
Chapter 6

THE DHAKA DECLARATION ON SANITATION

6.1 Introduction

One of the key outputs from the Conference was the Dhaka Declaration on Sanitation. The Conference was designed so that, while the Declaration would retain its focus as a series of Government-owned political commitments, there would also be avenues for discussion and input from the wider delegation.

There were three key vehicles through which this was achieved:

- 1) Secretary's Meetings on Dhaka Declaration: Secretaries or other Senior Government Servants selected by the Minister to participate in the Secretary's Meeting discussed and deliberated the contents of the draft Declaration, and in turn briefed their Minister on the discussions. Owing to time constraints, participants of this session reconvened to resume discussions on three separate occasions (one hour each). By the end of these sessions, the Conference Coordinator was able to incorporate some substantial amendments and additions to the draft.
- 2) Participatory Session on Dhaka Declaration: The amended draft of the Declaration was presented to all Conference Delegates in the Plenary Hall. With sufficient briefing from their Secretaries, the Ministers or Heads of Delegations were able to sit in panel and listen to comments from all Conference Delegates.
- 3) Ministerial Roundtable discussion on Dhaka Declaration: The purpose of this session was to ensure that Ministers and other Heads of Delegation came to a consensus on the finalization and endorsement of the Declaration. In this session, they were able to draw from the points raised in the Secretary's Meetings and Participatory Session.

6.2 Meetings of the Secretaries

Mr. Gourisankar Ghosh, Executive Director, WSSCC, was the Moderator for the session. He stated from the outset that the purpose of the session was to come to a consensus on a near-final draft, with agreement from the various technical, diplomatic and administrative heads and other heads of agencies, to take back to their political heads, so that discussions and finalization on final day could be short and succinct.

The adopted methodology was to run through the text of the draft Declaration, using it as skeleton to attach flesh or make amendments, both in terms of substance and language. All discussants participated and made detailed comments. This made for fertile debate. There were a number of core (and often overlapping) themes that were discussed. These are outlined below. Deliberations over the precise wording of the text are not included.

6.2.1 Extent of Declaration

- Should the Declaration go beyond sanitation and hygiene to include water, food safety, solid waste and other environmental issues?
- The main argument for creating a specific and focused agenda for sanitation was based on the observation that a historic tie to water often meant it was left out. Even in cases where safe water supply had reached one hundred percent, assured health benefits were not always achieved.
- The majority of discussants therefore agreed that it deserved its own focus, and that the rationale behind SACOSAN was to raise profile of sanitation. Other forums (such as the World Water Council) existed to deal with both water and sanitation.
- To reduce the incidence of infectious disease it was still considered necessary to include water. An integrated approach, which mentioned water within the Declaration, was therefore seen as being important.

6.2.2 Definition of Sanitation

- Discussants agreed that there needed to be further consensus built into the Declaration on the definition of sanitation. The extent of the definition could take from the MDG definition of 'Basic Sanitation' or could go further to clarify what was meant by the term 'Total Sanitation'.
- It was agreed that this definition needed to determine whether bad sanitation would simply represent open defecation, or whether it should go further to incorporate health implications (such as malnutrition), other unhygienic practices and unsanitary disposal methods. Whatever the case, the Declaration should make its definition through a 'paradigm', which represented the views expressed in the conference.
- There were also discussions on who should constitute the target beneficiaries within the new definition/paradigm of sanitation. Giving appropriate attention to children, in particular the elimination of open defecation through hygiene promotion and school education programmes, was seen as being absolutely essential.
- Reviewing the draft Declaration, it was also agreed that there was not in fact an urban bias in resource allocation. However, it was agreed that the poor allocation of funds for the urban poor was a serious problem that needed to be addressed.

6.2.3 Responsibility for Sanitation

- There was a lengthy discussion on the use of the term 'Local Government': should this go further to include other Government, such as local health authorities and elected local bodies?
- Despite the varying degrees of responsibility for sanitation in different countries, discussants agreed that the 'Local Government' was indeed an appropriate and universal term for local-level government, as it represented a distinctive move away from central control. It was considered more important to recognize this shift in responsibility to the local level, than deliberating over specific responsible agencies at that level.
- Government should be increasingly seen as a 'leader, promoter and facilitator', with each country translating and adopting the Declaration into its own specific policy and practice.

- Bearing in mind this role, participants discussed whom Governments should be facilitating for: should this include just NGOs and CBOs, or would this exclude other actors within communities and constitute a gap in participation?
- Again in response to the draft Declaration, discussants agreed that the type of private sector actors should be defined specifically as ‘small-scale private providers’.

6.2.4 The debate over subsidy

- Subsidies for hardware should be discouraged: There was general consensus that the lessons of the last twenty years were testament to the fact that top-down approaches to latrine-building programmes do not always work. Capturing the right wording was therefore essential, since the right signal needed to be sent out.
- Subsidies should be given for motivation: Indicative of the shifting paradigm away from traditional top-down approaches, was the clear need for continued financial assistance, or subsidies for ‘software’, to encourage motivation for better hygienic behaviour and attitudinal change. If sufficient demand is created and options for technology made available and affordable, sanitary practices would improve.
- Exceptional circumstances: To address the specific problems of those living in conflict or post-conflict situations, the poorest of the poor or the most vulnerable, there were exceptions to the above principle on hardware subsidy. In such circumstances, part-subsidies for hardware could be delivered indirectly through revolving fund mechanism (possibly channeled through CBOs).
- Individual or community incentives: Incentives for Local Governments and communities demonstrating tangible success in achieving improved sanitation and hygiene were generally seen as being positive. However, a cautionary notes was delivered, as some experiences suggested that incentive schemes could sometimes upset the entrustment built by other programme work. Discussants agreed that rewards or ‘acknowledgement’ should therefore be ‘considered’.

6.2.5 Future of SACOSAN

- The Conference Director raised the issue of whether there would be another SACOSAN, and if so, who would host it.
- One suggestion was for a meeting to be held every year, rotating round each of the countries participating in SACOSAN. The logic was that this would take countries forward 9 years to 2013, with 2 years to review progress towards the MDGs!
- Discussants agreed that an event should be held every two years. Each country could then set up a body or task force for inter-country coordination. A ministerial working group could even be used to raise the profile of the event.
- Another suggestion was for SACOSAN to retain its name and become the ‘South Asian Council on Sanitation’.
- It was finally agreed that whoever should host the next event, would take on the responsibility for driving an inter-country working group.

6.3 Participatory Session

At 2.00pm on Wednesday 22nd October, Conference delegates came together for one hour in the Plenary Hall for a moderated discussion on the Dhaka Declaration. Delegates were able to put comments to a panel of country delegation leaders (Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Secretaries, etc.), which was chaired by the Minister of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, Government of Bangladesh.

Walter A. Stottmann, WSP, Moderator for the session, began by presenting the amended draft Declaration to Conference Delegates. The floor was then opened for a series of lively and at times animated statements about delegates' impressions on the new draft.

- The main thread of the discussion was again on subsidy. On four occasions delegates referred to the statement that hardware subsidies should be 'strongly discouraged'. Robert Chambers said that this statement was too weak. In other instances it was supported as being very positive (one delegate referred to it as 'spot on'). However, there was also a plea from members of the delegation that financial mechanisms should still be provided to the poorest of the poor, and that disbursements, whether for soft or hardware, should be related to socio-economic conditions. Robert Chambers responded by asserting that hardware subsidies of any sort would undermine Community-led Total Sanitation (CLTS), and that they would therefore not be in the interests of the poorest. If there was anyone who doubted this, the voices that should be listened to and heard were those of the poorest in communities which had been totally sanitised.
- Delegates were enthused by the widespread recognition of the role of civil society, vis-à-vis Government, in the Declaration.
- There was a suggestion that there should also be a focus on Local Government capacity building, as well as advocacy for further emphasis of water and sanitation issues in PRSPs.
- There were suggestions from the floor that the draft Declaration had overlooked, and therefore should incorporate, the following marginalized groups: children, women and those in conflict/emergency/shelter situations. A universal definition of sanitation would envisage girls in school sanitation programmes.
- Another delegate also suggested that the Declaration should include a component emphasizing research and development for a range of technological options, available at affordable costs.
- There was advocacy for the inclusion of a component on environment and safe water, as well as an increased focus on urban sanitation.

6.4 Ministerial Roundtable

At the end of the second day, Ministers, other Heads of Delegations and Heads of Development Agencies came together to finalize the Dhaka Declaration. The points raised in the Participatory Session, and any other outstanding issues, were considered. Many of the above issues were incorporated into the final text.

The issue of subsidy was again raised and after lengthy discussions, it was decided that hardware subsidies could still be provided, but only to the poorest of the poor, or in exceptional circumstances, such as conflict and emergency situations. In all these situations, it was agreed that appropriate mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation would have to be established. The need for community subsidies for promotion, awareness, capacity-building and the creation of funding mechanisms for scaling up sanitation and hygiene programmes were again agreed upon.

The longevity of SACOSAN beyond Dhaka 2003 was wholly dependent upon the willingness of the other participating countries to host a follow-up event. During the Ministerial Roundtable, Pakistan volunteered to host the next event in 2005. India also agreed to host the third SACOSAN in 2007. It was agreed that, according to the Declaration, the hosting country would be the coordinating point for an Inter-Country Working Group for the period leading up to the next biannual event.

6.5 The Dhaka Declaration on Sanitation

1. We, the Heads of Delegation from the 9 countries participating in the South Asian Conference on Sanitation (SACOSAN) in Dhaka, Bangladesh, October 21-23, 2003, which was attended by 4 Ministers, State Ministers, senior civil servants, professionals from sector institutions, academia, civil society, NGOs, Development Partners, and the private sector,

- (1) *recognizing* that, although much has been achieved in last decade, the overall picture of sanitation in South Asia still remains dismal, and the practice of open defecation, unsanitary disposal of human excreta and other unhygienic practices by the majority of people in the region is a serious threat to the quality of life, control of disease and the environment;
- (2) *concerned* that about one million children under the age five in the South Asia region die each year of water and sanitation related diseases;
- (3) *being aware* of the need to pursue common strategies under a common definition of sanitation, to accelerate the progress of good sanitation and hygiene promotion in South Asia in order to improve people's quality of life and reduce child mortality and morbidity, and fulfil the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the commitments made in the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg;
- (4) *recognising* that significant improvements in the situation of sanitation and safe water will have large positive impacts on poverty reduction by increasing health and productivity and therefore should have a central role in country's poverty reduction strategies;
- (5) *noting* that it is the vulnerable and marginalized population in urban and rural areas that suffer most from minimal access to sanitation facilities;
- (6) *observing* from the experiences of the last two decades that conventional, top-down sanitation programmes driven only by high hardware subsidy have not brought about the desired improvements and sustainability, but that the use of direct and indirect subsidies for software are a must for sustainable sanitation promotion;
- (7) *understanding* that some Government Organizations, NGOs and small-scale private initiatives in generating demand and delivering door-to-door services have demonstrated remarkable achievements of basic sanitation (every household having access to a hygienic latrine and practicing good hygiene);

2. Unanimously agreed that the focus of proper sanitation and hygiene in the region should be based on a paradigm that is: "people centered, community-led, gender-sensitive and demand driven" and that the following principles should facilitate this new paradigm, wherein the thrust:

- (1) Should be on the elimination of open defecation and other unhygienic practices, as well as the promotion of good hygienic practice;
- (2) Should provide hardware subsidies only to the poorest of the poor, who have no means of helping themselves, to be given under appropriate and effective monitoring and evaluation arrangements;
- (3) Should recognize the need for community subsidies for promotion, awareness, capacity-building and the creation of funding mechanisms for scaling up sanitation and hygiene programmes;

- (4) Should focus on understanding and creating demand, sustaining attitudinal and behavioural change and encouraging wider community participation, as opposed to top-down approaches to subsidized sanitation programmes;
- (5) Should consider giving proper and appropriate acknowledgement and rewards to Local Governments and communities demonstrating tangible success in the elimination of open defecation and other unhygienic practices, intensifying advocacy through political and religious leadership;
- (6) Should focus on the hygienic disposal of children's faeces, other hygienic practices and the development of hygiene education in school and community sanitation programmes;
- (7) Should recognize the need for gender-sensitive programmes;
- (8) Should be on the research and development of a range of viable, locally-appropriate, technological options that should be available at affordable costs;
- (9) Should create an enabling environment for small-scale private providers and innovative technical and financial mechanisms to be mainstreamed to promote better, faster and cheaper service delivery;
- (10) Should encourage Local Governments to engage in strategic partnerships with community based organizations (CBOs), NGOs and other concerned actors, so as to facilitate scaling up of this new paradigm;
- (11) Should recognize the need for special arrangements when dealing with sanitation programmes in conflict and emergency situations;

3. And the Ministers and other Heads of Delegations, on behalf of the delegates at the Conference, committed to accelerating the progress of proper sanitation and hygiene in the South Asia region, by:

- (1) Formulating and implementing national programmes in partnership with all sanitation stakeholders, to raise the profile of sanitation and hygiene in all political and development processes, leading to overall improvements in health;
- (2) Establishing national plans and programmes in partnership with all sanitation stakeholders, particularly through mechanisms like the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs);
- (3) Working with other stakeholders to develop broad based alliances and coalitions, sharing and disseminating best practice, monitoring progress and aligning implementation programmes;
- (4) Sustaining collaborative efforts towards achieving the MDGs in sanitation, through the development of a SACOSAN Inter-Country Working Group, to meet annually to share information and exchange ideas on progress in countries across the region;
- (5) Agreeing to organize a SACOSAN meeting to be held every two years (the hosting country will be the coordinating point for Inter-Country Working Group for the period leading up to the next biannual event) with Ministers, Heads of Agencies, development partners and other actors with the potential to introduce and sustain a viable regional cooperation for sanitation, with the first of these events hosted by Pakistan in 2005, and the second hosted by India in 2007.

4. We express our profound appreciation to the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh for successfully hosting this first South Asian Conference on Sanitation (SACOSAN). We are fully appreciative of the cordial and warm hospitality accorded to us and thank the Government and the People of Bangladesh for the excellent arrangements made for the success of the conference.

.....*Signed*

(Mr. Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan)
Honorable Minister for Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives
People's Republic of Bangladesh

.....*Signed*

(Mr. Kanshi Ram Rana)
Honorable Minister for Rural Development
Government of India

.....*Signed*

(Mr. Buddhiman Tamang)
Honorable Minister for Physical Planning and Works
His Majesty's Government of Nepal

.....*Signed*

(Mr. Mohammed Nasir Khan)
Honorable Federal Minister for Health
Islamic Republic of Pakistan

.....*Signed*

(Dr. Azam Mehraban Mir)
Honorable Deputy Minister for Health
Transitional Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

.....*Signed*

(Dr. Sangay Thinley)
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