

African Sanitation and Hygiene Conference

29th July to 1st August 2002 : Johannesburg (Midrand),
South Africa

Conference Statement on Sanitation and Hygiene in Africa

Every hour, a hundred African children die from diarrhoea. Most of these lives can be saved through better access to sanitation and improved basic hygiene; the simple act of washing hands with soap can reduce deaths from diarrhoea by a third! Poor sanitation and hygiene weaken Africans through disease, disrupt the environment, exacerbate poverty through medical cost and lower productivity, and rob the poor and vulnerable of dignity.

At least 300 million (40%) of Africans do not have access to basic sanitation and hygiene; this number has *increased* by 70 million since the year 1990. Those without access are concentrated among the poorest and most vulnerable, and the problem is particularly severe in rapidly growing peri-urban areas. Epidemics, however, do not respect geographical boundaries or social status, so a threat to the most vulnerable is a threat to us all.

Over 150 decision-makers (including 8 ministers), sector professionals and activists from over 20 African countries and elsewhere met in Johannesburg from 29th July to the 1st August to launch a major thrust for improved hygiene and sanitation in Africa. Never before have both sector specialists and senior political leaders gathered from across a continent to address this enormous challenge. But while the challenge is great, the opportunity is greater and must be seized now.

We, the participants of the African Sanitation and Hygiene (Africasan) conference:

- understanding the lessons of successful African programmes in hygiene and sanitation,
- considering the very limited resources and priorities so far accorded to sanitation and hygiene, and
- knowing the vast improvements in health, comfort, dignity, and environmental quality that better sanitation and hygiene can achieve

therefore urge leaders and decision-makers in all fields to

- **Raise the profile of sanitation and hygiene in all political and developmental processes.** These include: international events such as the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and the Third World Water Forum in 2003; regional bodies such as the African Union and the African Ministerial Conference on Water;

sub-regional and national parliaments and legislatures; and the full range of local government processes. The importance of sanitation and hygiene must also be recognised in national and regional developmental frameworks such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD).

- **Develop and strengthen the clear policies and institutional frameworks needed to improve sanitation and hygiene;** as a first step, identify departmental leadership and clarify the responsibilities of the many government departments usually involved in the sector.
- **Develop realistic local , national and global targets for improved sanitation and hygiene;** in particular, support adoption and implementation of a global target of halving the number of people without access to sanitation and hygiene by 2015.
- **Increase the financial and human resources available to achieve these targets, and ensure that adequate resources are also available to monitor progress.**
- **Recognize the leadership of women in sanitation and hygiene.** As care-givers who suffer the consequences of managing health within the family, women have always been quicker than men to appreciate the importance of sanitation and hygiene; they have been at the forefront of efforts to improve them. This does not mean that men can “leave this challenge to women”, but rather that the role of women must be understood, respected, and supported if the challenge is to be met.
- **Make the most of public resources in sanitation and hygiene** by using them only for those items for which households and others cannot or will not pay (for example, hygiene promotion and awareness creation, school sanitation and hygiene.) Where subsidies are required, they must be carefully targeted to the most vulnerable.)
- **Involve all elements of society in meeting this challenge.** Children, parents, individual households, CBOs, NGOs, and the private sector,(especially small scale providers,) have a stake in sanitation and hygiene at least as great as that of the state. Each can contribute much to the solution, given the chance and a clear role to play. National campaigns such as the WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) campaign can be one way to initiate such partnerships.
- **Support the implementation and monitoring of the African and Regional Action Plans developed at this conference by the participants.**

More detailed recommendations, and further supporting information are presented in other conference documentation, including the African and Regional Action Plans.

Adopted by:

The participants of the African Sanitation and Hygiene Conference.