



*An Interview with*

## ***Honorable Maria Mutagamba***

*Uganda, September 2009*

**WSSCC:** *Although Uganda is making progress on the water and sanitation target, most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are not, what are according to you the key challenges to be addressed in order to put this region back on track?*

**MM:** **Inadequate funding to meet all water and sanitation needs is one of the challenges that need to be addressed.** Most of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa live within the vicious cycle of poverty meaning that having readily available funds for sanitation remains a non-priority in their scale of needs. This is made worse by the fact that there is insufficient involvement of the private sector in sanitation. It is not considered an attractive investment field by governments, communities and other stakeholders and lack of a commercial market for sanitation services undermines the sustainability of the sector.

**Inadequate political commitment is another key issue.** Water and Sanitation are not really given as much attention as other poverty reduction strategies by governments, civil society (media), donors and other stakeholders. However, with the establishment of the African Minister's Council on Water, this is slowly changing and the high level of commitment by AMCOW is encouraging.

**Lack of the necessary capacity.** In sub-Saharan Africa, like in most developing countries, most of the training is focused at water resources and water supply specialists and very few opportunities are available to experts in sanitation and hygiene education. This scales down to those responsible for operation and maintenance of water supply and sanitation, who are mostly women. Targeting women for training and capacity building is important and critical to the sustainability of sanitation and hygiene initiatives. Their capacity should be built in technical and managerial roles to enable them to participate in the decision-making processes which really matter and have a sustainable impact. High population growth is also a factor in the lack of resources.

**Lack of awareness on sanitation and hygiene issues.** This is still a big issue in Africa. People have not yet internalised the importance of sanitation, especially at the grass roots level. That is why raising awareness on sanitation and hygiene is important. In the case of sanitation, it is only through attitude change that sanitation targets can be achieved. This is where the role of political leadership at the grass roots level is very essential. Sensitization on water and sanitation activities in Uganda have been accomplished through a number of activities that include radio talk shows, drama groups, posters, etc.

**WSSCC:** *Women Leaders for WASH is in essence an effort to increase leadership for the sector, what kind of role can such an initiative play according to you?*

**MM:** It can play the following roles:

- Create awareness on Sanitation and Hygiene Issues
- Mobilise additional financing for the water and sanitation sector in Africa and provide a mechanism for monitoring the progress of implementation of major regional and global water resources, water supply and sanitation
- Advance advocacy and create strong political will for translating commitment into action

**WSSCC:** *How do you see the role of women in positively contributing to sustainable sanitation schemes?*

**MM:** **Women can play a big role in raising awareness on sanitation and hygiene.** This is because they carry the biggest domestic responsibilities and play a big role in developing their children's hygiene habits. They also carry the extra burden of taking care of the sick as a result of unsafe water and poor sanitation. They can also be used as entry points to pass over sanitation and hygiene messages to other community members including their husbands and convince them to provide sanitation facilities. Women can also contribute to sustainable sanitation through community mobilisation through women groups and Community Health Clubs.

**Women can play a big role in the planning and designing process of the sanitation facility to ensure its sustainability.** This is because since they are the main users of these facilities (disposal of waste, disposal of garbage) they know the best location for these facilities. Also, involving women in the planning process empowers them and also reduces corruption since women are more transparent and accountable.

**WSSCC:** *The International Year of 2008 has created momentum for sanitation. What needs to be done in terms of advocacy to maintain the current spotlight on the issue?*

**MM:** All of the following:

- Advocate for continued support from the political wing and for increased funding
- Increase involvement of all stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society
- Support innovative approaches and affordable sanitation technologies e.g. eco-san
- Involvement of schools as conveyor belts for sanitation awareness