

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA
DECLARATION ON ENDING OPEN DEFECTION IN THE GAMBIA:
“A CALL TO ACTION”

STATEMENT DELIVERED BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL WELFARE; HON. OMAR SEY ON BEHALF OF HIS EXCELLENCY SHEIKH PROFESSOR DR. YAHYA A.J.J. JAMMEH “BABILIMANSA” PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA AT DELEGAS, CRR DURING THE PRESS BRIEFING ON THE DECLARATION

Sanitation coverage figures in The Gambia are promising and reduction in sanitation related disease burden is anticipated. The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare together with key partners and stakeholders have worked very hard in developing a strategic frame work that is consistent with Vision 2020, PAGE as well as the National Sanitation Policy Vision “Universal access to basic sanitation for all”. Universal access means ensuring everyone, everywhere has access to safe, hygienic toilet at homes, schools, health facilities and public places which is the only way we can have a fighting chance of eliminating and ending open defecation. As every man, woman and child deserves the dignity of a safe, hygienic toilet, the Government of The Gambia will be committed to prioritizing sanitation as well as fast-track the progress on sanitation to eliminate Open Defecation and bring better health and dignity to the population. Improving access to improved sanitation and ending open defecation practice is a high priority for the Government of The Gambia.

The Government of The Gambia recognized that poor sanitation undermines the country’s social and economic development and has serious health impacts on the population. Noting that poor sanitation and hygiene result to huge burden of disease and that the associated economic, human, social, health, nutrition and environmental costs are a major burden to national development. In this regard, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in collaboration with other government sectors, partners, NGOs, private sector organizations, Regional Governors, Chiefs, Alikalolus, religious leaders and community structures be actively involved in community empowerment and engagement activities to raise awareness, build skills for the adoption of positive sanitation behaviours at all levels.

Ending open defecation is one of the commitments made by national governments at high level Global Sanitation and Water for All meeting in Washington in April 2012 and 2014 as well as the 2015 AfricaSan 4 Conference in Dakar. The Government of The Gambia has made significant strides towards scaling up of Community Approaches to Total Sanitation throughout the country with impressive results on behaviour change for latrine use. Currently, the country has registered significant results in reducing the rates of open defecation nationally which stand at 2% nationally. With this low rate, the country is positioned to be the first African country to end open defecation.

In order for impact to be achieved and the gains registered to be sustained, I hereby declare that this country be Open Defecation Free by end 2016. During this period, emphasis will be on the scaling-up of cost-effective and sustainable community-based approaches to “Total Sanitation” in all regions for effective targeting of communities.

The success so far is under-pinned in the principles of; rapid scale up and expansion of all relevant and proven interventions, universal access to relevant interventions, ensuring equity through community based and gender based approaches.

I sincerely thank all stakeholders and our partners for supporting this “call to action” to end Open Defecation in all communities by 2016 in The Gambia.