

Message from the World For World Organization on the occasion of the World Water Day, 22 March 2011

"We need to take Action to Ensure Water and Sanitary as Human Rights For All 'Water is life'"

Rome, 22 March 2011, the World For World Organization (WFWO) and its partners will commemorate World Water Day 2011 (WWD 2011). The WWD will provide a good opportunity to alert the world to the adverse global situation in urban water management, and to encourage seizing opportunities to address these formidable challenges. Through disseminating knowledge of successful approaches, it also seeks to give hope that solutions can be found. A principle objective of WWD 2011 is to celebrate success and better understanding the scarcity of water. The WFWO will organise a special event in this occasion in close cooperation with its partners to raise public awareness to draw attention to decision-makers, sector stakeholders and the world population about solutions.



This year, World Water Day highlights a specific aspect of freshwater. UN-Water has dedicated WWD 2011 to the theme **Water and Urbanization**. The objective of WWD 2011 is to focus international attention on the impact of rapid urban population growth, industrialization and uncertainties caused by climate change, conflicts and natural disasters on urban water systems. It will encourage action by governments, NGOs, CBOs, organisations, communities, and individuals around the world to actively engage in addressing urban water management challenges.

Today, half of the planet's population lives in urban areas and the world's cities and towns are growing at an unprecedented rate. According to the United Nations (World Urbanization Prospects: The 2009 Revision), the urban areas of the world are expected to absorb all the population growth expected over the next four decades while at the same time drawing in some of the rural population. Globally, the level of urbanization is expected to rise from 50 per cent in 2009 to 69 per cent in 2050.

Fast pace of African urbanization affecting water supplies and sanitation. Rapid urbanization over the last five decades is changing Africa's landscape and also generating formidable challenges for supplies of water and sanitation services, says a new UN report. According to the Rapid Response Assessment by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and UN-Habitat, urban centers in Africa are growing at a faster rate than anywhere else in the world.

Today 40 percent of Africa's one billion people live in urban areas - 60 percent in slums - where water supplies and sanitation are severely inadequate. Africa's urban population without access to safe drinking water jumped from close to 30 million in 1990 to well over 55 million in 2008. Over the same period, the number of people without reasonable sanitation services doubled to around 175 million says the report launched on World Water Day 2011. Is calling for action on, as part of next year's Rio+20 conference.

The majority of cities in developing countries grow and their populations increase, water scarcity is becoming an increasing constraint to urban development. New sources are more costly to develop and lack of control of city wastes results in increasingly polluted water sources resulting in environmental degradation and higher costs in water treatment.

In Africa the poor in the cities receive the worst services: piped water coverage is declining in many settings and yet the poor pay the highest water prices. Few urban authorities in developing countries have found a sustainable solution to urban sanitation. They cannot afford to extend sewers to the slums; nor can they treat the volume of sewage already collected. Solid waste disposal is a growing threat to health and the environment.

Urban sector institutional arrangements are fragmented, lack effective regulation and roles are not structured for efficiency or success.

The lack of resources for the investments in infrastructure in Africa have not kept up pace with the rate of urbanization. Water and waste services have not been given the priority they deserve, and they show significant under investment, in comparison with its economic returns. Africa for example invests only 4% of its GDP in infrastructure as opposed to 14% in China. Water services are undervalued and water is underpriced (African water utilities forgo \$1.8 billion in revenues against the costs of water production). Utilities in developing countries are characterised by high unaccounted for water, bloated staffing, weak governance and financially unviable operations. Whilst there are some important exceptions, in general they have a significant way to go in improving efficiency and effectiveness.

There is growing evidence that the water infrastructure will also be significantly affected by climate change, particularly through the impact of floods, droughts, or extreme events. Water resources are expected to change, both in quantity and quality; and water, storm water and wastewater facilities will face greater risk of damage caused by storms, floods and droughts. The effect of climate change will mean more difficult operations, disrupted services and increased cost for water and wastewater services.

As water demand grows, water scarcity is becoming an increasing constraint to urban water management in many settings. Increasingly, sustainable water management requires cities to plan with the whole river- basin in mind. Lack of treatment of city wastes results in increasingly polluted water bodies downstream. This results in environmental degradation, higher costs in water treatment and negatively affects public health and welfare, agriculture and the prospects of exports.

Future urban environments can take better advantage of economies of scale and scope (thereby increasing efficiency and promoting equity through lower costs of provision), reduce the costs of water provision, improve access to services in adjacent rural areas, design sustainable tariff and subsidy schemes and minimize environmental and downstream pollution.

The WFWO will continue to take concrete action on water and sanitary services to contribute sustainable development program through its local NGOs, CBOs partners to support local communities in remote rural areas, and to raise public awareness on commitments to support the achievements of the Eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) objectives.

We need to take action for the up coming conference on sustainable development to held in Brazil next year's Rio+20, in order to give more priority on water and sanitary for all populations to benefit significantly.

WFWO's Communications Team