

UNSGAB Dialogue with African Leaders
May 27 2008, 8:45 – 12:30
Tokyo Japan

SUMMARY

UNSGAB Chair, His Royal Highness, Prince Willem Alexander of the Netherlands, opened the session and said he looked forward to candidly discussing African priorities and how UNSGAB can be most helpful.

Opening remarks were delivered by H.E. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Ms Anna Tibaijuka, Executive Director of UN-Habitat and H.E. Mr. Bruno Jean-Richard Itoua, President of the African Ministers Council on Water.

In addition, following ministers attended the dialogue.

- H.E. Mr. Abu Zeid, Minister for Water Resources and Irrigation, Arab Republic of Egypt
- H.E. Dr. George Chabonda, Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, Republic of Malawi
- H.E. Mr. Felicio Zacarias, Minister of Public Works, Republic of Mozambique
- H.E. Mr. Mohamed Akotey, Minister of Environment and Desertification, Republic of Niger
- H.E. Ms Maria Mutagamba, Minister of Water, Republic of Uganda
- H.E. Mr. Ng'andu P. Magande, Minister of Finance & National Planning, Republic of Zambia

Participants discussed how unpredictable settlement patterns can complicate the delivery of water and sanitation services. For example, in Zambia the freedom of movement is a constitutional right and so it is not possible to force people to settle where it is easiest to deliver water and sanitation services. People migrate from rural areas into the cities and they can settle in areas where planners want to put a sewage line or electricity grid however it is difficult to move the settlements.

The need to step up efforts to break the sanitation taboo was considered. Approximately 10% of girls continue to drop out of schools since safe and clean sanitation facilities are not available. Ideas such as a first ladies or celebrity campaign were suggested. In Uganda, because of the IYS, the President discussed the need for better sanitation for the first time.

Financing for water supply and sanitation was discussed in detail. Water supply and sanitation are not attractive areas for investors, but it is the role of African leaders to make it attractive, since it is clear that ODA will not provide enough capital in order to meet the MDGs. More effective engagement from African civil society and the private sector is needed in part through more integrated projects that meet multiple objectives.

Egypt is preparing integrated water resource management plans and has also reviewed the country's tariff system and now includes water and sanitation in the electricity bill.

National budgets must allot a greater amount to water and sanitation. Funding should come from users, and the financial markets can provide some capital. Clearly private companies can not replace the government in these areas, rather they should operate under the guidance of the government. Private companies should be reviewed on a case by case basis and good experiences must be shared, such as the Senegalese private public partnership. Some expressed caution regarding the role of the private sector since in some places after privatization in the early 1990s there was an increase in service breakdowns. Also, a privatized model makes it difficult to service rural areas since it is very difficult to turn a profit in sparsely populated areas. Some suggested that instead of privatization, the focus should be on greater public financing with an emphasis on capacity building for public utility workers.

The clear linkages among water, sanitation and health were highlighted. For example, approximately 50% of hospital beds are occupied with patients who are ill because of water.

Large scale sanitation infrastructure is extremely expensive. There are many models that are smaller scale and lower cost that could be scaled up in many African countries. This highlights the need for more technical assistance and the sharing of experiences on how to efficiently and effectively deliver sanitation services.

Ways to provide compelling arguments to donors for water and sanitation funding were suggested. For example, African countries could demonstrate how they are prioritizing water in their budgetary processes and that the right lines are in place. For water and sanitation urban infrastructure funding, countries can demonstrate they have established the right legal and regulatory structures to effectively support public private partnerships.

The UNSGAB Vice-Chair, Uschi Eid wrapped up the session. She said that the themes addressed in the Dialogue could be taken up in the AU Summit discussion. She thanked all the participants and said that one of the greatest African leaders, Kofi Anan had said water is the key to combat poverty. He endorsed the water for life decade, and established UNSGAB to help ensure the MDG targets on water and sanitation are achieved. This is UNSGAB's context she said and it is why the Board fully supported an AU Summit to address water and sanitation issues.