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Contact: Renuka Jeya-Raj [r.JeyaRaj@cgiar.org](mailto:r.JeyaRaj@cgiar.org) Mob: 0777598438  
Shevonne Jayasinghe [s.jayasinghe@cgiar.org](mailto:s.jayasinghe@cgiar.org) Mob: 0773778078

## **New partnership will explore how SL can avoid pollution from human waste**

*IWMI/Ministry of Water Supply & Drainage research project will look at how human waste from septic tanks can be turned into valuable fertilizer rather than an environmental concern*

**Colombo. 8 May 2013:** The Colombo-based International Water Management Institute (IWMI) and the Ministry of Water Supply & Drainage signed a Memorandum of Understanding today to improve septage management in the country. The MOU signatories IWMI Director General Jeremy Bird and Secretary, Ministry of Water Supply & Drainage, A. Abeygunasekera, signed the agreement in the presence of the Minister of Water Supply & Drainage and Chief Government Whip Hon. Dinesh Gunawardena.

The MOU provides a collaborative framework for sustainable septage management in Sri Lanka in line with national regulations. Dealing with septage (human waste held in septic tanks) is a challenge across the developing world. Safe management with options for resource recovery and reuse to mitigate environmental and health risks will be a key focus of the new partnership. IWMI will contribute research data for the drafting of a septage management component of the national sanitation policy. The Ministry of Water Supply & Drainage will lead implementation of the policy through an advisory committee headed by Minister of National supply & Drainage.

“Sri Lanka’s rapid development in recent years has put tremendous pressure on sanitation and wastewater management systems,” said Mr. Bird. “In times of transition and rapid growth, it is unrealistic to assume that everyone will be connected to sewerage systems and so as cities grow, we need to put much more effort into other options to avoid damaging people’s health and degrading the environment. IWMI’s international expertise in the area of wastewater management and reuse can be a vital resource to the Sri Lankan Government in tackling the present water challenges.”

Only about 3% of Sri Lankans are connected up to sewerage systems. Everyone else relies on latrines and septic tanks for sanitation. But septage systems need to be properly managed to ensure public and environmental health. Without regular clearing of the tanks potentially hazardous quantities of waste can build up. So tanks need to be regularly serviced and the waste disposed of in a manner that cannot damage the environment or endanger human health. Such treatment facilities are currently lacking in large parts of the country leading to environmental costs. Careless disposal is creating a health hazard that could jeopardize Sri

Lanka's achievements on the millennium goals for drinking water supply and sanitation. But a new approach, being studied by IWMI in cities around the globe, seeks to treat the human waste collected so that it can be safely used, potentially as agricultural fertilizer. By applying this approach, cost recovery will be possible and allow better sanitation and environmental protection for all.

"Despite substantial government investments in onsite sanitation systems like septic tanks and flush latrines, the management of urban sanitation still needs improvement," said Mr. Abeygunasekera. "Proper maintenance of septic tanks through regular de-sludging, treatment and disposal of septage are important steps in improving public health and sanitation, the environment and the economy. We appreciate IWMI's support in this area of strength and look forward to working with them to introduce more sustainable septage management practices."

IWMI scientists are currently looking at various sustainable models for septage management, recovery and re-use. Case studies from cities in Asia, Africa and Latin America will help Sri Lanka design innovative new approaches that could benefit both public sanitation, agriculture and protect the environment. Imported fertilizer, for instance is becoming increasingly expensive. So a local alternative based on safely treated human waste could be a valuable asset to farmers.

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The **International Water Management Institute (IWMI)** is a non-profit, scientific research organization focusing on the sustainable use of water and land resources in developing countries. It is headquartered in Colombo, Sri Lanka, with regional offices across Asia and Africa. IWMI works in partnership with governments, civil society and the private sector to develop scalable agricultural water management solutions that have a real impact on poverty reduction, food security and ecosystem health. [www.iwmi.org](http://www.iwmi.org)

**CGIAR** is a global research partnership that unites organizations engaged in research for sustainable development. CGIAR research is dedicated to reducing rural poverty, increasing food security, improving human health and nutrition, and ensuring more sustainable management of natural resources. It is carried out by the 15 centers who are members of the CGIAR Consortium in close collaboration with hundreds of partner organizations, including national and regional research institutes, civil society organizations, academia and the private sector ([www.cgiar.org](http://www.cgiar.org)).

The **CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems** examines how we can intensify agriculture while still protecting the environment and lifting millions of farm families out of poverty. The program focuses on the three critical issues of water scarcity, land degradation and ecosystem services. It will also make substantial contributions in the areas of food security, poverty alleviation and health and nutrition. The initiative combines the resources of 14 CGIAR centers and numerous external partners to provide an integrated approach to natural resource management research. This program is led by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI). [www.wle.cgiar.org](http://www.wle.cgiar.org)