

Welcome Address by the Chairperson of CONIWAS - Ms. Beata Awinpoka Akanyani

Naa Chairman Naa Paganee Sakoe Mornah III (Chief of Sankana), The Hon. Minister of Sanitation and Water Resources, The Hon. Regional Minister Members on the Parliament, Chairman and Ranking Member Parliamentary Select Committee on Works and Housing, Directors and staff of MSWR, Hon. MCE of Jirapa Municipal, Development Partners, Our Child Diplomat- Nana Akua, Distinguished Guests, Esteemed Experts, Respected Practitioners, the Council of Elders of CONIWAS, CONIWAS members, Valued Participants and the Media - Good Morning.

On behalf of the Executive Committee and distinguished members of the Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation (CONIWAS), it is with immense pleasure and profound gratitude that I welcome you to the 34 edition of the MOLE Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Conference Series in Ghana. This is the first time it is being held in the Upper West Region, at the Royal Cozy Hotel - "Jirapa Dubai". This year's conference is special to CONIWAS as we celebrate 20 years of active CSO partnership and contribution to the WASH sector in Ghana and being the long-standing CSO body advancing WASH issues nationally and internationally.

Introduction of the Coalition and Conference:

On the celebration of our 20th Anniversary, permit me to re-introduce our great coalition. The Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation (CONIWAS) was established in 2003 with over 80 memberships from National NGOs, International NGOs and Affiliates put into three zones in Ghana. CONIWAS has since been committed to driving positive change in the WASH sector.

We aim to unite our collective efforts, harness the power of collaboration, and find lasting solutions to the most pressing issues in water and sanitation. Our coalition has been working tirelessly to bring attention to critical issues in the water, sanitation, and hygiene sector in Ghana and beyond. Our mission is to "work with citizens and relevant stakeholders to influence policies, remove barriers and promote access to safe water, improved sanitation, hygiene and livelihoods, especially for the poor and vulnerable." Over the last three decades, CONIWAS members have made tremendous contributions to WASH delivery, innovations, research, advocacy, monitoring, evaluation, and learning resulting in safe WASH delivery.

State of Affairs-CONIWAS

Naa Chairman, Hon Minister, Distinguished ladies, and gentlemen, let me update you on state of affairs of the three zonal wings of CONIWAS. Generally, all our active National NGOs and CBO members are still struggling with funding challenges to implement programmes. The COVID-19 era further exacerbated the funding situation for most of our national NGOs and CBOs. I am using this opportunity to appeal to International NGOs and Development Partners to consider sustainable funding partnerships with our national NGOs and CBO members of CONIWAS to sustain their programmes and Organizations.

The Northern Zone has vibrant membership and has come up with critical policy perspectives on CLTS and Sanitation which they are preparing to develop into a position paper. They are also preparing to develop another policy position on subsidies, and we will soon hold policy dialogues with relevant stakeholders on these issues.

The Middle Zone is reactivating our membership base and planning to engage more with the MMDAs in the Eastern, Ashanti, Bono, Bono East and Ahafo Regions to support WASH planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Let me emphasize that this is a ZONE with very poor donor support for WASH activities which has affected and continue to affect our members. Despite that many INGOs and DPs are headquartered in Accra, our Southern Zone members are also not spared of the challenge of inadequate funding for WASH activities. Overall, our newly elected ZONAL Leaders are poised and ready to work with INGOs, GoG and DPs to accelerate Ghana's WASH access rate. We are prepared for durable and effective partnerships to promote innovative service delivery, address inequities and work to strengthen systems.

Key accomplishments

Naa Chairman, Hon Minister, Distinguished ladies, and gentlemen, I would like to highlight key achievements we have chalked in the past year.

1. To begin with, CONIWAS held Policy engagement on the review of the Environmental Sanitation Policy with the Ministry, DPs, and Parliamentary Select Committee to highlight key issues to consider in the review of the environmental sanitation policy; especially considering the assessment of our previous policy using the African Sanitation Policy Assessment Tool (ASPAT) developed by AMCOW.

2. It is important to note that, based on the recommendation from the policy engagement, for the first time, the ministry involved the Parliament Select Committee on Works and Housing from the initiation of the review of the policy (unlike previous policies developed and shared with them after it is concluded).

Besides that, last year, CONIWAS sent a petition to CHRAJ on the need for every school to have adequate and safe WASH infrastructure. In relation to this, CHRAJ engaged CONIWAS and thus will be undertaking a nationwide assessment of WASH situation in schools.

4. Furthermore, our continuous advocacy on Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) and the clarion call for the removal of taxes on menstrual hygiene products have resulted in wider CSO support for the call. In that regard, we are happy to note that the speaker of parliament supported the actions of CSOs, following that, an MP initiated a bill in parliament for the removal of a 15% tax on sanitary products.

5. Also, CONIWAS pushed for the Ministry to commit to a presidential compact and we are committed to follow up on the processes. On calls to harmonize sector data, we have been engaging with the ministry on the rollout of the SIS (where yearly we organized dialogues on the SIS including update sessions at the Mole conference). It is worth noting that the Ministry has engaged all the 16 regions on the SIS and a roll-up of the capacity of all MMDAs is being planned, we are happy to note that this year's mole will once again provide a platform for an update).

Within the year, CONIWAS provided platforms to discuss issues of water safety planning and is ready to support the government in rolling out the road map that will ensure that all sector Water service providers integrate water safety planning as part of their operations.

7. On IWRM, CONIWAS sits on ***the Taskforce for WRM*** and is on the steering committee of the ***Tamale Water Fund***, leading sensitization of communities and schools around the Nawuni catchment area on issues of water protection, security, and IWRM supported by CRS. Our partnership with CRS is advancing the setting up of a learning hub towards knowledge management and learning.

8. Again, we successfully organized the 2nd Ghana WASH week celebration which was marked by sector players and our members across the country, creating publicity, sensitized citizens, undertook outreach to the **Savelugu School for the Deaf** and highlighted various contributions of our members on WASH among citizens.

CONIWAS built the capacity of its members in WASH System Strengthening to adopt and integrate in their project activities.

We are grateful to our key partners that have supported our advocacy and capacity-building actions. We would like to show our gratitude to the Government, UNICEF, The GAMA SWP, IRC, CRS, WaterAid, Global Communities, SNV, Plan International Ghana and World Vision International.

MOLE 34 WASH Conference

Naa Chairman, Hon. Minister, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, this year's MOLE 34 WASH conference is under the theme: ***"Building Inclusive and Resilient Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Systems to Reach the Unserved"***. The theme has been carefully chosen to mark such a milestone. This theme underscores our unwavering commitment to fostering inclusive, resilient, and sustainable WASH systems for all. It seeks to advance the agenda and call for equitable and sustainable WASH systems that can transform communities and safeguard public health for all. The chosen theme is not just a set of words; it embodies the heart of our shared mission. It speaks to the very essence of our work in the WASH sector towards safely managed sanitation, inclusive city-wide sanitation, pro-poor water access, and universal access to water.

Addressing Critical Challenges:

As we all know, the WASH Sector continues to face numerous challenges. These are not limited to any one region but resonate nationally and even across the globe. Challenges such as water scarcity, water quality, inadequate access to sanitation and hygiene facilities, and the persistent threat of WASH-related diseases continue to jeopardize the health and well-being of numerous communities. In addition, the devastation brought on by climate change impacts, such as the crisis we find ourselves after the Akosombo Dam Spillage are some of the hurdles we face as a Sector. The status quo is not an option. We must confront these challenges with determination and creativity.

Goals and Objectives of the Conference:

The goal of the conference is to review equity and inclusive approaches toward building resilient WASH services in the country. The focus of discussions will include systems, approaches, and models of resilient WASH service delivery. Our objectives include inspiring positive action, strengthening partnerships, and finding ways to bridge the gaps in WASH service delivery. Our focus on Inclusivity, Equity and Resilience in a Changing Climate:

Our commitment to inclusivity and equity in WASH delivery efforts is non-negotiable - No community should be left behind. We recognize that marginalized communities, including women, children, and persons with disabilities often bear the heaviest burden when it comes to WASH challenges. We stand united in our determination to ensure that every individual, regardless of their socio-economic status, gender, age, or location, can access safe water and improved sanitation. By fostering inclusivity in our approaches, policies, and interventions we can ensure that the most vulnerable among us are given a

voice and their needs met. The key to accelerating our gains and successfully scaling up all the workable approaches and models we intend to share at this conference lies in community-driven initiatives.

Notwithstanding, the changing climate casts a shadow over the future of water resources, and WASH infrastructure. Partners managing WASH programs in emergency contexts in Ghana, are very much aware of the annual impact of floods on household toilet uptake and how this challenge continues to disrupt progress and undermine community morale and commitment towards behaviour change and household toilet construction. It is imperative that we build resilience in our WASH systems, developing innovative, climate-smart nature-based solutions that can withstand the test of time. This conference will explore how we can adapt to climate change, ensuring our systems remain effective even in the face of climatic uncertainty.

The Role of Stakeholders - a Call to Action:

Naa Chairman, Hon Minister, Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, we acknowledge that the journey to transform WASH systems is a collective one. It requires the active participation of various stakeholders - Governments, Development Partners, CSOs/NGOs, the private sector, Traditional Authorities, and communities, since each plays a pivotal role in this endeavor. For us at CONIWAS, our mission is not one that can be achieved in isolation, we recognize and appreciate the contributions of each stakeholder in achieving our objectives over the years. This conference is about action. We have gathered here over 170 diverse group of experts, policymakers, researchers, practitioners, politicians and community leaders who are committed to making a difference. Together, we will explore innovative solutions, share best practices and develop tangible strategies that can be implemented on the ground.

Overview of Conference activities and Conclusion:

We have an exciting program at this conference that will allow members to reflect upon and celebrate our past accomplishments, renew partnerships, extend our networks, and jointly explore current and future research directions. Before I conclude, I would like to quote the words of Franklin D. Roosevelt "***We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future***", Our novelty this year is the introduction of the ***Young WASH Professional Network sessions*** and engagement with Children. We have introduced the young WASH professional network session to provide the youth under 40 years to understand and build a career in WASH with the opportunity to engage with esteemed and accomplished WASH mentors for the period of the conference. Moreso, CONIWAS through our engagement with our ***SANITATION Child Diplomat- Nana Akua*** will have a direct outreach with selected schools in Jirapa as part of her advocacy with peers in the Basic Schools on WASH.

At this conference, let us celebrate what we as a professional community have achieved. This conference will be one for us to share our thoughts and exchange ideas on how to chart our journey towards building inclusive and resilient WASH systems to reach the unserved. It is my humble request to each one of you to actively engage, share your knowledge and experiences, and contribute your unique perspective to the transformative solutions that we will discuss throughout this conference. Your insights, expertise, and dedication will shape the outcomes of this conference and ultimately contribute to the transformative change we seek.

Naa Chairman, Hon. Minister, before I take my seat, I have the honor to introduce the new Executives of CONIWAS (***Mr. Isaac Acheampong Fianko- Middle Zonal Coordinator, Mr. Freeman Salifu Kanton-***

Northern Zonal Coordinator, Mrs. Abigail Naana Ansandu- Southern Zonal Coordinator, Mr. Kofi Biscoff- Vice Chairman and Beata Awinpoka Akanyani- Chairperson and two co-opted members from Water Aid and CRS)

Naa Chairman, Hon. Minister, I would like to acknowledge the tireless effort, sacrifice, and hard work of the all-female secretariat of CONIWAS led by our **executive secretary-Basilina Nanbigne**, thank you and God bless you! I would like to show my profound appreciation to the council of elders of CONIWAS for their support and for building the youth for the future of CONIWAS. To the **New Executive Committee members lets poise ourselves to effective partnership within the sector**. My special felicitations to the Chairperson of the Planning Committee of MOLE 34 **Madam Jemilatu Mashood of CRS**, and all Planning Committee members for your contributions, your efforts surely will be crowned by a successful MOLE 34. My biggest thanks go to our cherished CONIWAS members, God Bless us all.

Naa Chairman, Hon Minister, Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, together we can create a future where every person regardless of their background has access to clean water and adequate improved sanitation facilities. Once again, I extend my warmest welcome to each and every one of you. I wish you a productive, fun-filled experience and networking session at this conference.

Thank You! BARIKA