



USAID/E3 Water Communications and Knowledge Management (CKM) Project

## GLOBAL WATERS RADIO

### Cheryl Hicks on World Toilet Day

#### *Interview Transcript*

**Global Waters Radio:** You're tuned in to Global Waters Radio, a podcast series produced by the Water Team at the U.S. Agency for International Development. The series offers listeners insights from USAID officials, development partners, thought leaders, and experts from across the water sector, as they discuss current USAID water programming and cutting edge research from around the world.

This week on the podcast, Cheryl Hicks, executive director of the Toilet Board Coalition. A public-private partnership, the Toilet Board Coalition uses market-based solutions to deliver sustainable sanitation improvements at scale in communities around the world. Today, we will be talking with Cheryl about a new multiyear partnership between USAID and the Toilet Board Coalition launched earlier this fall to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals' sanitation targets. We will also be talking about the Coalition's plans for observing World Toilet Day on November 19, with a major global summit in India.

**So Cheryl, welcome, and why don't you start by giving our listeners a bit of the Coalition's back story, and talk to us about the Coalition's approach to enabling sanitation improvements.**

**Cheryl Hicks:** Really, our story starts with business and that's where our partnership is unique as well. And so the Toilet Board Coalition was formed by business for business really to help facilitate more comprehensive private sector engagement in the goal that we all have, which is universal access to sanitation, fitting in with Sustainable Development Goal 6— universal access to sanitation by 2030. And so, the Coalition recognized a gap in private sector engagement and a body to help facilitate that, and so that's the gap that the Toilet Board is trying to fill. We were founded by four leading companies, really progressive on this agenda and their thinking. And that's Unilever, Kimberly-Clark, LIXIL Corporation, which is Japanese toilet maker, and Firmenich, which is a leading Swiss company, one of the top companies in the fragrances and flavorings area, which doesn't sound so obvious for sanitation at the beginning, but they are really leading on developing solutions for malodor, which of course in this sector is very important. We have also been able to attract the current leaders from the public sector, and so we have governments at the table—the US government of course, via USAID and our new partnership; the UK government; Canadian government; the French government; and the Asian Development Bank; the World Bank; but also, really those that have been leading on the sanitation agenda from the NGO sector and IGO sector—UNICEF, WaterAid, BRAC, WSUP, which is Water and Sanitation for the Urban Poor, and the WSSCC, which is the UN body mobilizing efforts to provide basic sanitation through the Global Sanitation Fund.

**GWR: Right. Well this year, with World Toilet Day focused around the theme of sanitation and livelihoods, can you talk about how improved sanitation contributes to job creation and economic development?**

**CH:** This year, at the World Economic Forum, the WASH for Work initiative was announced, which is where this focus is coming from, where many multinational and large businesses from around the world committed to providing basic and improved sanitation in their own operations, and really they saw that they needed to also pledge and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development's companies also have a pledge to do the same, to really ensure that all of their operations globally do provide access to improved sanitation in their operations, number one; and then future ambitions for supply chains and communities. And this is really linked to productivity and the importance of health and hygiene to workers' productivity, and of course basic health and safety. So this is something that the Toilet Board Coalition absolutely supports, and I guess where the Toilet Board tries to add additional value is going beyond into, you know, where the business opportunities in providing universal access to sanitation, and looking more at the innovation opportunities. You know, where are the innovations that are helping to provide sanitation through the market and how can we support those market-based solutions? The Toilet Board is trying to bring a business perspective to the global sanitation crisis, thinking about those without sanitation as customers. People, you know, want services and products that improve their lives.

**GWR: Right, so how long has the Coalition been around for, and can you give us a sense of how you go about developing sanitation goods and services that can make an impact at scale?**

**CH:** The Toilet Board is new, we're very much at the beginning—lots to do, but we see lots of opportunity. We were established in 2014 and so we're trying to learn from each other and see where business can add value. And the way we do that is very transaction focused, and so, we do come down to that level of "Okay, where can we affect change now? Where are the small businesses or innovations that we can work with to take them to scale through our accelerator program?" And on the other hand, how can we help to identify business opportunities for the broader business community and private sector, and so I think this is the strength of the Toilet Board Coalition.

The Toilet Board is supporting facilitation of private sector engagement in three ways. Number one, through business mentorship. So, the businesses that are operating in low-income markets where people don't have access to sanitation need support. They are small- and medium-size businesses and to get to the type of scale that we need to deliver universal access, they need basic business skills and support, and multinationals and large companies on our board are very well positioned to really help them overcome those barriers to scale and mentor them with basic business skills and scalable business model opportunity. In 2016, we established the Toilet Accelerator, which links to this program I'm talking about on corporate mentorship of small businesses. It is really inspired by the tech accelerators which had the same issue of a lot of great technologies, a lot of startups working in their basements, but can they run a business and take it to scale? And we're seeing the same thing. A lot of interesting technologies around toilet innovations and waste management solutions, but really technology driven. And what we're trying to provide is some of those commercialization skills and mentorship. So our multinationals and businesses in our partnership work one to one with a small businesses through our accelerator program. It's a one-year program, and we are just about to graduate the first cohort this year on World Toilet Day, at our summit, which I'll talk about later.

**GWR: Okay, great. Well, as mentioned at the top of the podcast, the Toilet Board Coalition and USAID have launched a multi-year partnership. How do you see the Coalition and USAID working together to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals' sanitation target?**

**CH:** We are really excited about this new partnership with USAID because of USAID's large scope, and breadth of the work it's doing on the ground in these very difficult contexts of the countries and communities where we need to deliver sanitation. And so, they bring that expertise to us, and where the partnership works really well is that we then bring private sector engagement, and so the partnership is really about developing this together in a public-private partnership. So that's really the role that we're looking for USAID to play, particularly through their operations in-country and the vast knowledge of the work that SMEs and governments are already doing in these communities and linking them to our project. The credibility and force of USAID we think will help us to accelerate the business of sanitation and achieve our joint goal faster of universal access to sanitation by 2030.

**GWR: Great. Well, with World Toilet Day right around the corner on November 19, can you talk about the strategic importance of holding a major sanitation summit in India, and what are your expectations for the gathering?**

**CH:** Sure, well you know, I think that the political will and leadership of the Indian government at the moment through the Swachh Bharat/Clean India program is a key driver. There's a lot of momentum in India. India is also the country which has the most people living without access to sanitation or improved sanitation, so a clear priority for this agenda.

But it is a global summit that we're putting on. Really trying to launch the global business of sanitation platform, and we are bringing the world to India, bringing small- and medium-size businesses from around the world who have very interesting business models to learn from each other, and connecting them to global businesses and local large businesses to work together. Because that's really what we're trying to establish here, is how do we put those business skills together, that the small- and medium-sized businesses working in-market have the innovation capability and understanding of what consumers' needs are there, and large businesses know how to scale, and know how to professionalize operations to get these businesses to scale. So that is a connection that we're trying to make, leveraging the momentum in India to bring the global business community together around sanitation. This is the first time we've really done that. The first gathering really focused on the business of sanitation, so we're really proud of that. Really excited about it.

**GWR:** Well Cheryl, thanks so much for taking the time today. For more information about the Toilet Board Coalition and World Toilet Day, have a look at the links below. And as always, if you'd like to see us cover a topic in a future edition of the podcast, drop us a line at [waterteam@usaid.gov](mailto:waterteam@usaid.gov).

This is Global Waters Radio.