Sector Ministers’ Meeting

The 2014 Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) Sector Ministers’ Meeting (SMM), held in Washington DC on April 10, the day before the 2014 High Level Meeting (HLM), was attended by 32 sector ministers from 37 countries as well as 150 sector professionals from around the globe. Convened by UNICEF and hosted by the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), the meeting was a key event within the SWA High level Commitments Dialogue (HLCD). The meeting brought together ministers responsible for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) from developing countries to review progress against commitments made previously at the 2012 HLM, present new commitments and discuss key actions to make progress towards sustainable universal access to sanitation and water services. The SMM was also an opportunity to share an update on SWA, the preliminary findings of the UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water (GLAAS) initiative, the results of the 2014 update by the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program for Water Supply and Sanitation (JMP) and to build a common understanding of WASH in the post-2015 development agenda. This year, the SMM sought to disseminate ideas on service sustainability, aid-effectiveness and tackling inequality.

The growth and focus of SWA

H.E. Mr. John A. Kufuor, Chair of SWA, welcomed ministers noting that the SWA biennial HLM had now, at its third meeting, become the established political forum in the WASH sector. The SWA partnership has grown to 95 partners which consists largely of developing country governments, large civil society networks and the most influential donors and financial institutions.

Latest findings from JMP and GLAAS

Both JMP and GLAAS reported progress in the WASH sector. The JMP update states that 2.3 billion people gained access to improved drinking water between 1990 and 2012, and 56% (almost 4 billion people) of the global population now have piped connections on their premises. Globally, open defecation rates have declined from 31% in 1990 to 17% in 2012. GLAAS reflects that over half the responding countries undertook a national joint sector review including sanitation within the last 2 years; over 75% of responding countries have recognized the right to water and 67% the right to sanitation. Further, between 2010 and 2012, aid commitments to water and sanitation have increased from 4.7% to 6.1% of total development aid. Sanitation and drinking-water aid is now better targeted towards Sub-Saharan Africa, Southern Asia and South-Eastern Asia.

However, the sanitation challenge remains large. Sanitation access is less than 50% in 46 countries and, at current rates, the world will miss the MDG sanitation target by more than 500 million people.
A main message from both JMP and GLAAS is the neglect of the poor. Despite a few notable exceptions, most recent service development has mainly benefitted the rich. For example, the proportion of global aid for basic sanitation services has declined from 26% to 21%. In sub-Saharan Africa, whilst 14 out of 33 countries have financial measures in place that help the poor, only three countries responded that they were consistently applying these measures. Fewer than half the countries participating in this GLAAS survey monitor service provision to the poor.

GLAAS also highlighted ongoing weaknesses in country preparations to scale up service delivery. Less than 30% of countries report having plans that are costed, funded, implemented and regularly reviewed. Few countries collect and analyze their own data to make decisions on sanitation. Many of these global findings were discussed in later sessions and addressed in ministerial commitments for remedial action.

**Post-2015 development agenda**

Ministers found broad consensus that universal access to WASH should feature prominently in the post-2015 development agenda. Improved WASH would also impact poverty, health, nutrition, education, gender equality and sustainable economic growth. Meeting presenters discussed four aspects to address the unfinished business of the MDGs and the progressive realization of the Human Right to Water and Sanitation: (1) the elimination of open defecation (consistent with the DSG’s Call to Action on Sanitation); (2) inclusion of hygiene (hand washing with soap and access to menstrual hygiene management); (3) a higher benchmark called ‘safely-managed services’ which, for water, means having access on the premises to reliable supplies that meet water quality guidelines and, for sanitation, means safely storing and transporting excreta to a designated site for disposal or treatment; and (4) an explicit focus on reducing and eliminating inequalities in access between population sub-groups. It was further highlighted that achieving universal access means going beyond households to include access to WASH in schools and health facilities.

**On tackling inequalities**

The SMM featured a session focused on the large inequalities in service access in the WASH sector and country experience (for example in Ethiopia, Bolivia, Liberia) in tackling these inequalities. The session noted a recurring pattern of exclusion from WASH service access by people living in informal settlements, people belonging to ethnic minorities, migrants, women, the elderly, homeless people or people suffering from chronic illnesses such as HIV/AIDS. Many of the people who make up these groups represent the poorest in society. The aggregate numbers show that overall progress in water
and sanitation access masks huge disparities in access, seen at its most extreme in the rural-urban divide. The inequalities of WASH access reflect fundamental divisions in society. The participants concluded that a political economy perspective is needed to appreciate the drivers of these inequalities.

During the meeting, specific strategies to tackle inequalities were discussed: (1) generating the political will from governments to put in place policies, legislation and regulatory frameworks to rid society of discriminatory practices; (2) gathering inclusive, yet disaggregatable data on access so it is easy to analyze who is getting left behind; (3) using service delivery approaches which include affordable service levels and funding arrangements that help the poor and marginalized; and (4) having transparent systems in place which track and benchmark service progress for the excluded.

**On building systems that keep services running**

The SMM featured a learning session on sustainability of WASH services. The consequences of non-functioning services are: wasted investment, lost economic costs as well as opportunity costs, and increased diseases and deterioration of living conditions. Recently, there has been a significant effort by WASH partners to break the dysfunctional cycle of ‘investment - breakdown - reinvestment’ and to help governments build systems that last. A number of pro-sustainability tools and approaches have been developed, including: life-cycle costing, bottleneck analyses, sustainability compacts, sustainability checks, geometric mapping tools, circuit rider approaches and service payment mechanisms using mobile phones. Attention is needed on three key aspects of system management: (1) monitor and improve accountability for service management; (2) match service levels to demand; and (3) shift to a financially-viable approach with a culture of payment for asset maintenance from user fees.

**On improving aid-effectiveness**

Whilst aid to the WASH sector has progressively increased over the past 20 years, aid effectiveness in WASH still shows limited progress and a high transaction cost for beneficiaries, due to managing such a diversity of projects with different requirements. Issues that can improve aid-effectiveness include: (1) donor support for service management (most aid focuses on capital investment such as pipes, plants and treatment facilities and little is allocated to service management); (2) target-setting and joint accountability; (3) donors work to rational international aid system for WASH (increase programmatic aid flows, reduce overlap, streamline aid); and (4) all parties work to improve ownership by one clear accountable government authority: some external agencies have continued to be reluctant to align and build WASH country systems.

**Ministerial commitments**

Building on the 2012 HLCD, countries have improved the identification, structure and formulation of 2014 commitments. In 2014, 43 countries made over 370 commitments. Many countries used analytical tools such as the UN-Water GLAAS analysis or the UNICEF WASH Bottleneck Analysis Tool (WASHBAT) in preparing commitments. Further, there was a strong effort to align HLM commitments with other commitments.
Ministerial commitments were the topic that connected the April 10 SMM and the April 11 HLM. Commitments were first presented in sub-regional country groups at the SMM and then summarized in a plenary discussion. At the HLM, ministers of finance spoke to their country’s commitments and country and donor commitments were showed as a slide show throughout the HLM. The ministerial commitments and thematic discussion at the SMM are summarized in the following points:

- **Common vision for large-scale action:** Most countries recognized that large-scale action is needed to reach national and global WASH targets and that improved access to WASH needs to be firmly positioned as part of broader efforts to improve health and prosperity.

- **Scaling up and better targeting of investments:** Achieving national objectives demands better targeting of investments to accelerate progress on sanitation and hygiene. To this end, sixty percent of countries committed to increase sector financing from domestic sources. Delivering the rich set of ministerial commitments requires partnerships. Sector ministers need finance ministers to recognize the value of investing in sanitation, hygiene and water and for donors to commit to a much closer alignment to national plans.

- **Sanitation and hygiene:** Notwithstanding the progress made, sanitation often still has a lower priority. Hygiene needs more much more attention and is often absent from policy and practice.

- **Sustainability:** Regular breakdowns and a high level of non-functionality of infrastructure is a continuing issue which many countries have sought to address by increasing sector capacity for service management, especially at the local level. The thematic discussion provided a range of new approaches that could be taken up by governments, donors, sector agencies and CSOs. Donor and government behaviours require a substantial change of mind-set to create services that can last.

- **Strengthening coordination:** Many countries undertook to improve coordination between the various departments with responsibilities with water and/or sanitation.

- **Improving donor harmonization:** The OECD presentation highlighted the slow progress made by donors to respect and adhere to principles of good aid-effectiveness regarding WASH. The existing donor framework still did not provide sufficient support to build systems. Many countries, even countries that had put in place difficult reforms, found that external investment was still not forthcoming.

- **Equality in service access:** The thematic discussion provided important arguments for improving policies and setting clear targets to improve equality of access. Monitoring systems need to provide disaggregated statistics so progress on equality of access can be tracked and decision-making can be based on data and evidence. Several countries expressed in their commitments the need to balance urban and rural development.

- **Adherence to plans, legislation and regulation:** Some countries committed to new frameworks and responsibilities, however, the central issue in many countries, as is evident from the GLAAS findings, is adherence to and implementation of existing agreements.

- **Human resources and technical capabilities:** A common theme, in the GLAAS report and ministerial commitments, was the need to address institutional and capacity weaknesses for service delivery. More people are needed, and those people need the right skills. Building capacity and skills were especially evident in the commitments made by fragile states.

- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Ministers agreed with the adage that “what gets measured gets done.” Commitments to improving management systems included acquiring the technical skills and defining more precise and measurable indicators.
• **Political prioritization of WASH and WASH in the post-2015 dialogue:** It was agreed that greater attention is needed, especially in larger countries, to build political will for WASH at local levels. Ministers expressed a strong consensus to have WASH featured prominently in the post-2015 agenda.

• **Engaging the private sector:** Some public-private partnerships are being developed but the pace of engagement, especially at the local level, is slow. Some countries, such as in East Asia, expressed the need for clear and transparent mechanisms that promote competition and encourages participation, including in government tendering processes.

### Summary of ministerial commitments

H.E. Mr. Wais Ahmad Barmak, Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, presented a two-page statement of the over 300 commitments made by over 40 countries. Hon. Mrs. Sarah Reng Ochekpe, Minister of Water Resources of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and President of the African Ministers’ Council on Water (AMCOW) presented a short summary of the sector ministers’ commitments at the HLM during a session moderated by the UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson:

“Sector Ministers endorsed a bold vision of Universal Access to WASH, set within a broader vision of economic growth. Commitments set ambitious national targets and established new commitments for eliminating open defecation. Responding to [DSG’s] your call to action, about half the countries pledge to eliminate open defecation by 2025.

**Achieving national targets demands better targeting of investments to accelerate progress on sanitation and hygiene. To this end, sixty percent of countries committed to increase sector financing from domestic sources. Ministers also recognized the imperative to reduce growing inequalities.**

*Sustainability depends on strong institutions at national and local levels. Nearly two-thirds of countries made practical commitments to increase the capacity of sector institutions. Many made pledges to improve coordination between sectors.*

**Ministerial pledges contain a rich set of ideas that provide better incentives to build systems that last and change attitudes to sanitation and hygiene. Delivering this rich set of commitments requires partnerships. We need finance ministers to recognize the value of investing in sanitation, hygiene and water. We ask donors to commit to a much close alignment to our national plans. Please join us to turn these commitments into reality”**.

### Conclusion

Darren Saywell, the Vice-Chair of SWA wrapped up the SMM by thanking ministers for the preparation and presentation of their commitments. He looked forward to ministers of finance speaking to these commitments at the HLM. He committed the SWA steering committee and secretariat to follow up and support partners in the implementation of their 2014 commitments and the continuing high-level commitment dialogue.

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- #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