

**Commission on Sustainable Development
Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting**

**STATEMENT BY
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ON BEHALF OF THE AFRICAN GROUP**

New York, 1 March 2005

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the African Group. I wish to thank the Secretary General for the reports prepared for this session.

The African Group associates itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Jamaica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Mr. Chairman,

The clusters under discussion during this cycle, human settlements, water and sanitation are at the core of any development strategy for Africa. As we prepare for the policy decisions we will take on human settlements, water and sanitation, it will be important to note that in the programme of work of the CSD adopted at CSD11 the sustainable development of Africa was identified as a crosscutting issue with provision made for its consideration in all the cycles of work of the Commission. The reports prepared for CSD13 show that while African countries have been making progress, overall they still lag behind other regions in the provision of access to water, sanitation and human settlements.

In addition, the findings of the UN Millennium Project 2005 Report also show that Africa is lagging behind other regions in meeting its targets. It is however important to note that African countries have made initiatives targeted at achieving the goals of access to safe water, provision of human settlements and addressing sanitation.

Within the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) we have identified action plans on this three clusters that are vital in comprehensively implementing the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the Millennium Development Goals on Water, Sanitation and Human Settlements.

SANITATION

Mr. Chairman,

The target set at the WSSD for sanitation enabled the recognition of sanitation as an important development priority in its own right. This was an important step, as sanitation needs to be an integral part of national development policies.

Sanitation coverage in Africa is still low especially in informal settlements and the rural areas. As the Secretary-General's report shows, only 31 per cent of rural inhabitants in developing countries are estimated to have access to any type of improved sanitation. It is also important to promote demand for sanitation services through education and hygiene campaigns. Public education programmes need to be developed with communities and these should also be culturally sensitive.

The report of the Secretary-General also notes that the rate of recent progress in extending rural sanitation has been slow in Sub-Saharan Africa and it calls for a dramatic escalation of efforts with an increased commitment from the donors to provide assistance. The report also recognizes that most developing countries cannot achieve the sanitation targets without the cooperation and support of the international community. We therefore support the Secretary General's proposal for increased ODA that can target sanitation directly.

In addition we also wish to reiterate that debt relief will also help African countries to free resources for the provision of basic services such as sanitation.

In this regard we also wish to draw attention to the findings of the Millennium Project Report that external financing is important for developing countries in the development of sanitation infrastructure.

We support the call of the Millennium Project that external finance should be provided in the form of grants. While the private sector plays a role we agree with the Millennium Project that in many developing countries with high levels of poverty the private sector does not provide a source of new financing for water and sanitation.

We also wish to highlight the African Development Bank's rural water supply and sanitation initiative that aims to expand rural water and sanitation coverage in sub-Saharan Africa to 80 per cent by 2015. This programme however needs to be supported by the international community.

Mr. Chairman,

In urban areas, international assistance will need to focus on wastewater treatment due to its high cost and its requirement for advanced technical skills. Capacity building in this area, focusing on both the human and institutional development is thus of crucial concern to African countries.

Technology transfer for the provision of sanitation should be highlighted. The African Group also stresses that South-South cooperation should be enhanced in the area of technology transfer.

The African Group emphasizes the need for the development of an institutional follow-up on sanitation issues within the United Nations system. This would enhance the monitoring of progress and also provide an institutional framework for addressing sanitation as development.

WATER

Mr. Chairman,

While the countries of sub-Saharan Africa have managed to increase the provision of safe drinking water, close to 300 million people are still without access. By far the largest number of people without access to safe drinking water reside in rural areas.

Many countries in Africa will miss the target set in Johannesburg for the development, by 2005, of integrated water resources management and water efficiency plans. We therefore urge the international community and the United Nations system to increase their support in this area.

The African Group stresses that the provision of water is central to poverty eradication. In the rural areas, provision of water can help to boost rural welfare and incomes, which are also essential for maintaining water supply and other essential infrastructure.

As the Millennium Project Report has shown, developing countries with low incomes are unlikely to attract private sector investments in water infrastructure development. We therefore urge the international community

to increase the levels of official development assistance in the form of grants to support African countries.

This should be accompanied by debt cancellation, as it will be impossible for African countries to address poverty eradication in general when they are saddled with unsustainable levels of debt.

Multilateral and regional development banks should enhance their assistance with the provision of financing for water. We emphasize the need to support the efforts of regional financial institutions. In this regard we call the relevant stakeholders to give their full support to the Water for African Cities programme.

African countries should also be assisted with the development of low-cost financing mechanisms including micro-credit and other schemes that could be accessed by communities, especially women, in African countries for the provision of water services and infrastructure.

We also agree with the Millennium Project that the international community should not delay investments until the reforms are completed if the 2015 targets are to be met. The learning-by-doing approach is practical and can yield immediate results for African countries.

Mr. Chairman,

As noted earlier, institutional and human resource development and capacity building is critical including through the sharing of best practices.

There is need to strengthen the managerial and technical capacities of local entities who are directly involved in water provision. In addition, south-south cooperation and the sharing of best practices should be supported.

The African Group also believes that the development of water related infrastructure is also important for flood and drought reduction and response in shared river basins, ranging from information sharing to coordinated disaster mitigation planning.

We also urge the international community to support African countries with the development of major infrastructure for water security and storage. Both

service delivery and infrastructure development are important for African countries.

As the Secretary General observes in his report, women are the main water haulers. There are therefore more likely to have the strongest interest in ensuring effective operation and maintenance of a convenient and safe water source. Their involvement in policy design on water is thus of crucial importance. In addition, tapping local knowledge can result in technical designs and management arrangements better suited to local circumstances. It is thus important for donor coordination in the promotion of local knowledge in both water management and development of technical designs.

We wish to stress the important role of the UN system in providing assistance to African countries including technical assistance for the improvement of capacities.

I thank you for your attention