

Speech by Roberto Lenton, Chair, WSSCC,
at the launch of the Global Sanitation Fund,
Geneva, 14 March 2008

Representative of the Director-General of WHO, dear guests and colleagues,

I am honoured to stand here today as the Chair of the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council to announce the official launch of the Global Sanitation Fund.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Collaborative Council was created in 1990 with the aim of serving those people in the world who do not have access to drinking water or sanitation. We all agree that adequate sanitation and hygiene, together with safe drinking water, are essential to keeping people healthy. Yet today, 2.6 billion people or 40% of the world's population still do not have access to basic sanitation.

To date, however, no global financing mechanism has been established solely for hygiene and sanitation purposes. Traditionally, policy-makers have been addressing water and sanitation as the same issue. Most of the efforts and resources went to water programmes, while sanitation was neglected. To combat this problem, the Collaborative Council has created the Global Sanitation Fund.

With the establishment of the Global Sanitation Fund, the Collaborative Council continues to put its philosophy into practice by focussing particularly on groups whose needs are not met by existing funding mechanisms, especially the poor in rural and peri-urban areas.

The Fund will support national efforts to help larger numbers of poor people attain sustainable access to basic sanitation and good hygiene practices. Many developing countries have national sanitation and hygiene policies, but lack the means to implement them. The Global Sanitation Fund will direct extra funding to carefully selected professional organisations to implement those sanitation policies.

The most distinctive feature of the Global Sanitation Fund's work is its people-centred and demand-driven approach. Since top-down investments do not always reach the poorest people, the Fund will support work that concentrates on hygiene education, raising awareness and creating demand. The Collaborative Council's members and partners have accumulated considerable expertise in this work over many years. There are plenty of good organisations doing excellent sanitation and hygiene work for poor people, albeit at a small scale. So the GSF will mainly support scaling-up and replication of proven techniques rather than developing and testing of new ones.

While the Global Sanitation Fund is global in scope, it actually works country by country in order to use its resources effectively. We select the countries in which the Fund works according to specific criteria, including:

- A large number of people and proportion of population without basic sanitation;
- A high rate of disease related to poor water, sanitation and improper hygiene;
- Low economic and social development indicators;
- An appropriate national sanitation policy or strategy, which is not already being fully funded from other sources;
- Existing active National WASH Coalition or other Collaborative Council partners that request GSF funding for that country;
- The government's agreement that the Fund can support work in the country.

The GSF will operate in annual rounds. For the first round - this year - the Global Sanitation Fund will start first in Madagascar, Nepal and Uganda and then in Burkina Faso, India, Pakistan and Senegal, all of which have been selected according to these criteria.

The Collaborative Council is well aware of criticisms of global single-sector financing mechanisms. It has carefully taken them into account. So, for example:

- the GSF is a finance mechanism within WSSCC not a separate organisation,
- it will work alongside and with existing government and non-government organisations in-country, not set up parallel systems that bypass governments,
- it will attract new money to the sanitation sector, not simply redirect money that is going to sanitation anyway.

The Global Sanitation Fund will complement and enhance the Collaborative Council's existing areas of activity, namely Networking and Knowledge

Management, and Advocacy and Communications. At present, the networking and knowledge management activities generate proven ideas and methods for sanitation and hygiene, while the advocacy activities communicate and promote these ideas and methods. The Global Sanitation Fund will finance organizations to implement these same ideas and methods on a larger scale.

The Fund will be managed within the Collaborative Council's Secretariat, which is hosted here in Geneva by the World Health Organization. WHO is an organization that has a wealth of experience in global funds, and we feel truly privileged to be able to draw on that experience. The quality of the Fund's work will be assured by an Advisory Committee of world-respected experts in sanitation and hygiene, which held its first meeting last week. The presence of those experts on the Committee, coupled with the WHO's experience in global funds, enhances the credibility of the Fund. We are also delighted that several contributors have already pledged contributions amounting to more than fifty million dollars to the Global Sanitation Fund, which have established the fund as a truly multilateral instrument.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to thank you all for your attention and would like to express our gratitude to all those who have pledged the first funding for this exciting initiative to tackle the global sanitation crises. We are particularly grateful to the Governments of the Netherlands and Switzerland, who have confirmed their funding for the initiative, and to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, who have set aside funding for the Global Sanitation Fund. I am very pleased that the representatives of the Netherlands, Switzerland and Sweden are here with us this afternoon. We are also excited by the news that other donors are poised to announce their support for the Fund very soon, and encourage other contributors – governments, foundations, private sector organizations and individuals – to support the Fund. Finally, we are extremely grateful to the World Health Organization, our hosts, for all the support that they have provided to the endeavour right from the start; to the members of our Steering Committee, who are present here today and who have steered the development of this initiative from inception; and – last but not least – to our Executive Director, Mr. Jon Lane, and all the staff of the Secretariat for their exceptional hard work, dedication and commitment, without which this initiative would not have been possible. With the support, commitment and determination of all our partners and colleagues, we can make a real impact and help large numbers of the world's poorest people to improve their lives.

Thank you very much.