This thematic discussion focuses on how to move towards more sustainable urban sanitation. The discussions will be organised around two areas: 1) addressing the entire sanitation chain and the need to embrace systemic change; and 2) the role (or lack of) of local governments and its leaders to drive the required change.

**Week 2, topic 2:**

**LOCAL LEADERSHIP TO DRIVE CHANGE IN SANITATION**

The guiding questions for this week’s topic are:

1. How crucial is the role of local leaders? Is it possible to achieve sustainable improvements in sanitation in the absence of strong leadership and local ownership?
2. What role can development partners play to nurture and develop local leadership? Are they playing their role as triggerers, catalysts and supporters? Is it enough?
3. How to move forward in areas where local leadership and local ownership are absent?

**Background**

The role of local leadership to drive change is gaining increasing attention as key stakeholders in the sector continue to strive towards making sustainable sanitation gains that both generate health impact and economic returns. Some argue that in order for the sector to be able to deliver sustainable services to everyone, the government has to take the lead. Where government leadership is weak, a likely negative spin-off is low political commitment leading to chronic budgetary shortages and a very low pledge of public funds for sanitation.

Strong local leadership alone will not be sufficient to overcome all the urban sanitation challenges but it will definitely help. Leadership which translates into political will as well as political commitment is a prerequisite to drive change that is owned locally. To be successful the change must be desired, understood and eventually owned by local actors. Without that it will be extremely difficult to articulate and unite all relevant actors behind a shared vision, to develop a supportive legislative and institutional framework, to clarify roles and responsibilities, to create a single institutional ‘home’ for urban sanitation, to provide a framework for coordinated action, to develop strong professional and organisational capacities; and not in the least to ensure the allocation of adequate financial resources.

The following are some lessons learnt on how government leadership can drive sanitation improvements at scale, namely:

- Make sanitation a political priority and clearly define institutional responsibilities.
- Allocate adequate public funding to support development of underlying sector systems and processes and ensure an appropriate balance between investments in software and hardware elements.
- Ensure equity by enabling (smart) subsidies at local level and facilitate or enable opportunities to explore the potential of establishing credit mechanisms to leverage household investments.

In 2014 IRC’s CEO Patrick Moriarty devoted three blogs to the roles of the various actors in providing sustainable WASH services to all. In the one titled ‘No more fairy tales’ he explains why “government leadership” is critical to tackle inequality, poverty and to create sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene services – and why we need to stop believing in fairy tales. He furthermore illustrates that universal provision of anything – roads; health care; education and yes, WASH – cannot come from the private sector alone. It requires active, empowered government providing an enabling environment for active, agile and involved private sector and civil society. Patrick’s blog can be accessed at [http://www.ircwash.org/blog/no-more-fairy-tales](http://www.ircwash.org/blog/no-more-fairy-tales)