



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, Spain**

## **Conclusions and recommendations\***

An estimated 1 million Africans die every year from sanitation, hygiene and drinking water-related diseases. Approximately 60% of the African population does not currently have access to safe sanitation. As a result of the deterioration of the water and sanitation sector, African countries face increasing challenges, such as water scarcity, desertification, hunger and poverty.

All participants to the meeting recognized that progress has been made to date, but a lot still remains to be done. There are still many deficiencies that need to be addressed.

Numerous conferences and meetings have recognized the main challenges facing the African continent, namely lack of capacity, finance, coordination and political will at the highest level to implement the decisions and other recommended actions.

All participants stressed the overabundance of declarations on water and sanitation and the low level of implementation. The countries and organizations present at the meeting recognized the numerous commitments made to date, and the need to now proceed quickly from rhetoric to action, looking ahead towards implementation. There is an urgent need to reinforce capacities to put commitments into practice, and ensure both accountability and follow-up.

The participants recognized that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have given visibility to the water and sanitation problem, contributing to placing water and sanitation high on the international political agenda and providing an important sense of urgency. But with six years to go before the 2015 deadline, research shows that the African continent as a whole will miss the water and sanitation targets. If current trends persist, Africa will



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

reach the water target in 2040 and the sanitation target in 2076. Very urgent measures need to be taken in order to accelerate implementation at all levels.

Furthermore, the participants stated that although the attainment of the MDGs on water and sanitation would be a great achievement, it is not enough. There is a need to guarantee universal access to safe water and sanitation. Otherwise, the situation in Africa will persist whereby an important percentage of the population – the poorest and the most vulnerable – is systematically excluded and discriminated against.

## **Conclusions**

Participating countries acknowledged that while certain African countries are lagging behind, great progress has been made by others; these were recognized during the meeting.

While national and regional disparities exist among African countries, the countries and national, regional and international organizations present at the meeting identified the following common barriers to implementation and challenges to extending water and sanitation services in Africa:

### ***Water governance***

- The lack of water governance is recognized as one of the main causes of the water and sanitation crisis but is still perceived as an abstract concept by most stakeholders.
- There is a need to reach a consensus on and systematize the concept of water governance and its components in order to be able to measure the degree of good or bad water governance at national, regional and global levels.
- Existing several initiatives aimed at improving water governance at local, national and regional level need to be further supported in order to facilitate effective implementation over the long term. Awareness of these initiatives needs to be better promoted to international cooperation actors, to facilitate better coordinate of efforts, priorities and activities with partner countries.

### ***Financing***



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

- There is a lack of budgetary allocation for water and sanitation in Africa. Financing has been recognized by all countries as a major challenge to achieving the MDG water and sanitation target. The commitment of additional resources for implementation is therefore needed.
- Most African countries are highly dependent on Official Development Assistance (ODA) to finance the extension of their water and sanitation services. ODA plays a key role due to the importance it has with respect to the total amount of financing in the sector.
- The current international economic and financial crisis is having significant consequences on the level of ODA allocated to the water and sanitation sector, which is decreasing globally.
- The income level disparity of the populations of African countries impedes the practical application of cost recovery policies, which in themselves should not form the main focus of water and sanitation policies.
- While national water and sanitation policies/strategies often exist, these lack links to financing strategies. Accordingly, the national budget and planning ministries are not involved in the development of budgets by the ministry of water.

***Monitoring, information, tracking***

- Most countries have difficulty in assessing their current status with regard to water and sanitation.
- There is a lack of information, monitoring, evaluation and tracking systems for the management of water resources and supply/sanitation systems.
- Data and information needed to make predictions and calculations for the management of water resources and systems, and design policies and strategies for the water and sanitation sector are often out of date or inexistent.
- Monitoring mechanisms need to be put in place to effectively measure progress towards the water and sanitation-related MDGs, as well as to collect solid data on which to develop national policies.



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

- In many cases, there is no monitoring system for water and sanitation. Where one does exist there is no corresponding link to other relevant offices, such as the national statistics office, the budget office, the health system, etc.
- There is a need to increase knowledge of water sector spending. Monitoring was recognized as an essential part of assessing the real impact of investments in meeting water targets.

### ***Capacity***

- There is a need for greater capacity at all levels (country level, international cooperation level, etc.) in order to operationalize commitments made.
- There is a scarcity of well-trained human resources: there are not enough skilled personnel in the water and sanitation sector.
- Most African countries are seeking to decentralize water and sanitation skills, but local administrations lack the financial and human resources capacity.
- A significant amount of water and sanitation infrastructure is out of service due to lack of maintenance and management capacities.

### ***Institutional and legal framework***

- Institutional weakness has been identified as one of the main barriers with regard to implementing policies and strategies in water and sanitation in most African countries.
- Due to the transversal and multi-sectoral nature of water, fragmentation in water-related responsibilities and lack of coordination among different actors and administrations is a common situation.
- Some countries have a ministry responsible for water resources, but in most countries there is no such 'home' for sanitation, responsibility for which is often buried among different institutions.
- One of the main advances of recent years has been the revision of legal frameworks, but this has not been accompanied by implementation of the necessary capacities.



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

### ***Partnerships and collaboration***

- Partnership with private companies is the most common approach in the majority of African countries to obtaining funding for infrastructure and expertise for the efficient management of water systems. Partnership with public operators is an option that has not been adequately explored.
- Furthermore, civil society is not sufficiently involved in water and sanitation decision-making processes.
- Collaboration on the management of transboundary water resources means not only managing and sharing the resource, but also the benefits derived from it.

### ***Availability of water resources***

- Some countries are also confronted with the challenge of very limited available water resources.

### ***Demography trends***

- Most African countries are experiencing rapid rates of population growth and uncontrolled urbanization.
- Informal urban settlements have very urgent needs related to water and sanitation.

### ***Sanitation***

- Extending sanitation services is a more complex challenge for African governments than extending access to water.
- Although sanitation amounts to much more than managing financial resources, lack of investment was stressed as one of the main concerns by all countries.
- Political awareness and concerted action are urgently needed to accurately position the sanitation issue.

### ***International cooperation***

- The African countries present at the meeting stressed that there were too many bureaucratic barriers in cooperation processes.



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

- African countries also highlighted the present sustainability challenge: the maintenance of water supply facilities and transfer of technologies are not sufficiently considered by most cooperation agents.
- They also recognized that, traditionally, most international cooperation efforts in the water and sanitation sector in Africa have focused on the most urgent needs and the delivery of 'ready-made' products and solutions. Instead, the mechanisms required by society at the local level need to be autonomous – a point that has not received sufficient consideration by donor countries. There is a need to address cooperation projects in a holistic manner, involving local communities and to think in terms of long-term collaboration.
- The changing priorities and interests of donor countries are also factors in the deterioration of the water and sanitation situation, as these make aid unpredictable and impede the prospect of long-term collaboration.

The case of Spanish cooperation with regard to water and sanitation in Africa was specifically addressed and the following issues were raised:

- Spanish cooperation is progressively increasing its interest and involvement in Africa, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Spanish cooperation accords great significance to the sustainable management of water resources and has given particular importance to the water and sanitation issue in its cooperation planning and strategy for the period 2009–2012, with the objective of promoting the human right to water and improving the access to water and basic sanitation while ensuring environmental sustainability.
- One of the main consequences of the importance accorded to water and sanitation within the Spanish Agency for Cooperation and Development (AECID) has been the creation of a sectoral directorate specifically devoted to this issue.



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

## Recommendations

The following recommendations were issued following the conclusions of the meeting:

- Advocacy actions should target political and social leaders at different levels to gain their commitment and active support for the water and sanitation cause.
- It is necessary to invest in efforts to generate a common and shared vision and framework among all stakeholders on important issues where consensus has still not been reached, for example, the concept of water governance or the human right to water.

### *Water governance*

- Create and provide tools to improve and objectively measure water governance at national, regional and global levels.
- Include pro-poor and gender mainstreaming within water governance. Establish and improve specific follow-up actions for these groups. In particular, access to water and sanitation for the very poor need to be better addressed.

### *Budget, financing and investment*

- The commitment of additional resources to permit implementation is urgently needed, with levels of investment commensurate to the challenges ahead.
- Advocate support for water and sanitation in Africa at all levels to mobilize the required resources.
- Provide tools to increase knowledge of water sector spending.
- At country level, allocate a specific budget line for improved sanitation and access to safe drinking water, including rural areas.
- Governments need to properly prioritize water and sanitation financing in their national plans and increase the profile of water and sanitation in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and other relevant strategy-related processes.



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

- National budgets need to be utilized to remove non-structural constraints (institutional constraints, financial constraints, human resources constraints, etc.).

### ***Monitoring, information, tracking***

- Allocate more resources (financial, technical, etc.) to monitoring, information and tracking systems.
- Develop and/or improve water and sanitation monitoring, information and reporting systems to track progress against commitments at all levels, and facilitate information and data-sharing among all parties (international cooperation, national governments, civil society, etc.).
- Facilitate the creation of platforms for the exchange of experiences. Also facilitate the collection, analysis and sharing of good practices and lessons learned in order to enhance multilateral and horizontal cooperation at all levels (among international cooperation actors, countries themselves, and among civil society organizations, etc.).
- At the global level, undertake efforts to harmonize existing monitoring and reporting activities in the water and sanitation sector in order to increase their effectiveness.
- Increase support for AMCOW's lead role to establish a regional roadmap for follow-up, monitoring and reporting progress in line with national strategies.
- At the national level, develop and strengthen monitoring tools to facilitate action by governments and other stakeholders, and to bring about consistency with global mechanisms.
- Ensure that African ministers and authorities are sufficiently briefed and have access to comprehensible information on water and sanitation.
- Involve other sectors (health sector, etc.) in awareness raising, information and monitoring activities on water and sanitation.

### ***Capacity***

- Give higher priority to capacity development, both in country assistance strategies and water sector funding mechanisms.





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

- Reinforcement of human resources, knowledge sharing, and monitoring and managing capacities should be prioritized at the national level and among international donors.
- Invest in human resources capacity specializing in the different aspects of extension of water and sanitation services, their operation and maintenance.

### ***Institutional and legal framework***

- Institutional responsibilities need to be better addressed and coordinated.
- Create a single lead institution in charge of inter-ministerial coordination for all water and sanitation-related issues (financing, sector management, etc.), accountable at the highest level.
- Reinforce institutional and legal frameworks to guarantee citizens and providers are protected alike and, in particular, that access is ensured to the most vulnerable and in-need segment of the population.

### ***Partnerships and collaboration***

- Further explore and reinforce public-public partnerships. Public operators often demonstrate the same valuable expertise as private companies in providing water and sanitation services, managing these systems, and recovering costs. Being non-profit organizations, they also demonstrate great potential in bringing services to the poorest.
- Further reinforce international partnerships for the management of transboundary waters and raise awareness among politicians, decision-makers, civil society, etc., of the importance of sharing, not only the resource, but also the benefits derived from the shared integrated management of the basin (e.g. risk management, preservation of ecosystems, water security issues, hydropower, etc.)
- Identify potential synergies among existing programmes and initiatives and combine efforts to increase their effectiveness.
- Strengthen regional collaboration between African countries to facilitate knowledge-sharing, build on existing initiatives and efforts, reinforce existing mechanisms, and identify potential duplications and gaps to expedite change.



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

### ***Availability of water resources***

- Make better use of existing water resources and consider inclusion into national legislation of the World Health Organization recommendations on safe reuse of human waste and water in agriculture.

### ***International cooperation***

- Comply with and ensure implementation of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. Take into account recommendations included in the latest evaluation of implementation, particularly with regard to the following aspects:
  - Country ownership
  - Reinforcement of mutual accountability mechanisms
  - Simplification and standardization of processes and administrative procedures for cooperation. Donor countries should harmonize and ensure a common approach in the water and sanitation sector. This process would be facilitated by the creation of a trust fund for water and sanitation similar to the Malaria trust fund
  - Further promote coherence and coordination among international cooperation actors
  - Ensure alignment of development assistance with national strategies.
- Mobilize additional financial and technical resources to support access to safe drinking water and sanitation in order to complement efforts made by national governments.
- Increase support to African efforts; provide financial and technical assistance for water and sanitation promotion.
- Explore and reinforce new forms of cooperation, in particular, to support access to safe drinking water and sanitation in rural areas. Among these, decentralized cooperation between local authorities from different countries should be strengthened and accompanied by reinforcement of capacities.



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

- Guarantee project sustainability by moving from a simple delivery of funds and/or infrastructure to a holistic approach. Investment in water supply infrastructure needs to address the issues of who will maintain it; where the financial resources, personal and institutional skills to do so will come from; and whether they need to be reinforced. The international cooperation effort needs to be maintained until the project acquires credibility and sustainability by itself. This requires further coordination with the partner country.
- Because of the nature of the water and sanitation sector, it is necessary to progress from short-term approaches to long-term collaborations. These encourage more stable and predictable support from international cooperation, which in turn facilitates long-term planning and implementation.

***No consensus areas***

- Although all participants acknowledged sustainable access to clean water and safe sanitation as basic human needs, not all recognized water as a basic human right. This issue was highly controversial, suggesting a need for fostering a better understanding of what the human right to water exactly means, and what the added value will be of recognizing it in relationship to the current water and sanitation crisis.

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