



United Nations Office to Support the
International Decade for Action
'Water for Life' 2005-2015

International Meeting on Water and Cooperation in Africa

20-22 April 2009
Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Islas Canarias, Spain

INFORMATIVE NOTE

The International Meeting on Water and Cooperation in Africa is being jointly organized by Casa Africa and the United Nations Office to Support the International Decade for Action 'Water for Life' 2005-2015 (UNO-IDfA) in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain, from 20-22 April 2009.

ORGANIZERS

Casa Africa is a public consortium created within the framework of Spain's Africa Plan. It was established as a result of a joint effort on the part of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MAEC) and the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation for Development (AECID), the Canary Islands Regional Government, the island administrations of Fuerteventura, Lanzarote, Gran Canaria and Tenerife and the Las Palmas de Gran Canaria Local Council, all of whom are represented through a Council of Directors.

Casa Africa was created as a space to facilitate open exchange and meetings among citizens of Africa and Spain. Its objectives are to promote awareness of the respective realities of Spain and Africa, and enhance overall Spanish-African cooperation as well as African-European dialogue between both cultures. It is also intended to serve as a catalyst and reference point for Spanish Africanism, from its base in the Canary Islands.

Casa Africa is committed to the struggle against poverty, to defending human rights, and promoting gender equality, sustainable development and cultural diversity. It also strives to attain the Millennium Development Goals.



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In 2003, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the years 2005–2015 the **International Decade for Action 'Water for Life'**. The primary goal of the Decade is to promote efforts to fulfill international commitments made on water and water-related issues by 2015. These commitments include the Millennium Development target of reducing by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015.

To facilitate implementation of the Decade's agenda, the City of Zaragoza in Spain is host to the **United Nations Office to Support the International Decade for Action 'Water for Life' 2005–2015**. The Office aims to:

- Contribute to the efforts of the United Nations in coordinating and ensuring follow-up to the implementation of internationally agreed goals in the areas of drinking water, sanitation and Integrated Water Resources Management.
- Raise awareness and create an enabling environment for achieving the ultimate goal of water and sanitation for all.
- Strengthen the capacities of Member States and other relevant stakeholders in addressing key obstacles impeding the implementation of the water and sanitation agenda.

BACKGROUND

Improving access to clean water and sanitation services and promoting integrated water resources management are essential to achieving poverty and hunger reduction, minimum human health and living standards, and supporting gender equality. Despite the absolute necessity of water for life, **2.6 billion** people worldwide still lack access to adequate sanitation, while **1.1 billion** do not have access to safe drinking water. This 'silent humanitarian crisis' hampers the quality of life of millions of people around the world and threatens prospects for human development in several countries. The situation is particularly acute in Africa, where the majority of the population does not have access to the minimum amount of water necessary to satisfy their basic daily needs or to an adequate sanitation system. As a result they are exposed to risks and preventable diseases.



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Humanity faces an ethical challenge: to eradicate an unequal situation that prevents most of the people on planet Earth from living their lives with dignity.

To tackle this situation, the international community adopted the Millennium Declaration in September 2000, and agreed to work together to secure peace and security and to reduce poverty through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). **Target 10 of MDG 7** engaged the international community to 'halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation'. As 2015 approaches it is clear that Africa is off-track, and efforts need to be increased and focused on key aspects.

The international community has responded with a number of efforts that aim to improve the situation. Numerous organizations are involved at different levels with the investment of significant funds. However, the evolving situation in Africa means it is necessary to ensure that the strategies implemented are both adequate and effective and that efforts are focused on key areas. Otherwise, weak cooperation mechanisms result in international cooperation efforts achieving only limited success.

In this context, Casa Africa and the United Nations Office to Support the International Decade for Action 'Water for Life' 2005-2015, have identified two key issues that need to be better addressed in terms of international cooperation strategies to facilitate the achievement of water and sanitation-related targets :

- Water governance (at both, national and local levels) as a prerequisite for sustainability of water and sanitation-related cooperation efforts.
- Reinforcement of coordination mechanisms, complementary and coherent cooperation efforts through partnership alliances, follow-up of international agreements, and information exchange and monitoring mechanisms.



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OBJECTIVES

Taking into consideration the outcomes and recommendations of several water-related initiatives in Africa, in particular, of the first African Water Week 'Accelerating Water Security for the Socio-Economic Development of Africa' (March 2008, Tunis), and the results of the International Conference on Financing for Development (November-December 2008, Doha), the main objective of the **International Meeting on Water and Cooperation in Africa** is to reinforce cooperation tools and mechanisms that will strengthen the capacities of African countries to achieve Target 10 of MDG 7.

The meeting will provide a platform to allow relevant stakeholders to participate in a dialogue aimed at:

1. Exchanging views on the role of international cooperation in the water governance field in Africa.
2. Identifying and evaluating existing coordination, information exchange and monitoring mechanisms.
3. Identifying gaps and key obstacles impeding the achievement of water and sanitation targets in the African region.
4. Examining actions implemented by cooperating actors on non-covered needs in the areas of water governance, water supply and sanitation in Africa.
5. Reorienting cooperation efforts in order to maximize their effectiveness in the water and sanitation fields.

This exercise is the first in a series of international meetings. It will focus specifically on how Spain's international cooperation is contributing and can contribute to improvements in water governance and the achievement of the water and sanitation targets in a selected group of African countries. The meeting will explore proposed strategies for dealing with identified needs and will aim to maximize the effectiveness of Spain's international cooperation with Africa in the water and sanitation



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sector, as well as analysing the results of cooperation efforts to date.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants will include:

- **Senior government officials** responsible for strategic planning in the water and sanitation sectors and the provision of water and sanitation services in the African countries considered as 'of main-interest' in the Africa Plan for 2009–2012 of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This includes the following countries: Angola, Cape Verde, Ethiopia, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia and Senegal.
- **Representatives from intergovernmental cooperation institutions from Africa and governmental cooperation institutions from Spain** with an interest in reinforcing international cooperation for the development of the water and sanitation sectors in Africa.
- **Distinguished experts** familiar with policy issues related to international cooperation, water governance and the institutional, technical, legal, financial and information challenges that need to be overcome in order to improve the situation of the water and sanitation sectors in Africa.
- **Representatives from international, African and Spanish NGOs** who represent civil society and are involved in international cooperation efforts in the water and sanitation sectors.
- **Representatives from United Nations organizations and programmes (UN-Water)** as facilitators of multilateral cooperation who are familiar with cooperation strategies aimed at achieving the MDGs.
- **Journalists** from the African region.



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STRUCTURE

To optimize the flow of information and facilitate discussions, the meeting will be structured as follows:

- **A plenary session**, where keynote speeches will present the objectives of the meeting, examine the status and general trends of water governance in Africa, and general trends in international cooperation for the water and sanitation sectors in Africa.
- **A set of successive thematic panels** where eminent experts and senior officials will facilitate interactive discussions on the progress, challenges and critical aspects of achieving Target 10 of MDG 7 in Africa, as well as on the actions that can and need to be taken to strengthen water governance across Africa to improve resource allocation and mobilize cooperation actors at all levels. Particular focus will be given to ways of strengthening cooperation mechanisms, in particular Spanish cooperation efforts, where these are currently inadequate, and identifying places where new mechanisms are needed. Every panel will be followed by a debate where all participants can explore areas and modalities for further international cooperation in the water governance, water supply and sanitation sectors.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The meeting is expected to lead to:

1. An improved understanding of current gaps and challenges in the water governance, water supply and sanitation fields in Africa, with a special focus on a particular group of selected countries.
2. A set of recommendations to improve the effectiveness of cooperation-resources allocation for the water and sanitation sector in Africa.
3. A better understanding of the role, implemented actions, strategies and policies of cooperation stakeholders in the water and sanitation fields in Africa.



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4. Improved orientation of strategic priorities for cooperation with Spain in order to achieve Target 10 of MDG 7 in Africa.
5. Strengthened collaboration between participating organizations to expedite the achievement of Target 10 of MDG 7 in Africa.
6. Reinforced networking between cooperation actors (international cooperation agencies, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders) and Member States on water governance, water supply and sanitation issues in Africa.

The report of the meeting, together with its proceedings, is expected to serve as a valuable source of information for decision-making at the national level and for organizing and better orienting Spanish and international cooperation in the water and sanitation sectors in a sub-set of countries in Africa.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Participants are responsible for obtaining visas for themselves. Organizers can support their application by sending a letter of support or verbal note to the relevant Embassy or Consulate.

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