



An Africa - Europe e-Conference, November 2007

About the Africa Working Group

The EU-Africa Strategic Partnership was launched in 2002 in Johannesburg and is implemented by the African component of the European Water Initiative. With this partnership, Europe and Africa aim to make an effective and joint contribution to reaching the MDG for water and sanitation in Africa. The partnership has set up an Africa Working Group (AWG), made up of representatives of AMCOW-TAC, EU Member States, the European Commission, civil society and the private sector, forming together a joint platform for dialogue on water-related issues.

Three Issues to Develop the Sanitation Sector

In the 2007 work plan, the topic of sanitation was given priority. The AWG identified three issues that need to be addressed to facilitate implementation of international commitments and development of sanitation services:

1. The definition of sound sanitation policies,
2. The support of local authorities to ensure the development of sanitation services locally,
3. The mobilisation of financing for sanitation infrastructure construction and service improvement.

An e-Conference to Identify Lines of Action

Over a three-week period, from 5 to 24 November 2007, an on-line conference was held on the three aforementioned themes to identify, on the basis of African and European partners experience and expertise, the most appropriate lines of action to take on the sanitation challenge. The end objective of this conference was to build joint messages to **contribute to international reflection in the context of events to take place throughout 2008, International Year of Sanitation**, in particular the AfricaSan+5 meeting and a high-level Africa-Europe meeting.

For more information:

The conference presentation documents and summaries are available on the European Water Initiative website (www.euwi.net) and the website of pS-Eau (www.pseau.org).

All contributions to the conference can be accessed at: <http://groups.google.fr/group/sanitation-assainissement>
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Three Themes Discussed during the Conference

1 – The building of national sanitation policies and strategies is an indispensable prerequisite for sector development. They provide the enabling framework for translating political will into concrete action, and constitute a reference framework for identifying the different roles and responsibilities. However, many African countries have inadequate policies, which are unable to respond to the sanitation challenges: who is responsible for this sector? What technical solutions should be promoted for each aspect of sanitation (i. access to sanitation, ii. waste water and excreta collection, iii. treatment)? How can the users' demands be taken into consideration?

2 – Strengthen and support local authorities to meet the challenges of sanitation service provision

Because they are close to the users and the different local operators, because sanitation is a public service that should be built locally, the local authorities have an important role to play in improving the sector. However, to fulfil this role, they must overcome many difficulties: the absence of recognition in national legislation, a lack of financial resources and skills, a lack of local strategies focusing on sanitation, ineligibility for international funding mechanisms.

3 – Financing sanitation infrastructure and service provision.

It is still difficult to mobilise resources, both on a national and local level, for the sanitation sector. This problem is exacerbated by the still dominant perception of sanitation as a component of drinking water projects, rather than as a priority in itself that can be dealt with specifically.

Conference Participants

Around one hundred participants registered on-line for the conference, and 49 contributions were made by 33 contributors (1/3 of those registered). Coming from both Africa (2/3) and Europe (1/3), these contributors represented NGOs, consultancies, local authorities, research organisations and governments as well as bi and multilateral institutions. Direct discussion among French and English speaking contributors was made possible by daily translation of all contributions.



The key messages of the e-conference

1-How to build sound sanitation policies?

“Encourage African political decision-makers to consider sanitation as a public service for which they are responsible”

High-level political support is a prerequisite for defining and implementing policy. Because sanitation policy in many countries is inadequate, lobbying by civil society is the most pertinent means to raise the necessary political awareness.

“Designate a single national authority responsible for sanitation”

In light of the wide range of stakeholders and actions, the sanitation sector needs a coordinating authority. Responsible for facilitating consensus and discussion and promoting chosen approaches, tools and solutions, this sector coordinating body must be recognised in the national legislation and be able to collaborate with the different ministries and state departments.

“Promote the wide development of on-site and semi-collective systems”

On-site sanitation and semi-collective sanitation, as a complement to collective sanitation, are two options that should be promoted to ensure the rapid development of sanitation services in Africa. These options must be developed taking into account the entire process, from access to sanitation services to waste treatment.

2-How to support local authorities to meet the challenges of developing sanitation services?

“Recognise the role of local authorities, increase their financial resources and build their capacities”

In order to fulfil their responsibilities regarding the implementation of sanitation services, which are yet to be consolidated within a legal framework, local authorities require training and decision-making and planning tools. Capacity-building actions should be accompanied by an increased transfer of finances from the national budget and technical support provided, in particular, by the State's decentralised technical departments.

National associations of local authorities are key partners in these processes.

“Support local authorities to build local sanitation strategies”

To define and set up actions at a local level, and to be able to maintain dialogue with development partners, each African local authority must have a local sanitation strategy, built with the collaboration of all local stakeholders, in response to the demands and needs of the population. To develop such strategies, which make it possible to set priorities and identify the most appropriate modes of action, national expertise, yet to be developed in each country, is essential.

“Involve all local sanitation stakeholders in sanitation service management”

To improve access to sanitation, all local stakeholders (service providers and users) must be involved. These stakeholders must be identified and their expectations heard to then involve them initially in formulating local strategies and subsequently in implementing them.

3-How to finance sanitation infrastructure and services?

“Assign the necessary funds to each link of the sanitation chain”

For each segment of the sanitation sector, and differentiating within the segments between investment costs and operating costs, specific sources of funding (national level, local level, household or the development sector) must be mobilised. Furthermore, allocation mechanisms for these funds need to be set up (direct payment by users, subsidies, micro-credit etc.).

“Build local and sustainable financing mechanisms”

Sector sustainability depends above all on the on-going capacity to mobilise funding locally. This funding can be raised for instance, by applying (moderate) taxes to existing public services which are financially profitable. The mobilisation of such resources shall make it possible to develop long-term programmes to provide access to sanitation, to cover operating costs of public infrastructure (sludge deposit sites, treatment stations, etc.), or even to leverage further funds from external sources.

Two Drivers of Sanitation Sector Development:

Local financing mechanisms that support households investments.

The emergence and consolidation of a dynamic sanitation market