

GLOBAL NETWORK FOR JUSTICE

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2003 International Year of Fresh Water

International Targets

Two main international targets related to water supply and sanitation were agreed in 2000 and 2002, respectively:

UN Millennium Development Goal (2000): 'reduce by half, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water.'

World Summit on Sustainable Development, Plan of Implementation in (2002), '... we agree to halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of people who are unable to reach or to afford safe drinking water (as outlined in the Millennium Declaration) and the proportion of people who do not have access to basic sanitation.'

In order to meet these targets in urban areas, more than **1 billion additional people** in cities will need access to both water supply and sanitation over the next fifteen years.

Definitions

Adequate sanitation

Access to sanitation is convenient for all household members and affordable.

Adequate water supply

Supply of safe water is sufficient, regular, convenient and available at an affordable price.

Improved sanitation

Access to a private shared toilet connected to a public sewer or a septic tank.

Improved water supply

Access to a water supply from a household connection, a public standpipe, a borehole, a protected dug well, or a protected rain water connection. At least 20 liters per person per day

must be available from a source within 1 kilometer of the user's dwelling.

Issues Impacting Water Supply

The water that exists today would be enough to meet human needs if it were equitably distributed throughout the world. Since it is not, there arise situations of scarcity – some due to natural causes and others due to a range of human activities.

Population

World population has continued to grow throughout history. The principal cause in increased demand is not in itself the mere growth of population but the disproportionate unsustainable use of water for production and consumption by populations in developed countries.

The ever-growing concentration of a very high percentage of the world's population in large urban areas, especially in mega cities, is going to propose new challenges for water and sanitation management, which will seriously impact the short-term and long-term local demand for water.

Politics

Water is a political issue. There is little today that cannot be achieved technically. What is needed is political effectiveness, political will and effective governance. The political arena is where decisions of water utilization will take place. The solution to water problems requires the interaction of many spheres and sectors. This interaction must take account of the objectives of safe drinking water, sanitation and

food security for all. Politics must ensure proper interaction through setting correct priorities and the equitable allocation of resources as well as through fostering interaction between institutions and the engagement and support of local communities, who are the most directly affected. The long-term viability of a country's water supply infrastructure depends on leadership and vision of political leaders at national and local levels, and their capacity to get things done. A larger portion of national budget may need to be directed to the water sector. Political leaders are crucial in generating genuine political support and vision in order to provide the motivation for such changes.

The international political arena must be given its proper role in seeking and formulating global strategies to address water issues. The issue of water cut across so many areas relating to sustainable development and poses considerable challenges to politics at the international level. Action-oriented responses to the challenges are what the people of the world await.

A Right to Water

A major achievement of recent history has been the ability to elaborate, within the framework of the United Nations, a network of international instruments formally identifying and proclaiming a broad spectrum of universally recognized human rights. Although access to water is a precondition to many of these rights, "clean drinking water" is explicitly mentioned only in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is however, to be found in some regional human rights documents and national constitutions.

Several of the explicit rights protected by the conventions and agreements, such as rights to food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services, cannot be attained or guaranteed without also guaranteeing access to clean water. There is a growing movement to formally adopt a human right to water. The right to water is thus an inalienable right.

The challenge remains as how to such a right to water would be realized and enforced at the local, national, and international levels.

Poverty

Poverty is the most important factor related to the sustainable provision of basic water and sanitation services. Water scarcity has more dramatic effects for the poor than for the wealthy. The cost of even minimal basic water services is so high that the poor may never be able to afford them.

The water services in many developing countries are, however, still plainly inadequate in providing safe water supplies. This situation is so dramatic that it will not be overcome without increased development assistance and focused private investment from abroad.

Country partnerships can provide a method of institutional building and reform whereby a long-term link can be formed between the water sector of a developed country and that of a developing country. International poverty-reduction strategies should focus explicitly on the water needs of the poorest populations.

Following consultation at the community level, policies on water and related public health and environmental sectors need to be revised and where lacking, established. After such policy change there is need to create the body of laws impacting water that will effectively obtain and allocate the necessary supply of it.

Poverty is about people and their ability to realize their God-given potential. The poor show extraordinary creativity, which should not be overlooked in working together to build up sustainable communities and avoid the creation of dependence.

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For more information visit Website of UNESCO, <http://www.wateryear2003.org>

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