

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE GAMBIA

**3rd WORLD PARLIAMENTARY FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
(COMBATING INEQUALITY THROUGH SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL INCLUSION)**

PANEL SESSION

(ENSURING RURAL ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER SUPPLY, SANITATION AND HYGIENE)

INTERVENTIONS BY THE HON. SPEAKER- MARIAM JACK DENTON

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BALI- INDONESIA

- Hon. Members of the Indonesian House of Representatives;
- Fellow Panellists;
- The Moderator;
- Distinguished participants of this panel session;
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Afternoon;

1. I am extremely delighted to be part of this panel to discuss what is arguably the most fundamental issues in the life of any human being- water, sanitation and hygiene. I therefore wish to commend the organisers for allowing us to come together to discuss the very critical issues with a view to chart a way forward to guaranteeing their availability everyone in our respective countries.
2. It cannot be argued otherwise that the benefits of having access to an improved drinking water source can only be fully realized when there is also access to improved sanitation and adherence to good hygienic practices. Beyond the immediate, obvious advantages of people being hydrated and healthier, access to water, sanitation and hygiene – known collectively as WASH – has profound wider socio-economic impacts, particularly for women and girls.
3. The fact that WASH is the subject of dedicated targets within the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 6) is testament to its fundamental role in public health and therefore in the future of sustainable development. Indeed, access to safe water and sanitation are human

rights, as recognized in 2010 by the United Nations General Assembly. For universal fulfilment of these rights to become reality, we will need the right systems: well-resourced, capable institutions delivering services and changing behaviour in resilient and appropriate ways.

4. The SDG baselines prepared by the WHO-UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) states that in 2015, 2.1 billion people lacked water services reaching the new standards, including 159 million who still drank untreated water directly from surface water sources such as streams or lakes. As at 2015 hygienic sanitation facilities for almost 4.5 billion people was not available and out of this figure 892 million people – mostly in the rural areas – still practiced open defecation. These statistics reveal a serious challenge and places greater urgency on our governments to do more in these areas as the SDGs relating to poverty (SDG 1), health (SDG 3), education (SDG 4) and gender equality (SDG 5) are not achievable without improvements in the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH.)
5. In The Gambia, this challenge has to a large extent been addressed with the provision of hygienic sanitary facilities in the rural areas. The Government of The Gambia has recently launched a \$ 1.8 billion clean water and sanitation project. The project will provide rural water supply and sanitation facilities and services to improve community health in the five rural regions of the country. It will also facilitate building the capacity of local authority institutions (regional area councils), Village Development Committees (VDCs), thus reflecting the Government's commitment to decentralized decision making by focusing implementation at the district level.

6. Overall, it is anticipated that this project will improve access to safe drinking water supply and sanitation in the rural areas, from the current level of about 70% to 72% for water supply and from 40% to 44% for sanitation.
7. Suffice it to say, The Gambia Government is making progress towards attaining the SDGs goals related to child health with interventions to reach every child and mother in every district with low cost high impact interventions. These interventions include hand washing with soap and hygiene promotion, sanitation improvements, water safety/quality, and availability safe of water.
8. It is envisaged that the WASH programme will contribute to a 10 per cent reduction in the incidence of diarrhoea in children under five years and contribute to the achievement of improved learning environment in schools.
9. All these interventions form key components of the National Development Plan (2018-2021) which is aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals. This National Development Plan seeks to build '***a country that upholds the highest standard of governance, accountability and transparency; where social cohesion and harmony prevails among communities;; citizens enjoy a standard of living and access to basic services to enable them to lead descent and dignified lives; youth, women, children realize their full potential, and a nurturing and caring***

environment exists for the vulnerable; there is an enabling environment for our private sector to thrive; and our natural heritage is nurtured and preserved for future generations”.

10. The National Assembly through its oversight functions has established Committees that monitor the implementation of the National Development Plan and ensuring that all the sectors uphold and deliver their responsibilities. By regularly holding meetings and requesting reports, the National Assembly is bringing the NDP and the SDGs to the attention of the public and the media, thereby encouraging accountability at all levels. Due to their closeness to the people, the NAMs are also serving as advocates, mobilisers and first-line ‘ambassadors’ for the SDGs.

11. It should however, be noted that the challenges in the WASH sector are unlikely to be adequately addressed unless water security concerns, improved water resources management, and water and sanitation infrastructures are factored altogether with increased waste- water treatment and reuse.

12. The implementation of the Water and broader Sustainable Development Goals should therefore go beyond just basic access to water and sanitation. No country can thrive and prosper without ensuring water and sanitation for all in urban, rural, and hard to reach areas. Water is a human right and sanitation is the enhancer of human dignity.

13. Effective water and sanitation services in vulnerable communities, requires new public narratives to support improved sanitation practices and reliable sources of water that are free from contamination. This requires that we commit ourselves to a range of initiatives to spur progress on SDG 6 and other water related SDG targets, one of which is dedicated to ensuring universal access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene for the growing world population, estimated to reach around 10 billion people by 2050.

Conclusion

14. To conclude, I wish to recommend that to accelerate progress requires WASH – as part of the achievement of SDG 6 as a whole - to be higher on our political agenda, and WASH needs to be mainstreamed into national, sub-national, and community-level planning.

15. The sector requires predictable and sufficient finance that reaches the countries and people that need it the most. Transparent and strong governance and realistic country specific planning should be encouraged; however, such planning must be based on reliable data and rigorous analysis for planning, making decisions, and tracking progress.

16. Greater mutual accountability and coordination is also required among the developing countries, development partners, supporting governments, and their citizens.

17.And motivational works, in tandem with administrative policies, will be required to address practices that impede the access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

Thank you all for the kind attention.