills to the HLCD; as well as to the sector generally, in terms of utilizing private sector capabilities in service delivery and specialist areas such as in marketing and behavior change.

The outcomes and content of the SWA High Level Commitments Dialogue and the milestone April 2014 HLM meetings have provided high-level political guidance and encouragement on action. Ministers left the 2014 HLM with their own clear commitments and, having heard commitments of other countries, a refreshed understanding of global sector trends, achievements and challenges. The next step, as articulated by SWA Chair, H.E. John Kufuor was to “turn commitments into actions”.

Other documents in **2014 SWA High Level Dialogue Summaries** series:

- #1: Overall conclusions from the 2014 HLM
- #2: Highlights from the 2014 High Level Meeting
- #3: Highlights from the 2014 Sector Ministers’ Meeting
- #4: Overview of the 2014 HLM Commitments