

Statement by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
High Level Meeting – Sanitation and Water for All
April 2010

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation appreciates the opportunity to participate in this first High Level Meeting on the Sanitation and Water for All initiative as an observer. We are encouraged by the efforts to create a platform for discussion, prioritization of investment, and sharing of good practices among developing countries, donors and NGOs. We are not in a position to make commitments to the SWA initiative, but our grants will *complement* the efforts of official donors by supporting innovative, high-impact activities of governments, NGOs, and the private sector.

This statement has two parts. In the first section, we highlight certain elements of the SWA, including those where we are particularly supportive and those where we are less well aligned. In the second section, we summarize the role of the Gates Foundation in the sanitation and water sector, to provide context for our interactions with SWA.

Focus on the SWA

1. **Better Evidence for Better Decisions:** SWA recognizes, and we want to emphasize, the importance of generating robust data on what works and what doesn't *and* using this data to inform decision-making by governments, donors, and other key players. The sanitation and water sector suffers from a dearth of hard data on the most effective ways to deliver sustainable services. SWA should support much more rigorous measurement of impact and sustainability and the sharing of results so that evidence-based practices become central to country-driven decision making.
2. **Sustainable Services, Not Just Access:** SWA should encourage donors and implementers not just to increase *access* by the poor to basic services – but to deliver *sustainable* sanitation and water services that last over time. Too often, global initiatives create incentives within donor and national governments to fund the installation of taps and toilets, without considering the ongoing sustainability of services. To avoid this trap, SWA-supported initiatives must consider the full life-cycle costs of providing sanitation and water services instead of only the up-front cost of installing infrastructure.
3. **Serve the Poor:** We encourage all parties in the SWA initiative to target households and communities who are in the greatest need – which means supporting sustainable, basic sanitation and water services for those who currently do not have any access or improving service conditions in poor communities. The GLAAS figures indicate that less than 20% of donor funding supports basic services for the poor, which clearly needs to increase.
4. **Prioritize Sanitation:** The neglect of sanitation, as compared to water, is highlighted in the JMP data, the GLAAS figures and in our common experience in the sector. We support the growing efforts by governments, donors and others to prioritize sanitation. As noted below, the Gates Foundation has chosen to focus its work in the sector on sanitation, including both rural and urban challenges.

- 5. Increase Accountability and Transparency:** We support SWA’s use of GLAAS data to analyze international donor flows, and we are pleased to provide data on our sanitation and water investments to GLAAS. We are also committed to strengthening accountability mechanisms at the *local* level between service providers and their customers, through increased transparency of data on life-cycle costs for service delivery, quality of services, and coverage of the poor.

Role of the Gates Foundation

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation seeks to identify and support effective, robust approaches to delivering sustainable sanitation and water services to the poor. We focus on developing and promoting at-scale implementation of catalytic models that work across a range of different country contexts, albeit with local adaptation. In this way, our cross-cutting orientation complements the country-based approach of most official donors.

One example of this is our effort to support implementation of the Community Led Total Sanitation and Sanitation Marketing approaches in four locations in Africa, South Asia and South East Asia. By working at large scale – about 1 million people in each location – and paying close attention to how key aspects of the program are implemented (triggering demand, encouraging local supply, strengthening the enabling environment), our grantee is identifying the common elements for success in this promising approach to rural sanitation, with the eventual goal of reaching many millions of people.

We define successful approaches to sanitation and water as those that meet three core criteria:

- i. **Impact** on the health, economic and social well being of the poor, meaning, for example, rigorous evidence on reduction of diarrhea. Simply counting new taps and toilets isn’t enough.
- ii. **Sustainable** in terms of long-term operations and funding. This is why we focus on life cycle ‘service delivery’ instead of up-front ‘access’.
- iii. **Scalable** to reach tens to hundreds of millions of people ... but not at the expense of sustainability and impact.

Our current strategy focuses on on-site sanitation, as we believe this is the most likely option for the poor in both rural and urban areas ... and we’d like to help make this a preferred solution.

In closing, we would like to thank the organizers for inviting us to participate as observers and would note that several of our grantees are also engaging with SWA, including IRC-International Water and Sanitation Resource Centre, WaterAid, and the Water and Sanitation Program.