

Declaration of the Pre-SACOSAN Civil Society Meet: OUR DEMANDS FOR URGENT ACTION

Vishwa Yuvak Kendra, New Delhi; November 17th, 2008

We, the participants of the Pre-SACOSAN Civil Society Meet organised on 16 and 17 November 2008 in New Delhi by the Freshwater Action Network South Asia (FANSA), WaterAid and the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) and those involved in a series of country level consultations; representing NGOs, CBOs, grassroots representatives and civil society organisations from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, submit the following declaration to the delegates of SACOSAN III.

There is a sanitation crisis in South Asia demanding urgent action. Ten lakh children have died from diarrhoea in South Asia in the 2 years since SACOSAN II. At 1 billion, the region has the highest number of unserved and underserved people. This represents human suffering at an unprecedented scale, obstructing people's right to lead healthy, productive, dignified lives.

Since the organisation of the first SACOSAN in 2003 in Bangladesh, the governments of South Asia have subscribed to two Ministerial Declarations, committing to an ambitious programme of action. These commitments must be honoured - the need for more political commitment, better coordination and partnerships and good governance continue to constrain progress in the sector. While we agree that some progress has been made against these commitments, there is a need to speed up and scale up the delivery - the human cost of this crisis means that business as usual is not an option.

We have identified the following eight key issues that need to be addressed in order to achieve equitable, substantial and sustainable growth in the number of people able to access safe sanitation and hygiene services.

We commit ourselves to work on these issues, to create models, seek innovation, and demonstrate best practices, working alongside communities, governments, international agencies and the private sector.

The right to sanitation and water

Access to sanitation is not only a development imperative; it is also a human right, firmly grounded in international human rights law. For better health outcomes, sanitation requires water supply in close proximity. Most governments in the region have recognised the right to safe drinking water and basic sanitation in the "Message from Beppu" at the first Asia Pacific Water Summit in 2007.

We call on governments to:

- Reaffirm their prior recognition that access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation is a basic human right and a fundamental aspect of human security and dignity.

Governance

Progress in the sanitation sector is constrained by weak accountability due to poorly defined institutional arrangements and the lack of accurate data on the real situation. Local governments, CBOs and CSOs are often sidelined in the process of planning and implementation. Recent advances in the right to information in the region can be used to improve service delivery outcomes and better governance.

We call on governments to:

- Establish accountable leadership at the national level, ensuring coordination among all relevant line ministries.
- Place local governments at the centre of planning and implementation of all sanitation programmes, coordinating activities of all actors at the local level.
- Create a dedicated budget line for sanitation with adequate financial provision to achieve universal access targets set by governments, and ensure judicious use of subsidies.
- Put in place mechanisms for independent assessments of the

status of sanitation and the process of implementation of programmes.

Health outcomes

Improved health is a key outcome of sanitation. Sanitation and hygiene promotion are the most cost-effective health interventions. We need better information on health impacts, both to improve the effectiveness of sanitation programmes and to convince policy makers of the need to invest in sanitation.

We call on governments to:

- Involve the health sector in designing sanitation programmes and in monitoring health impacts.
- Develop and strengthen mechanisms to collect, validate and analyse incidence of excreta related diseases which should form the basis of policy and programme design.

Urban sanitation

Urban sanitation, including solid and liquid waste management, is a critical issue with implications for the environment and the dignity of the urban poor.

We call on governments to:

- Ensure that all urban and peri-urban communities have access to sanitation, de-linking access to basic services from land tenure and ensuring land tenure security, and that all public places have sanitation facilities.
- Prepare city/town/peri-urban area wide maps of existing infrastructure to improve transparency and make informed investment decisions and interventions in which all stakeholders can participate.
- Facilitate and scale-up local initiatives and promote appropriate and improved technologies using a decentralised approach and partnerships between communities, public and private sectors.

Manual scavenging

The practice of manual scavenging is a violation of human rights, a grave infringement of people's dignity, and the worst form of caste-based discrimination. Laws to eradicate the practice have been passed in some countries but these are not enforced.

We call on governments to:

- Acknowledge and record the continuing practice of manual scavenging in order to allow for accurate assessments of the scale of the practice.
- Put into place improved waste management practices and technologies to avoid human contact with harmful waste and ensure safety of workers until the practice is eradicated.
- Eradicate manual scavenging by 2010, and support alternative livelihoods and education for all former scavengers and their families.

Sanitation in educational institutions

Many schools in the region do not have adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities, keeping children, especially girls, out of school. Sanitation and hygiene promotion are about behaviour change. Behaviours are formed at a young age and school sanitation and hygiene education can build a healthy future generation; children are also effective agents of change.

We call on governments to:

- Make budgetary provision for government schools and regulate private schools to construct and maintain sufficient and gender-friendly sanitation and hygiene facilities (soap and water supply) with facilities for menstrual hygiene management.
- Include hygiene as an integral

part of education and improve monitoring of school sanitation and hygiene education programmes.

Menstrual Hygiene

Unsafe menstrual hygiene practices place a heavy and unrecognised burden on women in the region. This remains a taboo subject, surrounded by religious and cultural myths, and a blind spot in sanitation and hygiene promotion programmes.

We call on governments to:

- Recognize menstrual hygiene as integral to hygiene and health and sensitise and build capacity of people on Menstrual Hygiene Management by integration into sanitation, hygiene and health programmes.

Exclusion

Sanitation programmes currently are not reaching a significant proportion of the population. Especially vulnerable groups include - differently-abled people, those affected and infected by HIV/AIDS, tribals and discriminated castes, religious minorities, migratory people, construction workers, urban non-tenured slums dwellers, floating and homeless populations, those affected by natural calamities, Internally Displaced People and people living in hard to reach areas.

We call on governments to:

- Raise awareness at all levels on issues of exclusion and build commitments to excluded groups into policy statements and implementation guidelines.
- Include methodologies to identify the poor and marginalised and adopt inclusive approaches in all sanitation programmes and monitor performance in reaching these groups.

We as CSOs in the region continue to commit to:

- Strive for the recognition of the right to safe drinking water and basic sanitation in our countries' constitutions, laws and sector policies and support communities to realize this right, highlighting the plight and experience of excluded communities, amplifying their voices and complementing their actions.
- Lobby governments through advocacy, legal action and awareness raising, to enforce the laws and government schemes to end manual scavenging and achieve sanitation for all.
- Demonstrate and implement innovative sanitation and hygiene models in communities and schools, embodying inclusion, equity and community initiative and generate evidence of successful approaches.
- Facilitate local communities, CBOs and government institutions to create partnerships that support local initiative and strengthen capacity at local level.
- Raise awareness on school sanitation and hygiene, addressing the special needs of adolescent girls, including menstrual hygiene management.
- Focus our resources on working with excluded groups to enable them to live dignified and secure lives and share our experiences widely.

Civil society has a long history of engagement in sanitation and hygiene behaviour change. We are committed to supporting the SACOSAN process to tackle the sanitation crisis in the region by jointly implementing and monitoring progress on past and future declaration commitments. We submit the above to you in a spirit of collaboration, recognising that all actors will need to work together to achieve sanitation for all.