

The 4th AfricaSan Meeting, Senegal 2015: From eThekweni commitments to the Ngor Declaration



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Greetings from Dakar, Senegal! May 25 2015 marked the beginning of the 4th AfricaSan conference under the theme, “Making sanitation for all a reality in Africa”, hosted at King Fahd palace, the biggest hotel in Dakar located on the shores of Atlantic Ocean. This event is a political initiative organised by the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW) that typically discusses sanitation and hygiene issues in Africa. The initiative also tracks the status of African government action on commitments that were made at a previous AfricaSan in eThekweni, South Africa.

This event has a range of stakeholders in attendance, including government representations, civil society organisations (CSOs) and development partners from all over African countries, as well as other countries including Great Britain and America where most international donors and development partners come from. This is my first time at this event and indeed in Senegal; three other AfricaSan conferences have taken place over the past few years.

The conference opened with looking on the status of sanitation in Africa, to assess the situation, status and gaps. AfricaSan4 aims to deepen knowledge in key issues such as creating an enabling environment, financing and monitoring sanitation and hygiene performance, cross-cutting issues and assessing the demand and supply of sanitation services. The conference also assesses the rate that all countries are working towards declaring their countries open defecation free. After the opening session, there were country dialogue side events assessing the current status of sanitation in each country.



Side event: Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) CSO national focal points (closed session)

The SWA CSO national focal points (NFPs) side meeting was an opportunity for the NFPs to meet, get to know each other, share experiences and challenges from their countries. In particular this examined challenges experienced in engaging with SWA activities in country, and in working with governments to track process made on commitments to making sanitation a reality for all. Members discussed the roles of most SWA CSO NFPs and the following issues were raised:

- Need for better coordination with government and donor focal points
- Bring a stronger CSO voice into SWA discussion in various national and international platforms
- Facilitate CSO engagement with SWA processes
- Better sharing of information on SWA to CSOs and other media
- Monitoring national performances against commitments
- Raise awareness among CSOs on raising SWA profile
- Representing CSOs in government meetings and national political dialogues

SWA coordinator Ms. Jennifer Williams led the discussion asking CSO NFPs to identify three challenges, along with what support they would need to ensure a clear fulfilment of their duties. The following were noted from the groups:

- Lack of harmonization among partners (government and development partners)
- Limited capacity both financial and human in carrying advocacy works
- Lack of clear work plan for most CSO NFPs

The group examined work plans and discussion on how to address these issues, and strengthen their future work.

I managed to attend the country dialogues where there were different countries including Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Sudan and Nigeria. Most interesting issues that emerged from these countries is examined in the sections below.

Tanzania

- The country will start a verification and certification campaign to end open defecation running from 2015 to 2019, and will be rolled out in all Tanzania villages.
- The country has started training health workers on a health programme that will run for 2 years under the Ifakara Health Institute (<http://www.ihl.or.tz>), and these will be later be positioned as health extension officers.

Sudan

- The country has a water policy in place, but this talks very little about sanitation. Therefore the government is planning to separate the two so that sanitation issues are clearly realized in a separate own policy.

- Sudan is emphasizing demand creation by targeting certain groups, particularly marginalized groups, that were not clearly addressed in the water policy document. These will now be shifted into the sanitation policy and will be clearly recognised and addressed.
- The country has a water management information system which is centralised, and currently operating in 10 states. However, this not functioning very well, and so will be given priority to improve its functioning.

Mozambique

- Recognised that the country needs to prioritize identifying where is inequalities lie in order to seek comprehensive ways to finish it once and for all.

Malawi

- There is a discussion to have a 5 years sanitation plan to raise the sanitation profile.



Challenges encountered

Despite progressive discussions, there were a number of problems and challenges that occurred over the conference. The days were very hectic due to heavily packed programmes, with around 57 events, sessions and meetings. There were just too many programmes running parallel to each other. This made it necessary for people to choose which session to attend, which at times was difficult. Rooms were reoriented and reshuffled as the real room numbers were changed after changing side events, forcing many people to hassle around looking for rooms and not finding where they were meant to be. The language barrier was a bigger challenge than expected, especially for many Anglophone (English speakers) people, as Senegal is a Francophone country (speaking French) and many don't speak any English. This was evident from the hotel we were staying in, to the conference venue where despite a number of ushers placed around the corridors, their assistance was mostly in French which was very difficult.

The overall conference organization was indeed another challenge that was first spotted. Registration of the near 800 delegates attending the AfricaSan meeting was only opened to registration on the actual first event day. This led to incredibly long queued of people waiting to pay with others seeking pay receipts. Most people also missed receiving the conference packs on day one and this prevented some people from knowing the schedule and caused them to miss programmes and presentations.