Introduction

The High Level Meeting (HLM) is the global climax of the on-going Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) High Level Commitments Dialogue (HLCD). SWA held its third global HLM, convened by UNICEF and hosted by the World Bank, in Washington DC on April 11th 2014. The 2.5 hour meeting was a dynamic dialogue between ministers of finance, ministers of development cooperation and other leading agencies. The meeting, entitled “Smart investments to achieve water, sanitation and hygiene for all”, aimed to outline an ambitious yet achievable vision for the sector: to link WASH (and sanitation in particular) to the economic growth agenda, to communicate how finance ministers can best achieve ‘value for money’, including learning from successful investments and addressing sustainability and inequalities, and to challenge participants to make WASH a high priority in the post-2015 agenda.

The 2014 HLM was divided into three segments: opening addresses featuring an unprecedented high-level representation, a ministerial discussion on past achievements and future commitments, and a high-level panel discussion on sustainability and inequality of services.

Opening and keynote addresses

The HLM was opened by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, President of the World Bank, Dr. Jim Yong Kim, and H.E. Mr. John Agyekum Kufuor, Chair of SWA and one of the most respected former presidents in Africa.

H.E. Mr. Kufuor reflected on the importance of water and sanitation in society and its importance for human development, health and sustainable economic growth. The progress against prior commitments and the truly global leadership in attendance at the third HLM showed the value of the partnership.

The UN Secretary-General spoke of the 2014 HLM as a “turning point” in attracting such high level participation and in bringing so many partners with so many commitments together with the common aim of progressive realization of the human right of universal access to water and sanitation. He identified three components for success: (1) making smart investments, using resources judiciously and making allocations to reach all people; (2) sustaining a firm commitment to meet the MDGs and pushing for WASH to be integral in the post-

“A world in which hundreds of millions of our fellow citizens lack access to sanitation, hygiene and water, the most basic of rights, is not a world we want to bequeath to our children.”

H.E. John A. Kufuor, Chair SWA
When WASH is improved for every person, lives are saved, nations become healthier and economies grow stronger.

Mr. Anthony Lake, UNICEF Executive Director

Fifty percent reduction as an externality is huge. This is the strongest case for public spending on sanitation. It’s not those high rates of return. It’s the externality and this is what governments should be focusing on.

Dr. Shanta Devarajan, Chief Economist at the World Bank

If a country is going to achieve universal access, addressing inequalities is vital.

Hon. Mr. Sufian Ahmed, Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Ethiopia

The President of the World Bank reminded ministers that they were here today to prevent the needless death of millions of poor children. Last year, the World Bank adopted two ambitious goals: to end extreme poverty by 2030 and to boost economic prosperity for the poorest 40%. The One World Bank Group strategy to tackle this problem was to: (1) undertake a rigorous and systematic approach towards delivery; (2) increase the magnitude and effective use of financing sanitation to reach the poorest; (3) to adopt a “whole government approach” teaming up with ministers of education, health, agriculture, environment and urban planning to put sanitation at the centre of initiatives to target the poor; and (4) encourage greater engagement by the private sector, both in strategy development and in service delivery. Dr. Kim reached out to ministers of finance, telling them that “World Bank country directors were waiting to hear from them” as to how they can help increase finance for sanitation.

The Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. Anthony Lake, presented a stark picture of the impact of WASH-related diseases on children. WASH-related diseases claimed the lives of 500,000 children in 2013 and contributed significantly to stunting which affects 165 million children around the world. Schools without WASH prevent girls from a proper education which limits future opportunities. Inadequate WASH creates the loss of 1.5% of GDP annually. He saw the HLM as an opportunity to trigger high-level commitments which, if turned into practical reality, could improve the lives of millions of people around the world.

If a country is going to achieve universal access, addressing inequalities is vital.

Hon. Mr. Sufian Ahmed, Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Ethiopia

The Honourable Mr. Sufian Ahmed, Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Ethiopia, gave the second keynote address in which he shared Ethiopia’s recent experience in making significant progress towards universal access and reaching marginalized populations. He
emphasized grounding all WASH programming within the overall planning framework of the country (Ethiopia has adopted a sector-wide approach to the WASH sector). Ethiopia’s progress has also been driven by increased government resource allocation, a strong emphasis on sector coordination across ministries, harmonizing with external partners and developing region-specific “packages” to target disparities.

**Achievements of the past, ambitions for the future**

UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson moderated the next segment of the meeting which was the opportunity for ministers to present updates on their previous 2012 HLM commitments and highlight new commitments. DSG Eliasson began by reflecting that the 2012 HLM was “the best meeting that I have ever attended on water and sanitation” because it brought together a broad mix of decision-makers who were in a position to make the decisive steps to achieve WASH goals.

Fourteen ministers or agencies contributed their experience and ideas to the discussion. Honourable Mrs. Sarah Reng Ochekpe, Minister of Water Resources of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Chair of the African Ministers’ Council on Water (AMCOW) presented a summary of country commitments agreed by ministers at the Sector Ministers’ Meeting, held the day before. Ministers had set ambitious national targets, especially in eliminating open defecation by 2025, increasing sector financing, better targeting investments, reducing inequality of access, strengthening sector institutions (especially by building their capacity) and improving sustainability. Achieving these commitments will require partnerships as well as the support of ministers of finance and donors.

Several ministers of finance spoke to the increased priority they are giving to the sector and their commitments on institutional and financial reforms. For example, Madagascar is prioritizing the sector and, before 2016, expected to decentralize its budget. The Minister of Finance from Tanzania spoke to the priority Tanzania was placing on separating implementing and regulatory functions and the new arrangements the government had put in place to improve service management. In Sierra Leone, the President himself was supporting the Ministry of Health in championing and prioritizing sanitation within the 2013-18 national development plan. Liberia has restructured its national institutional framework to establish a National Water Resources and Sanitation Board, chaired by the country’s President and whose membership includes representatives of all the main institutions in the country concerned with water and sanitation. In Afghanistan, water and sanitation’s importance is recognized both from a health and rural development perspective and steady progress is being made through dedicated and largely
autonomous programs. The Minister of Finance from Nepal spoke to his country’s commitment to radically expand efforts to make Nepal open-defecation free.

Ministers of development cooperation confirmed their commitment to retaining the level of existing financial commitments to WASH and some announced new finance. The UK Secretary of State confirmed that the UK is on track to meeting its commitment to support 60 million people to receive water and sanitation by December. The Minister for International Development of Finland announced support to reach one million people with WASH services. The USAID Administrator made three new commitments: (1) serve an additional six million people in twelve countries with sustainable sanitation access by 2018; (2) develop a knowledge platform for sustainable WASH solutions; and (3) integrate hygiene into the ‘first 1000 days’ nutrition program. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation highlighted its’ focus on supporting sector innovation, especially with the development of new tools for containing and treating human waste. Japan, which for over 20 years has been the largest WASH bilateral donor, reaffirmed its commitment to maintain funding levels of $2.4 billion, including $490m for African countries. Sweden also re-affirmed strong support to the water sector.

On behalf of civil society organizations, the Executive Director of Lumanti, a Non-governmental Organization in Nepal, spoke to the role of civil society, working at the global, regional and local levels to help hold governments to account to deliver on commitments.

The DSG wrapped up this segment of the discussion by noting agreement that efforts focus on should: (1) continuing to press for universal access to be prominently featured in the post-2015 agenda; (2) placing emphasis on reducing inequalities in service access; (3) eliminating open defecation; and (4) increasing allocations to the sector and spend the money we have more wisely, including on strengthening institutions.

**High-level panel discussion on reaching everyone and making services last**

The final session was a panel discussion highlighting eliminating inequalities and achieving institutional and technical sustainability.

The Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the The Netherlands spoke of her government’s commitment to invest $100 million a year to the water sector. She spoke to her country’s experience in prioritizing sustainability in order to retain the benefits of service development and mentioned lessons the Netherlands have learned in sector investment: place sustainability at the core of joint development assistance; incorporate sustainability within financing agreements; and include the private sector as a partner in inclusive economic growth to help sustainability.

Speaking to what governments and donors can do to progressively eliminate inequalities, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking-water and sanitation spoke to four steps: (1) adopt legislation and have regulatory frameworks that recognise the human right to water and sanitation; (2) collect, disaggregate and analyze the data on who has been left behind; (3) use this data to target the most marginalized; and (4) put accountability mechanisms in place, set targets, monitor progress and include eliminating inequalities in the post-2015 agenda.
The final speaker on the panel, the Chief Marketing and Communication Officer of Unilever, spoke to how the private sector could align its perspective with the MDGs and improve service sustainability and emphasized the experience that the private sector had in marketing and behavior change. Partnerships with the private sector will work best where the market is at the core of private sector interests.

H.E. Mr. John Kufuor closed the meeting acknowledging the rich set of practical and concrete commitments that had been made, especially in the area of building the capacity of local institutions and the large number of commitments in the area of financing. He looked forward to the next HLM and in the meantime gave his assurance that the SWA Secretariat would track progress against the commitments made and hoped that the partners of SWA would hold each other accountable for the progress he expected to see.

“I am now more confident than ever that our name, Sanitation and Water for All, will become our achievement.”

H.E. John A. Kufuor, Chair SWA

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