It is my distinct honour to be here today and speak on behalf of UNICEF at this crucial gathering with the theme “A Community-Led Approach to Scaling Up Sanitation Coverage and Sustainable Hygiene Behaviour Change”.

Honourable Minster, this meeting happens at an opportune time – the beginning of our Namibian Government/UNICEF Programme of Cooperation 2014-2018 within the framework of UN Partnership Framework (UNPAF). The workshop is creating an opportunity to highlight Namibia’s priority interventions in terms of improving national sanitation and how they tie into the theme of the workshop – which is being supported by the UNICEF Regional Office, UNICEF Namibia and the CLTS Foundation.

I first would like to congratulate the Government of Namibia – in particular the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry – not only for their commitment in addressing the challenges brought forth by Sanitation, but also for ensuring that the process of identifying the problems and solutions of sanitation is participatory and truly owned by Namibia and all Namibians.
We do not need to remind ourselves that this work is long overdue – and the children of Namibia cannot – and should not – continue to live in an environment surrounded by feaces that compromise their growth and development.

Namibia is currently classified as an upper middle-income country. However, this status disguises the extreme inequalities in income distribution, standard of living, access to services such as Sanitation and quality of life left by the apartheid legacy, which lingers even 24 years after Independence from the colonial South Africa.

Globally about 2.5 billion people don't have access to adequate sanitation— that is one in three people in the world.

In Namibia, 67% or two thirds of the population lack access to improved sanitation. The situation is worse in rural areas, with 94% of people in rural Namibia not having access to improved sanitation. Levels of sanitation coverage in some regions are lower than the national average with Ohangwena at 11% and Omusati at 17%. This means that more than half of the Namibian population uses the bush or defecate in the open as an alternative to a toilet – compromising the nation’s health and development.

Reports indicate that 1 in 5 schools do not have access to toilets and that 298 schools do not have sanitation facilities. Reports tell us that 94% of those schools without toilets are concentrated in the 5 flood prone regions i.e Omusati, Ohangwena, Oshana, Kavango and Zambezi.
Introductory Remarks
Southern Africa Regional Meeting on CLTS
UNICEF Namibia Representative: Michaela De Sousa
1st April 2014
Safari Hotel, Windhoek

A review of research published in the Lancet suggests that:
“...Child underweight or stunting causes about 20% of all mortality of children younger than 5 years of age and leads to long-term cognitive deficits, poorer performance in school and fewer years of completed schooling, and lower adult economic productivity....”

This workshop will highlight key child development challenges that are linked to Sanitation and I would like to touch on three of them

**Nutrition**
This is a serious issue in Namibia as around a third of Namibian Children are stunted (about the average for much less developed countries in Africa). This stunting affects not only the physical and intellectual development of children, but also consequently puts a brake on the future development of the whole country.

There is strong evidence that links childhood under-nutrition and stunting to poor sanitation and hygiene and Open Defecation in particular. Diarrhoea and other infections like worms due to lack of safe drinking water and proper sanitation, accounts for about half of ill health and under-nutrition in children, but we have only just begun to understand why many undernourished children fail to make “catch-up” growth when their WASH and nutritional environment is improved - in other words why some children become stunted.

The emerging explanation is that infants living in conditions of poor sanitation – where open defecation is the norm – ingest large quantities of faeces – that as Kamal Kar will tell you they are literally eating the excreta (shit?)! This constant exposure of infants to fecal bacteria causes their guts to weaken, and become less able to absorb nutrients, which adversely affects growth and causes stunting.
Therefore one of the most important steps Namibia has to and need to take is to Address Open Defecation. Why so? Because research has revealed that taking care of sanitation will help to improve nutritional standards and reduce stunting, with consequent benefits to the development potential of the Nation.

**Education**

Education is a key programme activity for UNICEF. The Namibian Government has done a tremendous job in ensuring that the right to basic education for each and every child in Namibia is realised – We applaud the government for that.

However we still have sanitation challenges as I have mentioned earlier, particularly for girls who lack privacy and facilities for menstrual hygiene management.

Ensuring that all schools have proper and adequate toilet facilities is crucial if we have to address good hygiene practices. Coupled with this is the fact that educating children in good hygiene and sanitation behaviour impacts positively on their educational potential and also helps promote behaviour change in their communities – as children are highly effective agents of change.

**Cholera Response**

Global reports indicate that since 2010 for the first time in history the majority of humanity now lives in cities. The 2011 Namibian Census indicated that 58 % of Namibia’s 2.1m strong population was in rural areas and 42 % were living in urban areas in 2011. But the urban population is growing fast up from 33% in last 10 years. Perhaps of more relevance to our discussions of Sanitation is that in common with many countries in the region many of these new urban dwellers are swelling informal settlements.
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In 2011, 25% of the Namibian population was estimated to be living in urban informal settlements – with extremely limited access to improved sanitation and WASH facilities in general.

We all know that there is an on-going Cholera outbreak in Namibia right here in the City of Windhoek – a direct consequence of poor sanitation in the informal settlements of the city. Addressing sanitation in growing cities is one of the most pressing issues of our globalised world and in Namibia.

As the three key areas that I have referred to illustrate, poor sanitation impacts directly on the health of any nation, and thus also has an impact on the development and economic potential of its population – especially children who are the nation’s future.

UNICEF remains committed to working with the Government of Namibia, the Ministry of Agriculture Water and Forestry, the Ministry of Health and Social Services, and other key partners to come up with workable solutions (this workshop is one of the processes) in addressing the sanitation challenges facing Namibia.

This workshop brings forth an opportunity for Namibia to learn from others who face and are dealing with similar challenges - through a spirit of partnership - can tackle these problems.

I thank you