



Briefing: UN High Level Event on the Millennium Development Goals

Promoting sanitation and water

1. Background

At the World Economic Forum at Davos in February 2008, the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon issued a Call to Action to rebuild the political will and momentum behind the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Call to Action features a number of high profile international political events focused on the MDGs in 2008, including discussions at the EU Council in June and the G8 Summit in July, and will culminate in a High-Level meeting of Heads of State, to be held between 22nd and 25th September 2008, during the UN General Assembly in New York.

For activists and campaigners this marks an opportunity to have water and sanitation prioritised alongside health and education, and to ensure senior political leaders end their sidelining of the sector. It is a chance for campaigners to make sure that the consistent prioritisation of water and sanitation services by the poor is reflected by governments. It will provide a political platform at which governments could announce firm action plans detailing exactly how the MDGs will be met, and what they themselves will do to achieve them.

2. How will the event be structured?

There are 3 key events to highlight in the process:

a) 22nd September: High-Level meeting on Africa's Development Needs

African leaders will meet in advance of the high-level event to come up with a series of recommendations, providing an opportunity to build on the statements from the AfricaSan Conference and the AU Summit. *We need to ensure that strong recommendations on water and sanitation are made.*

b) 24th September: Partnership Event on Water and Sanitation

Governments, as well as foundations, business and NGOs, will be hosting high-level partnership events on a range of different issues. A high-level event on water and sanitation will be organized primarily by the Governments of Japan, Netherlands and Tajikistan, but also with the input of Spain, Germany and the UK. It will be attended by heads of states, ministers and officials from developed and developing countries, as well as UN bodies. It may be the first of such events to be held annually.

The event will aim to assess progress towards the sanitation and water MDG targets based on the JMP and Global Annual Assessment (GLAAS) Reports, identify barriers to progress and mobilise increased action by donor and recipient governments. Crucially, the meeting will deliver a declaration and series of recommendations to feed into the full High-Level Event the following day. *We need to ensure that this declaration is strong, ambitious and includes the End Water Poverty demands for a global action plan.*

c) 25th September: Main High-Level Event

This is the main event for Heads of State and Governments. It will begin with an opening plenary session with the UN Secretary General. Following this there will be 3 concurrently running roundtable discussions themed around (1) poverty and hunger, (2) health and education, and (3) environmental sustainability. Water and sanitation will be placed in the *health and education* theme (NB. previous briefs had put it in the environmental sustainability theme). There will also be further partnership events held over lunch, and the day will conclude with a closing statement and summary by the Secretary General that will highlight the main discussion points, and hopefully outline any commitments made and key milestones agreed.

We need to ensure that the roundtable discussion and the final declaration includes concrete actions to meet the sanitation and water MDG targets, and endorses the End Water Poverty demands.

3. What opportunity does this summit provide?

On the one hand, there is a risk that this meeting will be mere rhetoric. Yet on the other, it could provide the platform, profile and momentum needed to deliver concrete actions. And given that it falls in the International Year of Sanitation, and following key events such as AfricaSan, the AU Summit and the G8 summit, it provides an opportunity for the water and sanitation sector.

4. What outcomes should we be calling for?

- a) **Heads of State should recognize and highlight the importance of sanitation and water as integral to progress across the MDGs, especially to the most off-track targets.** It may serve both as an opportunity to raise awareness amongst less-engaged leaders, and a platform for supportive leaders. We need to make sure both that the 'partnership event' feeds concrete outcomes into the main discussions the following day, and that it agrees to convene on a larger scale in 2009. We must also ensure as many Heads of State and Governments are briefed and willing to raise issues of water and sanitation prominently in each of the 3 roundtable discussions.
- b) **Ambitious and concrete milestones – and a review process – should be agreed to measure and drive progress towards to 2015 MDG target.** The meeting *may* agree key indicators to outline what would have to be done by 2010 and 2013 to meet the 2015 MDG targets. We must ensure that these are sufficiently ambitious and measurable, and that, crucially, the *means* to achieve them are outlined also. We need a process whereby progress would be reviewed and remedial action taken if targets were not on track. A separate paper on key milestones will be developed.
- c) **UN member states should back a Global Action Plan for sanitation and water, as outlined in the End Water Poverty [Programme of Action](#).** Member states should collectively agree to an action plan that includes creating a global high-level task force and an annual review to drive progress towards meeting the MDG targets, the development of credible, costed sanitation and water plans at national level, and a donor commitment that *no credible plans will fail through a lack of finance*. Individual countries – both developed and developing - should use the meeting as a platform to spell out specifically how they will support progress in these areas.

5. What actions can End Water Poverty members take?

A fuller toolkit providing ideas and information to assist local campaigning will be developed and circulated soon, but for now do start to think about plans to:

- a) **Meet your Government:** ensure your Head of State or Government will attend, and brief them on the need to prioritise sanitation and water as ways of meeting the MDGs. Ask them to support the End Water Poverty calls at each of the 3 events highlighted earlier. Your head of state will just have received an invitation to participate in the roundtable discussions on 25th September, asking them which discussion they want to take part in – we want them to take part in the roundtable on *health and education* and commit to promoting water and sanitation there.
- b) **Raise the public profile of the event:** build expectations around the event by capturing public and media attention, and creating pressure through local and national parliamentarians.
- c) **Support the End Water Poverty petition:** The petition for the G8 in Japan will be extended towards this meeting and presented shortly beforehand. So far over 940,000 actions have been taken worldwide. Make this even bigger by collecting petitions and promoting the online actions to be added soon – make sure you tell us what actions you take so we can include it in the total.
- d) **Get involved in a working group on the issue:** End Water Poverty members who want to be more involved in a working group to focus on the policy and advocacy elements of this meeting should get in touch to be included in discussions. Contact stevecockburn@endwaterpoverty.org

For more information on the event please visit:

<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2008highlevel/index.shtml>
www.endwaterpoverty.org