

Welcome Statement on Mole at 35:

"Looking Back on the Implementation of SDG 6: Progress, Challenges, and Way Forward,"

Delivered by: Beata Awinpoka Akanyani (CONIWAS Chairperson)

Salutation and Warm Welcome:

Togbe Tepre Hodo IV, Paramount Chief of Anfoega and the President of the Volta Regional House of Chiefs, Hon Lydia Seyram Alhassan the Minister of Sanitation and Water Resources, Dr. Archibald Yao Letsa- Hon. Volta Regional Minister, Members of Parliament, Directors and staff of MSWR, Hon. MCE of Ho Municipal, Distinguished Development Partners, Our Child Diplomat- Master Abdul Yazid Faraj Timtoni Wumbui, WASH Experts and Practitioners, the Council of Elders of CONIWAS, CONIWAS members, **Fellow Civil Society Representatives, the Media, Ladies and Gentlemen– Good Morning.**

It is both an honor and a deep responsibility to welcome you to the 35th Mole Conference here at Volta Serene Hotel. This conference represents a landmark in our continued journey toward sustainable water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services for all. Mole at 35 is not just a reflection of our history and dedication, but a reaffirmation of our collective commitment to improving WASH services in Ghana and beyond. The theme for this year's Mole Conference, *"Looking Back on the Implementation of SDG 6: Progress, Challenges, and Way Forward,"* is timely and significant. This theme offers us an opportunity to critically assess where we started, the strides we have made, the obstacles we continue to face, and the best way to push forward as we strive to meet the SDG 6 targets by 2030.

Introduction of the Coalition and Conference:

As we celebrate this 35th anniversary, it's essential to acknowledge the history and evolution of the Mole Conference Series. Since its inception in 1989, the Mole Conference Series has evolved from what was primarily an NGO forum into the most important multi-stakeholder platform within the WASH Sector in Ghana. The conference management within the years has moved from the National Service Scheme through ISODEC, ProNet and now to CONIWAS. Through the dedication of our fallen heroes/heroines the conference series is one of the longest-running and consistent running conferences in the country. It has also witnessed consistent growth of

interest and importance among civil society, policy makers, local government and development partners, including local authorities on an annual basis to deliberate on critical issues affecting the sector.

Togbe Chairman, Hon. Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen, 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. 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.

Within the context of sector changes and localization agenda, we sought to understand the current state of our members. Our recent Institutional and Organizational Capacity Assessment of members revealed several insights:

1. Many of our members are re-designing their programs to address emerging WASH-climate challenges.
2. Others are integrating preventive health measures into WASH programming.
3. However, weak funding remains a significant challenge for many of our members, hindering both program delivery and institutional sustainability.

Togbe Chairman, Hon. Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen, the localization agenda cannot succeed if the institutional capacities of national NGOs remain weak. I use this occasion to urge the Government and Development Partners to revisit the funding models for CONIWAS members and increase financial support for both WASH service delivery and organizational growth

Key accomplishments

Togbe Chairman, Hon Minister, Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, Over the past year, CONIWAS has achieved several key milestones:

1. **Policy Engagement:** We contributed significantly to the review of the Environmental Sanitation Policy, ensuring that our members' perspectives were integrated.
2. **Launch of the Revised Water Policy (2024):** CONIWAS was actively involved, highlighting the impact of climate change on water resources.
3. **Public Lecture on WASH Institutional Frameworks:** We engaged key stakeholders and political parties, resulting in their agreement to prioritize WASH. We are happy to note that, the submitted position paper by CONIWAS resulted in at least all the major political parties agreeing that water and sanitation should never be separated. CONIWAS continuing this advocacy is developing a WASH manifesto to get the political parties sign to prioritize WASH.
4. **Historic Presidential Compact on WASH (August 2024):** This compact outlines clear legislative frameworks, including the creation of the National Sanitation Authority and a fund for sustainable WASH services. CONIWAS among other initiatives, shared on the African's 7 conference with ANEW members. Additionally, we were given a Platform by the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) Secretariate to share Ghana's experience with other CSOs in different countries on the presidential compact.
5. **MHM Product Standardization:** We led a national stakeholders dialogue on the standardization of reusable MHM products and we are happy to note that the process has begun and progressing with the Ghana Standard Authority.
6. **MOLE Communiqué Review:** We are currently conducting a ten-year review of the Mole Communiqués and will present some preliminary findings during this conference. We look forward to having more inputs on how we can make this enviable WASH conference sustainable, engaging and more international.
7. **Launch of the White Volta Basin Watershed Fund:** In collaboration with Water Resources Commission and Steering Committee on the Water Fund, we supported in the launch of the White Volta Basin Watershed Fund. In collaboration with our members, we will support advocacy initiatives in communities and schools in water protection and security initiatives.
8. **3rd Ghana WASH Week:** This year's celebration was marked by sector players and our members across the country, creating publicity, sensitized citizens, undertook outreach to the **St Johns Integrated Special school in Navrongo in the upper**

East region. The Week also focused on building institutional partnerships, engaging the Ghana Health Service, Ghana Education Service, and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture to collectively prioritize WASH in national programming.

Addressing Critical Challenges:

Togbe Chairman, despite good progress made by, the WASH Sector continues to face numerous challenges. 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.

CONIWAS is saddened by the increasing effects of the practice of illegal mining (Galamsey) which has resulted in; major rivers like the Pra, Ankobra, Birim, and Offin being heavily contaminated with toxic chemicals, posing long-term health risks including neurological disorders, kidney damage, and developmental issues in children. Pregnant women and young children are particularly at risk, with mercury exposure potentially causing birth defects and cognitive impairments. The contamination also contributes to waterborne diseases, skin ailments, and respiratory conditions. Also, the Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) reports that pollution from Galamsey has drastically increased water treatment costs, disproportionately affecting the poor and vulnerable, which is a worrying situation for us as a sector.

We are joining many CSOs and Ghanaians to call on the government to take action, CONIWAS will therefore release a press statement to clearly state our position and call for action by Government, Traditional Authorities, the media and all Ghanaians to protect our freshwater bodies and improve on the quality supply of potable water and conserve our natural resources.

MOLE 35 WASH Conference

Togbe Chairman, Hon. Minister, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, this year's Mole Conference will focus on Ghana's SDG 6 implementation trajectory, assessing progress, identifying challenges, and defining a way forward. The sub-themes will cover institutional alignment, innovative financing for WASH service delivery, and policies for effective service delivery.

We have a robust program, and I encourage all participants to engage fully. As part of our efforts, our Sanitation Child Diplomat, Master Timtoni Wumbei, will be visiting schools in Ho as part of his advocacy work on WASH.

Conclusion:

Togbe Chairman, Hon. Minister, I want to extend a warm welcome to the Country Directors of Plan International Ghana and the Catholic Relief Services, as well as the CEO of the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA). CONIWAS is eager to collaborate with you to achieve the national WASH agenda.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the Government especially the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources for their continuous support and collaboration. We are grateful for your unwavering dedication and look forward to continuing this successful collaboration in the pursuit of universal WASH access for all Ghanaians.

I would like to extend our deepest gratitude to our development partners whose unwavering support has been instrumental in the progress we have made in the WASH sector. UNICEF, GAMA SWP under the World Bank, IRC, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), WaterAid, Plan International Ghana, SNV, Global Communities, and World Vision International, your commitment to policy development, infrastructure improvements and addressing inequality has empowered communities and strengthened systems. We look forward to continuing our shared journey towards achieving SDG 6 and ensuring sustainable WASH services for all. Thank you for your invaluable partnership and contributions.

Togbe Chairman, Hon. Minister I want to express my gratitude to the all-female secretariat of CONIWAS, led by our Executive Secretary **-Basilia 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 to the EC and Secretariat. To my own Executive Committee members, I'm deeply grateful for your support to get CONIWAS this far. My deepest appreciation goes to this year's dynamic planning committee led by the abled subcommittee team leads such as our very own Musah Ibrahim (Technical Lead); Esi Bonni-Morkla (Protocol and Logistic Team); Emmanuel Addai (Publicity and Branding Team) and our strong Emily Hammond for your dedication. Thanks to

the Volta Regional Environmental Health Officer Stella...for coordinating most of the regional activities for us- Your hard work has made this conference possible.

Let us use this platform to renew our commitment to achieving SDG 6 for all Ghanaians. **Remember the 3 C's: Choices, Chances and Changes; *You must make the choice to take a chance if you want anything in life to Change.*** So as leaders let's take Action to cause a positive change in the WASH sector.

Thank you all once again for being here, and I wish us all a fruitful and impactful Mole at 35 Conference.

Thank you.