

11 Recommendations from Dutch NGOs to achieve the Washington commitment to sustainable water and sanitation services for the poor

Position paper by the NWP NGO-platform, final version, August 2015

Introduction



Photo: Ellie Van Houtte/USAID

"Ten years ago, we set ourselves a target, and we gave 30 million poor people safe water and 50 million people clean toilets. Today, I am doing it again; I am setting another target. Let's do another 30 and another 50."

With these words, Minister Ploumen announced a new commitment of the Dutch government during the Global Citizen 2015 Earth Day celebrations in Washington DC, on April 18, 2015.

As members of the NGO platform within the Netherlands Water Partnership¹ (NWP), we congratulate the Minister on this commitment. It is a more than welcome contribution of the Netherlands to the upcoming Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which seek to achieve universal access to water and sanitation services by 2030.

As NGO-members of NWP, we have been partnering with the Dutch government to work on the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) for WASH. Through this position paper we would like to share our lessons learned on the realisation of the Dutch commitments under MDG7. We have a set of eleven recommendations for minister Ploumen for the realisation of the commitment. We invite the Minister for a dialogue with the Dutch water sector, in particular with the members of the NWP NGO-platform, on how this commitment can be materialized in a way that ensures a maximum impact.

The context

Even though the water MDG was met several years ahead of the deadline, some 663 million don't have any access to water supply², 90% of which live in rural areas. This hides the fact that many services are sub-standard: 1 out of 3 handpumps in Africa is not functioning at any given moment in time³; the quality of water supplies is often not safe⁴, and in many cities non-revenue water (due to poor management) is around 30-40%. For sanitation the situation is even more dire. More than one third of the global population – some 2.4 billion people – do not have access to sanitation facilities (of

¹ This position paper is drafted by the policy working group, consisting of Amref, Aqua4All, Both Ends, IRC, Plan Nederland, Simavi, SNV and WASH Alliance International.

² WHO/UNICEF. 2015. Progress on sanitation and drinking water – 2015 update and MDG assessment. WHO and UNICEF: Geneva, Switzerland

³ RWSN. 2010. Myths of the Rural Water Supply Sector. RWSN Perspective No 4. Rural Water Supply Network: St Gallen

⁴ Onda, K., LoBuglio, J. and J.Jamie Bartram. 2012., Global Access to Safe Water: Accounting for Water Quality and the Resulting Impact on MDG Progress. In: *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*: 9, 880-894

which 70% live in rural areas), and 946 million people practice open defecation⁵. These water and sanitation needs especially affect the health and economic potential of women and girls.

On the other hand we may not forget where we come from and what we have achieved so far. The good news is that since 1990 well over 2.6 billion people have gained access to improved sources of drinking water, and 147 countries have met the MDG target for water. Almost 2.1 billion people gained access to improved sanitation and 95 countries have met the MDG target for sanitation⁶.

Recommendations for realising the Washington commitment

We have grouped our eleven recommendations around four topics: access, sustainability, governance and finance.

Access

- 1. Keep the commitment clear and ambitious.** Minister Van Ardenne announced in 2004 that the Netherlands would provide 50 million people with safe water and sanitation by 2015. During successive governments the commitment for safe water was watered down to 33,4 million people by 2018⁷. We sincerely hope that the Minister wants to target new people additional to the previous WASH commitment. It would be very helpful if a baseline and timeframe is developed in order to clearly track the progress of the Washington commitment.
- 2. Target where the gaps are biggest.** The Minister rightfully targets more people for sanitation than for water, as that is where gaps are biggest. And the gap is also biggest in rural areas, where 90% of those without access to water supply and 70% of those without access to sanitation live. In addition, targeting according to poverty of population groups is needed. The Joint Monitoring Report of Unicef and WHO shows that in many countries inequalities are big and widening, with the poorest quintiles not making equal progress as the richer ones.

Sustainability

- 3. Don't forget hygiene.** Without hygiene promotion, taps and toilets will not be the adequately used, and health impacts will not materialise. The Ebola outbreak in West-Africa in 2014 highlighted the importance of behaviour as hand washing. An integrated approach between water, sanitation and hygiene is needed, particularly in health centres and schools. Menstrual hygiene management should be included to ensure that women and girls can equally benefit from improvements in WASH services. This in turn requires strong cooperation with the health and education ministries. We call on the Minister to add to her commitment that by 2030, these 50 and 30 million persons practice sustained hygienic behaviour.

⁵ WHO/UNICEF. 2015. Progress on sanitation and drinking water – 2015 update and MDG assessment. WHO and UNICEF: Geneva, Switzerland

⁶ Idem.

⁷ NWP NGO-platform, *Minister, verwater uw ambities niet*, brief aan Minister Ploumen, 13 november 2014

- 4. Ensure the sustainability of services.** Access to WASH is not enough. Sustainability of services is even more important. The IOB evaluation⁸ of the Dutch contribution to water and sanitation services from 1990-2011 placed critical remarks around the quality and sustainability of these contributions. People fall back to open defecation if toilets are not maintained well. In response, the condition for Dutch funded WASH programmes is to ensure that WASH facilities keep on providing good services for at least 10 years and to include financial, institutional, environmental, technical and social aspects of sustainability. Ensuring the sustainability of services requires management, technical skills and finance mechanisms in place at district level, not only for the WASH facilities developed with Dutch support, but for all facilities in a district. We call on minister Ploumen to also commit to strengthen the capacities for sustainable service delivery in those districts where the Washington commitment will be realised. We also call on the minister to remain a frontrunner amongst the donor community for WASH.

Water governance

- 5. Ensure better allocation and management of water resources for WASH.** Sustainable access to water resources is important for sustainable WASH services. Over-extraction of water causes rivers to dry up or groundwater levels go down. Large-scale farmers and industries can put a high pressure on scarce water resources. This may be exacerbated by the impacts of climate change. If sanitation systems are developed without adequate treatment, disposal, and reuse of faecal sludge and wastewater, recipient water bodies become polluted. It is for that reason that the proposed Sustainable Development Goal for water and sanitation not only has targets for access but also for the management of water resources. Linking WASH and IWRM starts amongst others by applying a landscape approach: linking local WASH services to landscape-scale water resource management, recognizing the role of ecosystems as water regulators and suppliers, and ensuring that there is a better allocation of water resources for WASH. We call on the Minister to follow the SDGs: the realisation of the WASH commitment should where relevant be accompanied by integrated water resources management programmes. This link needs to ensure sustainable access to water resources for WASH, and to ensure that WASH (particularly in urban areas) doesn't lead to pollution.
- 6. Include participation of local communities, in particular women and girls.** By protecting the water rights of the most vulnerable people, a better allocation of scarce water resources for WASH is possible. In our view domestic water use should always be prioritised above agricultural and industrial water use. Drinking water is a basic human need and therefore it is globally recognised as a human right. This doesn't mean water should be free, but it should be affordable for all. Ownership of local communities is also crucial for the maintenance and thus sustainability of WASH systems. Evidence shows that the inclusion of women and girls in the decision making process and the implementation of WASH programmes improve the sustainability of the interventions. WASH programmes have also shown to serve well

⁸ IOB. 2013. *Van infrastructuur naar duurzame impact: beleidsdoorlichting van de Nederlandse bijdrage aan drinkwater en sanitaire voorzieningen (1990-2011)*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague

as a tool to improve the position of women and girls in their communities. We call on the minister to put local communities, women and girls at the heart when planning the implementation of the Washington commitment.

- 7. Make WASH everybody's business.** WASH services provision is a public affair, as it is ultimately government (both nationally and locally) who is responsible for ensuring these services. We expect the minister to focus strongly on strengthening the capacity of partner governments to create the enabling environment that is needed to achieve scale and sustainability, as mentioned above. But government cannot do this on its own. The private sector will need to install, maintain and repair systems to ensure a "profit based sustainability". Utilities will need to operate systems and invest in their expansion. NGOs have a role in reaching the marginalised, strengthening civil society, informing and holding government to account. Users must exert their rights and obligations vis-à-vis their service providers. But by being everybody's business, WASH also runs the risk of being nobody's responsibility. Strong water governance is needed, with clearly defined roles, platforms through which these stakeholders can interact, and mechanisms to hold each other to account. The stakeholders that currently have little power, often the poorest and most vulnerable communities must get a seat at the table to create an equal level playing field. To meet her commitments, we would advise the Minister to put strong emphasis on improving water governance, under clear leadership of partner country governments, but involving the wider range of the mentioned stakeholders and others.
- 8. Invest in innovation and learning.** Commitment to learning is of crucial importance to sustainable results in the WASH sector. Too often, business as usual results in systems that fail within a few years. Few local governments or local service providers have access to latest sector information and insights. Reaching the SDG requires innovation and continuous learning around what works and what doesn't, e.g. what is most cost-effective. Particularly in the urban context, sustainability can only be achieved if efficiency and effectiveness of service increase, by applying different approaches than the current ones. We therefore ask the Minister to include in all her investments a strong emphasis on innovation and learning.

Finance

- 9. Go for scale.** 50 and 30 million are just a drop in sea in view of the huge needs, particularly for sanitation. Leverage is needed to create the conditions for scale. The Dutch contribution should be used to leverage *new* funds into the sector. So, don't only use Dutch funds to leverage other donor funds, as that often has a limited net effect. Stimulate national governments to increase public funding for WASH; leverage private sector funds; and support programmes to promote households investments in their own sanitation facilities or household wells. In certain settings, blending of finance and attracting private financial flows could be an option, but this is likely to be limited to drinking water in urban areas. Dutch ODA can also be employed for public utility reform, so that revenue from tariffs can increase. But in many of the poorest rural settings grant aid will remain needed. We would advise the Minister to make a clear statement for the leverage that the Washington commitment is to achieve, and the development of targeted and effective instruments that reach SDGs to ensure a higher scale of impact.

- 10. Involve different types of partners, particularly NGOs.** All types of partners are needed to achieve the new Washington commitment. Bilateral aid to partner governments is crucial to build government leadership and strengthen its capacity. Multilateral partners may be needed to reach people without access to WASH in fragile states; the private sector is needed to develop inclusive businesses around WASH. Finally, NGOs are crucial in strengthening water governance and the enabling environment, building capacity of communities and civil society organisations, promotion of the local private sector and holding governments to account. Local and Dutch water NGOs have a strong track record in all of these topics and in reaching the poorest, the most difficult to reach, the target group of the SDGs. Therefore we particularly call on the Minister to apply her general commitment to spend at least 25% of Dutch ODA through civil society organisation, also to the WASH sector. This means that at least 25% of the budget to achieve the Washington commitment is spent via NGOs, and that she reports on this percentage to parliament.
- 11. Focus on selected geographical areas.** To achieve synergy between the different types of partners and funding a strong geographic focus is needed. Currently, there are twelve water partner countries, although not all include WASH; public-private partnership instruments focus on 66 countries; multilateral and NGO programmes are carried out in the water partner countries, but also well beyond. This means that the complementarity between the water and sanitation programmes carried out by the different types of partners is limited. For the Minister to get the required complementarity which is needed to achieve both leverage and sustainability, a much stronger focus on these types of efforts in selected geographic areas (water partner countries, but also towns, districts and catchments and landscapes within these countries) is needed. We expect the minister to identify these selected geographic areas and how she can achieve greater complementarity between the various programmes and instruments of the Netherlands, as well as of other donors and governments. In that, it is important to prevent donor darlings and orphans, and we advise to select the countries and districts in coordination with other donors, especially with European donors and the EU.

Conclusion

The commitment that Minister Ploumen made during the Global Citizen 2015 Earth Day is one that we welcome. But what we would like to reinforce:

That it is a **NEW** commitment: referring to 50 and 30 million persons that were not planned to be covered yet and targeted to those areas where the gaps are biggest and to the most vulnerable people in these areas.

That it is a **SUSTAINABLE** commitment: that these 50 and 30 million people will use and enjoy their water supplies and toilets for at least 10 years, they practice good hygiene behaviour and that these WASH services are developed in a landscape approach, applying IWRM principles for its realisation when applicable.

That it is an **INCLUSIVE** commitment: that it will be achieved by involving all relevant stakeholders, particularly civil society, women, NGOs and user communities, and that water governance will be structurally strengthened.

That it is a CATALYTIC commitment: that the 50 and 30 million are just the ones who will be reached directly with infrastructure; but that by using a mix of complementary funding channels in selected geographic areas, the enabling environment for creating a much bigger impact is achieved.

The NWP NGO-platform is well-prepared to work with the Minister to make these commitments come true, so that the 50 million people use a clean toilet every day, and that the 30 million people enjoy safe water flowing from their tap or pump, forever.