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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF WATER RESOURCES, WATER SUPPLY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION

Outline for a discussion forum on citizens' action: how bridging the accountability gap leads to water and sanitation service provision

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Note: The discussion form is based around the paper submitted to the conference organizers by Peter Ryan, Biraj Swain and James Wicken entitled Citizens' Action: how bridging the accountability gap leads to water and sanitation service provision.

Introduction

The snail like pace of progress on the grim and well known statistics of water and sanitation coverage mean that the goal of universal coverage of water and sanitation remains a distant hope; even the intermediate target to halve by 2015 the proportions of people living without these necessities – as set out in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – look like they will be missed by some distance. Despite all the efforts of those in the water and sanitation sectors something is missing. This 'something' is accountability to the people.

In these dire circumstances poor people are asking not only where is the water and where are the toilets, but also, who is responsible? A new source of momentum is needed to ensure that agencies stick by their commitments, that governments put into place – and act upon – the legislation necessary to support service provision and that service providers meet demand.

This is the essence of the Citizens' Action project: citizens supported to engage in ongoing dialogue and negotiation with service providers and governments; citizens holding them to account for the provision – or lack of it – of water and sanitation services.

Overview of the session

The session provides a space for organizations with an interest in improving governance and promoting accountability mechanisms to learn about exciting new work being done in this area and share experiences. Given that the conference is being located in Sri Lanka there is a South Asian flavour to many of the presentations. It is expected that the session will result in a joint resolution/call to action and the formation of a loose network of organizations working to bridge the accountability gap in the water and sanitation sector.

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