The Global Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for all (WASH) Initiative and the African Ministers Initiative for WASH (AMIWASH)

Global WASH campaign
The Global Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All (WASH) campaign is spearheaded by the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC). It was launched in 2001 at the International Freshwater Conference in Bonn – Germany by Hon. Maria Mutagamba, Minister of State for Water (Uganda). It is a concerted advocacy effort to place sanitation, hygiene and water firmly on the political agenda. It aims to raise the commitment of political and social leaders to achieving these goals and effecting the necessary behavioural changes through various information and communication channels, using traditional and mass media, hygiene promotion in schools, training and building local capacity in communications and improving networking and research. Subsequently WASH was re-launched in the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in 2002. The WASH partnership is the only active global multi-stakeholder partnership which has remained focused on the achievement of the water and sanitation goals for the poor.

National WASH campaigns have since been launched and activities started in over 36 worldwide, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda in Africa. Under this initiative WASH coordinators were selected and coalitions were formed in these countries.

AMIWASH
The African Ministers’ Initiative for WASH (AMIWASH) was formed in 2004 by Ministers responsible for water and sanitation in Africa, as a political effort to take up the responsibility to spearhead the effort to address Africa’s WASH challenge. This was essentially because it was imperative that the political leaders in Africa take up the responsibility to spearhead the effort to address the huge challenge facing Africa. AMIWASH brings together African Ministers from different sectors to work proactively together in accelerating their countries’ progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on water supply and sanitation. The specific objectives of AMIWASH are:

(a) To support African countries (governments) to achieve the MDGs on water and sanitation, through WASH advocacy, coalition building, and policy development and implementation;
(b) To place WASH issues high on the political agenda at AMCOW and strengthen AMCOW’s capacity in water supply, sanitation and hygiene; and
(c) To strengthen south-south collaboration on WASH interventions.

AMIWASH was introduced at the fifth ordinary session of AMCOW (Entebbe, November 2004), which welcomed it as “…a political advocacy for water, sanitation and hygiene on the African Continent”. AMIWASH was further presented by the AMCOW President and discussed at the Global WASH Forum in Dakar in 2004.

Subsequently an AMIWASH session was held at the Stockholm World Water Week in August 2005. The session highlighted the following lessons and recipes for success.

(i) Political leadership is the driving force for success.
(ii) Building on the WASH campaign AMIWASH has captured attention and raised the profile.
(iii) Involving all stakeholders’ coalitions, civil society, including local government, builds bridges between water and health.
(iv) Coordination: all actors should get their act together in a coordinated, not divergent fashion, including external support, and on data and statistical information.
(v) Mainstreaming gender, through Women and Water Awards, gender-sensitive policies showing real action on the ground.
(vi) Good, solid analyses, clear roadmaps to achieve the MDGs, and even exceeding the goals.
(vii) Pro-poor policies and institutional reforms, engaging the private sector while States maintain control.
(viii) Investing in people, especially in children, particularly girls’ education.
(ix) Mobilizing investment, whether through own resources or with external support.
(x) AMCOW: widened reach of WASH campaigns with youth involvement, WASH in schools, annual Sanitation Weeks celebrations.
(xi) Critical importance of Hygiene, which is often forgotten.

African Ministers showing solidarity at the Stockholm AMIWASH session towards achievement of the MDGs

AMIWASH is an initiative rather than an institution; and its role is supportive to institutions and initiatives. It cannot, therefore, best achieve its objectives through country level action by governments and other players. The role of AMIWASH is to encourage and facilitate inter country collaboration and partnerships among sector players to focus attention on WASH priorities. Linkages with ongoing initiatives are therefore important for AMIWASH to be able to deliver results. AMIWASH will draw on financing mechanisms under the different initiatives to guide the focus on the critical WASH challenges.

The sister “Women Leaders’ for WASH for All Initiative” has brought together women leaders from the North and South, and the international organisations (convened by Hon. Hilde Johnson, Minister for International Development (Norway), Hon. Maria Mutagamba, Minister of State for Water (Uganda) and AMCOW President, and Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director of UNICEF). The initiative by women leaders adds a new impetus to the ongoing efforts, and brings the women’s issues and concerns into better perspective. It also contributes to achieving other MDGs, such as achieving gender equality and in promoting children’s, especially girls’ education, on improved hygiene and sanitation practices. Through this initiative the women leaders are raising the profile of WASH in international fora, and championing it within their areas of influence.

While AMIWASH is of necessity multi-sectoral in nature, it will be of mutual benefit for it to operate closely with AMCOW’s establishment. In the process it will increase the scope for AMCOW to address its objectives relating to water and sanitation. This will assist to mainstream WASH issues within the AMCOW structures and operations, and to encourage and streamline activities at country level. It is important that support is provided at country level, since that is the main point where policy and other interventions can have a real impact on access to safe water and sanitation services.