

Summary of Side Event: Access to Water and Sanitation: Partnership approaches and lessons learned in the global pandemic to protect the most vulnerable and achieve the SDGs
02 February 2022, 14:00 - 15:30 (EST, New York time)

Background on the event

2.2 billion people worldwide do not have secure access to safe drinking water. Of these, around 785 million people lack even a basic supply. The devastating consequences for the health of the affected persons, but also leads to poorer education prospects and is a threat for female empowerment since the burden of collecting water often falls on women and girls. All of these aspects are reflected in the biennial Resolution on the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation put forward by Germany and Spain in the Third Committee of the United Nations, amended last [in November 2021 to reflect](#) the ongoing public health crisis caused by the pandemic. While every community has been affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic, established social hierarchies and endemic discrimination has resulted in a further marginalisation and exploitation which has left the most marginalized communities in a vulnerable situation. Existing social hierarchies have been exacerbated during the pandemic and access to healthcare has been denied to many in these communities during this time. Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) face generational discrimination and prejudices dictated through the principle of purity and “pollution”, millions were denied access to public water wells or other sanitation facilities due to their status in society and being considered “unclean”. CDWD bear the stigma and humiliation in everyday life based on caste, descent and work, and in addition to this, they also face brutal violence by the dominant communities. Women in those communities experience the discrimination in multiple ways as a result of the intersection of caste, class and gender. The event sought to initiate collaborative approaches with community leaders and decision takers from, to foster a better mutual understanding, interconnectedness and come up with innovative insights to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)

- This event was inaugurated by the Her Excellency, Ambassador Maria Bassols, Deputy Ambassador of the UN Permanent Mission of Spain who stated in her opening remarks that the access to clean water and sanitation is fundamental to human health, environmental sustainability and economic development. She also added that Spain is committed to working towards equality and against all forms of discrimination. Ambassador Maria Bassols ended her address with a wish that all those gathered at this session would work with conviction and take the responsibility of the human right to water and sanitation as a top priority to build towards a future of sustainable development for all.
- Dr. Alioune Tine, UN Independent Expert on the human rights situation in Mali stated that access to water and sanitation is crucial for all aspects of life. He stated that CDWD are the most discriminated communities. When access to water and sanitation is unavailable, people are more susceptible to disease. CDWD being among those who are the poorest due to being descendants of slaves and those who continue to be at risk of being subject to slavery. Dr. Tine added that the ever growing concern of climate change is aggravating

the situation around access to water and sanitation. It is a grave situation of discrimination which must be taken seriously by the UN and by CSOs.

- Continuing the session, Mr. Javier Sabogal representative from the Acueducto de Bogota, Colombia provided the grassroots public works scenario of access to water and sanitation in the city of Bogota, Colombia. Mr. Sabogal provided a comprehensive look at the systems in place, discussing how the most marginalised and poorest individuals were able to be protected and had access to clean drinking water and sanitation during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Using sustainable and ecological methods, the city of Bogota is able to provide water at subsidised rates to over 8 million residents and protect those who are most vulnerable and at risk of not being able to access water and sanitation due to economic disadvantages.
- Dr. Givania Silva, Executive Director, Coordenação Nacional de Articulação das Comunidades Negras Rurais Quilombolas (CONAQ), Brazil, spoke of the Quilombola communities in the country. Dr. Givania spoke of how due to the lack of infrastructure in the rural areas, the Quilombola communities, who are among the most marginalised and are largely situated in rural areas, must depend on trucks transporting water to these areas. She added that any crisis or natural disaster can drastically impact the situation. There is a lack of public policy regarding water and sanitation for the most vulnerable communities and this is further impeding the access to water for the Quilombola communities. In addition, racism, xenophobia and existing inequality is furthering the divide. The lack of impetus from the government is also aggravating the situation.
- Speaking on the situation of the Roma communities in Europe, Cipri Nodis from the European Roma Grassroots Organization Network stated that almost 1/3rd of Roma communities do not have access to water and sanitation. Due to discrimination which has continued through history, Roma people still face a lot of discrimination and live in inhumane conditions that aggravate the situation of access to clean water and sanitation facilities. Even though policies are in place as per the European Union, the lack of active enforcement of these policies has resulted in continued discrimination and marginalisation of the Roma people. The lack of access to water and sanitation impacts the access to livelihoods and education, thereby continuing a cycle of inequality.
- The final speak for the session was Ms. Beena Pallical, General Secretary for the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights. Beena discussed the how the practices of untouchability and the concepts of 'purity' and 'pollution' that form the basis for the caste system in the South Asian region, have hindered the access to water and sanitation. Furthermore, ghettoization of populations and situations of communal violence and backlash have also made access to water and sanitation a difficulty for Dalits and particularly Dalit Women who are further marginalised due to the intersection of their identities as women and Dalits.

Key recommendations for action

- **Investment.** Governments must make a concerted effort to allocate budget and finance the access to clean water and sanitation facilities even in the most remote areas keeping in mind the most vulnerable populations. It is imperative that governments subsidize the

costs to access water and sanitation as we have seen poverty intrinsically tied with the lack of access to water and sanitation

- **Infrastructure.** Building the water, sanitation and hygiene facilities necessary in all parts of the country so that people are not required to walk miles to access these basic and fundamental rights.
- **Inclusion.** DWD communities particularly face societal stigma on their inherent descent and jobs that they have historically been forced into. As this has been one of the fundamental barriers to the access to water and sanitation of these communities, it is vital that governments works towards undoing these barriers along with investing and building infrastructure for the full and inclusive access to water and sanitation. Ensure that the voices of survivors of slavery and people vulnerable to slavery are incorporated into the design of any programmes to ensure their sustainability.