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## UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

### *Scaling Up of Rights of Children to WASH in Schools*

March 23rd 2023, 12:30-13:45 EST, Conference Room B UN HQ

Organized by: CENTRE FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH RESEARCH (CCHR), India; Human Right2Water, Switzerland; AOSED (An Organization for Socio-Economic Development), Bangladesh; WHEC (Women's Health and Education Center), USA; Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB), Malaysia; Malayala Manorama National Daily, India; FANSA (Fresh Water Action Network South Asia-Kerala), India.; CeTamb (Research Center on Appropriate Technologies For Environmental Management In Resource Limited Countries), University of Brescia, Italy.

#### **Background on the event (one paragraph)**

Children are reported to be powerful agents of change not only in their homes but also in the community. In India, the program on WASH in Schools (WinS) has a profound impact on the learning interest of children, especially girls. Girls are reluctant to go to schools due to lack of appropriate toilet and hand washing facilities and consequently become vulnerable to drop out from school. The main objective of the proposed Side Event is to scale up worldwide the Constitutional amendment of the "Right to Children" under the purview of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 in India that ensures all schools in the country must have adequate safe drinking water and sanitation facilities, including separate toilets for boys and girls; and facilities for hygiene, especially menstrual hygiene management for adolescent girls.

#### **Water Action Agenda (one paragraph, if possible, please include the link to your commitment in the [Water Action Agenda database](#))**

The Water Action Agenda linked to this event is to ensure the basic Rights of the Child such as access to safe drinking water and sanitation and hygiene facilities under the preview of the Right to Education (RTE). The observation by the Supreme Court of India on RTE needs to be scaled up so that every school in India has requisite number of teachers, potable water, toilets, safe building, and other such facilities for students. Partnership with multi-level actors is essential to achieve the sustainability of school sanitation and hygiene education programs. These stakeholders should highlight the fact that children are effective agents of change and their rights to WASH are a necessity not only in India, but also in other countries around the world. It is therefore important to implement environmental awareness/school sanitation/hygiene education in school syllabus for a healthy school environment, to strengthen capacity building programs, and to fight against any threats such as diseases or infections caused by lack of WASH safe access.

Link to the commitment: <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/children-are-agents-change-intervention-kerala-india-wash-schools>

### **Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)**

1. Children should be empowered as agents of change to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.
2. The Rights to Water and Sanitation are game changing rights for accessing other human rights. It is important to promote education since it is an enabler of human rights, peace and WASH awareness.
3. There is a need to support schools in promoting menstrual hygiene management and other WASH issues. In India Women face challenges such as open defecation, unsafe drinking water, unhygienic conditions that risk their health, and risks of violence in accessing WASH.
4. There is a need to scale up laws, policies, and commitments to improve WASH conditions in countries around the world.
5. Youth leaders need to be hopeful and involved as well as willing to transmit the WASH success stories that are being developed already to encourage more people to join the cause.
6. There is a need to invest in capacity building and the construction of community networks to promote access to WASH.
7. Personal pledges were discussed regarding water action, for example, awareness building, education, openly speaking about taboo topics, and others.

### **Key recommendations for action (5 - 6 bullet points)**

1. Local integration, as shown by the State of Kerala, India, should be scaled up in advancing WASH in schools.
2. There is a need for more discussion among policymakers to protect young women and students to access WASH
3. Bottom-up approaches for youth engagement in WASH will produce optimum outcomes when combined with teachers' engagement.
4. There is a need to publicize positive work and trends in WASH to scale up commitment and effort.
5. Financial support and investment in capacity building need to be allocated to community-based solutions in WASH.
6. Inclusion of traditional leaders, indigenous knowledge, and shared accountability are needed to break the barriers in advancing WASH, particularly to remove barriers and taboos.