**UNICEF-Academia-Private Sector Partnership WASH Innovation Project 2014-2016**

**Project Launch Friday 9th May, 2014**

Venue: College of Engineering Design, Arts and Technology (CEDAT) Conference Hall, Makerere Univeristy

OPENING REMARKS

Mrs. Aida Girma, Representative, UNICEF Uganda

Prof. John Ddumba-Ssentamu, Vice Chancellor of Makerere University;
Eng. Aaron Kabirizi, Director of the Directorate for Water Development, Ministry of Water;
Ms. Marja-Riitta Ketola, Executive Director of UNICEF Finland;
The Assistant Commissioner, Environmental Health Division, Ministry of Health;
The PEO in charge of the School Health Desk, Ministry of Education and Sports;
Representatives of Universities, the private sector and media;
Ladies and gentlemen,

***Introduction***

It is an honour and a pleasure to speak to you today, on this occasion to officially launch this WASH Innovations project in Uganda.

I would like to begin by thanking the Government of Finland for supporting this initiative, which is a new and exciting type of development cooperation that brings UNICEF, academia, and public and private sector actors from Finland and Uganda together into partnership.

I would also like to express my appreciation to all of the partners who have been engaged in bringing this partnership to fruition where we are able to today launch a three year cooperation in Uganda.

Notably - Makerere University; the Government of Uganda's Ministry of Water; the two Universities from Finland – Aalto and Helsinki universities; Biolan, our private sector partner in Finland; and, our sister UNICEF office in Finland.

It is exciting to see the synergies being created from all of your various expertise, skills and experiences to develop innovative water, sanitation and hygiene solutions that will benefit Uganda's children.

We thank you for your efforts to develop new WASH solutions that will improve the health, well-being and lives of Ugandan children today and in the future.

***Importance of Safe Water and Sanitation for Children***

Ladies and gentlemen, universal access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene is a long standing development goal, and one that is pivotal to the health and well-being of children.

In particular, access to safe water and adequate sanitation facilities in schools is both critical to children's learning - as it contributes to improved enrollment, attendance and retention of boys and girls in school - as well as child survival, as it significantly reduces the incidence of disease.

Indeed, access to quality basic WASH facilities and services, such as toilets, safe drinking water, and information on good hygiene practices, is a basic right of and commitment to children, which is reflected under point 5 of *The 1997 Kampala Sanitation Declaration* as follows:

> *"We shall ensure that every primary school and all other institutions of learning have adequate sanitation facilities (latrines, safe drinking water supply and with hand washing facilities; with separate facilities for girls"*)

***Situation of Water and Sanitation in Uganda***

However, ladies and gentlemen, despite all of the known benefits of adequate WASH facilities, access still remains a formidable challenge in Uganda.

For instance, the pupil latrine stance ratio (PSR) in Uganda remains at 69:1 - meaning 69 children share one latrine! This is compared to the national standard of 40:1.

And, access to hand washing with soap in schools is as low as 33% in some schools across Uganda - with glaring disparities between regions.

Three main reasons can explain this:

1) The level of investment in WASH facilities in schools is failing to match the growing school population;

2) There are inappropriate WASH technologies like latrines and hand washing facilities, which are not suitable to local socio- economic and environmental conditions*;* and

3) There are poor practices to operate and maintain WASH facilities.

***The Need for WASH Innovations***

Ladies and gentlemen, there is therefore a need for more innovative WASH solutions that benefit school children across Uganda.

And not just any innovations, solutions that are locally tailored to meet the local challenges Ugandan children are experiencing wherever they may live.

Existing innovative solutions such as the use of Effective Micro-Organism (EMO) to reduce both the stench and sludge in school latrines thereby improving the quality of education for children in schools is one.

Another is the innovative bio-latrine technology that uses the waste in school latrines to provide gas for cooking food, and in-so-doing ensures that the latrines never fill up, maintaining a cleaner more odor free environment for children in schools.

A third is the innovative elephant water tap stand that was developed by students from Finland as a pilot of this partnership, highlighting the major potential this partnership holds to meet the need for innovative WASH solutions in Uganda going forward.

***Conclusion***

Ladies and gentlemen, in conclusion I would like to reaffirm UNICEF's commitment to supporting this WASH innovations project and cooperation over the next three years.

We now look forward to a close collaboration with all partners in order to provide adequate and sustainable WASH facilities for all school children, thereby giving them more opportunity to survive and realize their full potential.

Thank you.