

Women's Major Group Intervention on Sanitation for CSD-13

March 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We endorse the Chair's draft text covering sanitation issues and would like to add the following points.

Poverty prohibits people from paying for even basic connection and water services, as well as from building toilets.

Safe land tenure and property ownership, especially for women, fits into rights-based "human settlement" approaches and will stimulate municipalities and individual households to invest in sanitation facilities. It is a precondition for access to water, sanitation and finances.

Setting national and local goals for sanitation access and using financial incentives such as subsidies or tax-incentives (fitting into national policies) will stimulate private families, local communities and businesses to invest in non-polluting toilets and develop information campaigns on water, hygiene and sanitation. Equipping and empowering women to play their part should be an integrated part of plans and measures regarding sanitation. Ongoing programmes aimed at behavioural changes AND vocational training - and not just short term projects - are needed.

Water is not necessarily required for good sanitation; good sanitation does not necessarily increase water usage. Eco-sanitation solutions use less water, are less polluting, often low cost, and in many cases more women-friendly. The World Health Organization can give information and guidance for allowing resource- recovery from human waste through appropriate national and international guidelines and regulations. The agricultural sector provides a market for nutrient rich products recovered from human excreta.

Government and NGO efforts for reconstruction after disasters - whether human-made or caused by nature - should include adequate gender and cultural sensitive sanitation facilities. Involvement of the local community and incorporating the women's perspective in deciding about the design, location, etc. of these facilities is imperative and will make the investment sustainable.

Women's biology requires different sanitation facilities; adequate facilities that take this into account will bring girls to school, make it possible for women to work, and in general, improve their health. Therefore, it is imperative to have women participate in the design, building and maintenance of sanitation to find workable solutions for their situation.

It will:

- create adequate facilities in terms of hygiene and reproductive health
- take into account privacy demands and help prevent sexual assault,
- help find solutions for cultural restraints
- will turn the facilities into a good sustainable investment in health and will reduce among other things the long term cost of healthcare.

We must go from principles to practise, from paper to action. A phrase like "please dispose sanitary towels in the bin" is a paper instruction in many places in women's toilets. Good instruction—what about the possibility to practise?

International commitments on gender, poverty and water have to be put into practise. Formal and informal women's organizations can and will assist in this. Thank you.