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<b>Title</b>	<b>Making sustainable choices – the development and use of sustainability oriented criteria in sanitary decision making</b>
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### **Making sustainable choices – the development and use of sustainability oriented criteria in sanitary decision making**

The most recent estimate states that world-wide at least 2.6 billion people lack access to improved sanitation (WHO and UNICEF, 2004), defined by the WHO as being a connection to a public sewer or septic tank system, a pour-flush latrine, a simple pit latrine or a ventilated improved pit latrine (WHO and UNICEF, 2000). This global sanitation crisis has been recognised by the international community and is addressed in the Millennium Development Goals, which set the target of halving the number of people without access to adequate sanitation by 2015 (UN, 2002).

Currently, legislation and decision making procedures for choosing sanitation systems are determined by norms, standards and practices that have developed within the framework of conventional, end-of-pipe sanitary thinking. However a more integrated view of sanitary provision needs to be adopted where the search for sanitary solutions is geared towards finding sustainable systems not confined by the boundaries defined economically by initial investment and operation and maintenance costs, environmentally by limiting effluent concentrations and technically by systems that have proven to be unsustainable.

One way of guiding decision making processes towards choosing socially, economically and environmentally sustainable sanitation is to use sustainability oriented criteria in decision making processes for the comparison and selection of sanitary systems. Such sustainability oriented criteria based approaches should be used at all levels of planning and implementation. Developing and using a context-specific list of criteria to indicate the overall sustainability of a sanitation system helps focus the decision making process on the issues relevant to the different stakeholders. This allows more room for the implementation of innovative sanitation solutions that are tailored to the needs of the system users (Larsen and Gujer, 1997).

Despite the work that has been carried out on criteria for sustainable sanitation (for example at the Swedish Urban Water group, or by van der Vleuten-Balkema, 2003), they seem to remain largely unrecognised and unused in real-life project planning and implementation. This may be due to the fact that this work has so far only been the domain of a relatively small circle of

academics. The use of abstract theories and computer models may only serve to discourage practitioners from using sustainability criteria in their decision making processes.

The objective of this paper is to present a broad list of sustainability criteria related to sanitation developed by an inter-organisational working group in a series of two international workshops (Eschborn, Germany, December 2003 and Stockholm, Sweden, April 2004). It will also present proposed definitions for the limits of sanitation systems and of how a sustainable sanitation system should perform. The aim of the criteria list is to inspire decision-makers, donor agencies, NGO's, and CBO's to assess sanitation alternatives in relation to their sustainability before deciding to implement sanitation programmes and projects. It also aims to make them aware that establishing and using criteria for sustainability need not be complicated, and can serve to provide an extremely well founded basis for discussion, increasing the participation opportunities for all stakeholders in a decision making process. To highlight this, the paper will suggest how such criteria approaches can be integrated into currently practiced and recently developed planning and decision making approaches.