



SOUTH ASIAN CONFERENCE ON SANITATION (SACOSAN)

21st – 23rd October 2003

Bangladesh China Friendship Conference Centre Dhaka, Bangladesh

The Dhaka Declaration on Sanitation

1. We, the Heads of Delegation from the 9 countries participating in the South Asian Conference on Sanitation (SACOSAN) in Dhaka, Bangladesh, October 21-23, 2003, which was attended by 4 Ministers, State Ministers, senior civil servants, professionals from sector institutions, academia, civil society, NGOs, Development Partners, and the private sector,

- (1) *recognizing* that, although much has been achieved in last decade, the overall picture of sanitation in South Asia still remains dismal, and the practice of open defecation, unsanitary disposal of human excreta and other unhygienic practices by the majority of people in the region is a serious threat to the quality of life, control of disease and the environment;
- (2) *concerned* that about one million children under the age five in the South Asia region die each year of water and sanitation related diseases;
- (3) *being aware* of the need to pursue common strategies under a common definition of sanitation, to accelerate the progress of good sanitation and hygiene promotion in South Asia in order to improve people's quality of life and reduce child mortality and morbidity, and fulfil the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the commitments made in the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg;
- (4) *recognising* that significant improvements in the situation of sanitation and safe water will have large positive impacts on poverty reduction by increasing health and productivity and therefore should have a central role in country's poverty reduction strategies;
- (5) *noting* that it is the vulnerable and marginalized population in urban and rural areas that suffer most from minimal access to sanitation facilities;
- (6) *observing* from the experiences of the last two decades that conventional, top-down sanitation programmes driven only by high hardware subsidy have not brought about the desired improvements and sustainability, but that the use of direct and indirect subsidies for software are a must for sustainable sanitation promotion;

(7) *understanding* that some Government Organizations, NGOs and small-scale private initiatives in generating demand and delivering door-to-door services have demonstrated remarkable achievements of basic sanitation (every household having access to a hygienic latrine and practicing good hygiene);

2. Unanimously agreed that the focus of proper sanitation and hygiene in the region should be based on a paradigm that is: “people centered, community-led, gender-sensitive and demand driven” and that the following principles should facilitate this new paradigm, wherein the thrust:

- (1) Should be on the elimination of open defecation and other unhygienic practices, as well as the promotion of good hygienic practice;
- (2) Should provide hardware subsidies only to the poorest of the poor, who have no means of helping themselves, to be given under appropriate and effective monitoring and evaluation arrangements;
- (3) Should recognize the need for community subsidies for promotion, awareness, capacity-building and the creation of funding mechanisms for scaling up sanitation and hygiene programmes;
- (4) Should focus on understanding and creating demand, sustaining attitudinal and behavioural change and encouraging wider community participation, as opposed to top-down approaches to subsidized sanitation programmes;
- (5) Should consider giving proper and appropriate acknowledgement and rewards to Local Governments and communities demonstrating tangible success in the elimination of open defecation and other unhygienic practices, intensifying advocacy through political and religious leadership;
- (6) Should focus on the hygienic disposal of children’s faeces, other hygienic practices and the development of hygiene education in school and community sanitation programmes;
- (7) Should recognize the need for gender-sensitive programmes;
- (8) Should be on the research and development of a range of viable, locally-appropriate, technological options that should be available at affordable costs;
- (9) Should create an enabling environment for small-scale private providers and innovative technical and financial mechanisms to be mainstreamed to promote better, faster and cheaper service delivery;
- (10) Should encourage Local Governments to engage in strategic partnerships with community based organizations (CBOs), NGOs and other concerned actors, so as to facilitate scaling up of this new paradigm;
- (11) Should recognize the need for special arrangements when dealing with sanitation programmes in conflict and emergency situations;

3. And the Ministers and other Heads of Delegations, on behalf of the delegates at the Conference, committed to accelerating the progress of proper sanitation and hygiene in the South Asia region, by:

- (1) Formulating and implementing national programmes in partnership with all sanitation stakeholders, to raise the profile of sanitation and hygiene in all political and development processes, leading to overall improvements in health;
- (2) Establishing national plans and programmes in partnership with all sanitation stakeholders, particularly through mechanisms like the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs);
- (3) Working with other stakeholders to develop broad based alliances and coalitions, sharing and disseminating best practice, monitoring progress and aligning implementation programmes;
- (4) Sustaining collaborative efforts towards achieving the MDGs in sanitation, through the development of a SACOSAN Inter-Country Working Group, to meet annually to share information and exchange ideas on progress in countries across the region;
- (5) Agreeing to organize a SACOSAN meeting to be held every two years (the hosting country will be the coordinating point for Inter-Country Working Group for the period leading up to the next biannual event) with Ministers, Heads of Agencies, development partners and other actors with the potential to introduce and sustain a viable regional cooperation for sanitation, with the first of these events hosted by Pakistan in 2005, and the second hosted by India in 2007.

4. We express our profound appreciation to the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh for successfully hosting this first South Asian Conference on Sanitation (SACOSAN). We are fully appreciative of the cordial and warm hospitality accorded to us and thank the Government and the People of Bangladesh for the excellent arrangements made for the success of the conference.

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Honorable Minister for Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives
People's Republic Of Bangladesh

(Mr. Kashi Ram Rana)
Honorable Minister for Rural Development
Government of India

(Mr. Buddhiman Tamang)
Honorable Minister for Physical Planning and Works
His Majesty's Government of Nepal

(Mr. Mohammed Nasir Khan)
Honorable Federal Minister for Health
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(Dr. Azam Mehraban Mir)
Honorable Deputy Minister for Health
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