

Water and Cities



Media brief

WHAT are the challenges?

- **Half of humanity** now lives in cities and every second the urban population grows by 2 people. In Africa and Asia, the urban population will double between 2000 and 2030.
- **141 million urban** dwellers do not have access to safe drinking- water.
- One out of four city residents, **794 million** in total, lives without access to improved sanitation facilities.
- The situation in these urban areas leads to water related **diseases** such as diarrhoea, malaria and cholera epidemics.
- Progress in access to water and sanitation in the last decades is undermined by the rapid **urban population growth**.

WHERE is the situation most pressing?

- Urbanisation is most rapid in **developing countries**, where cities gain an average of **5 million** residents every month.
- The situation is most pressing in slums, hosting **828 million** urban dwellers. These people do not have access to safe drinking water and sanitation services and their unstable houses are vulnerable to water and environmental related disasters such as floods or landslides.

WHO is most affected?

- The **urban poor** are most affected. They are often not connected to the urban water supply system and rely on expensive private water vendors
 - Example - in Accra, Ghana, the urban poor pay up to 12 times more for a litre of water than their richer neighbours in other parts of the city.
- Sanitation reality for many urban poor: No or limited access to sanitation (public or private latrines). The daily reality for many in informal settlements is to defecate in a bag ('flying toilet'), open sewage and waste in the backyard.

WHEN are changes being realized?

- The **Millennium Development Goals**, formulated in 2000, call for:
 - a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020.
 - a reduction by half of the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015.
- At the current rate of progress, the drinking water target will be achieved by **2015**.
- However, at the current rate of progress the world will **miss the sanitation target**. Urban areas, though often better served than rural areas, are struggling to keep up with the growth of the urban population.
- Also the slum improvements are failing to keep pace with urban population growth. Although the share of the urban population living in slums in the developing world has declined from 39% in 2000 to 33% in 2010, the absolute number of slum dwellers in the developing world is growing by 6 million slum dwellers each year.

Sustainable Water Management in Cities: Engaging stakeholders for effective change and action



Zaragoza, 13-17 December 2010

WHAT are the key discussion points and aimed outcomes of the Zaragoza Conference?

- To analyse how cities are making **progress** towards international commitments such as the Millennium Development Goals.
- To find out **how can we do 'better'** in urban water management through sharing lessons from recent city experiences, and inspiring participants to do 'better'
- To discuss and analyse the key water related **challenges**: affordability and equity, decision-making, co-operation, behavioural change, water and land.
- To analyse the importance of **stakeholder involvement**.
- To look forward and invite everyone to share his/her ideas about **Cities of the Future**.
- To work towards the upcoming **World Water Day -22 March 2011-**, which focuses on the theme "Urban Water Management: Key Issues and Priorities for Action".

HOW can journalists contribute?

- We call on all journalists to participate actively in addressing and discussing the challenges that cities face and as such stimulating progress on solutions.
- We call on all journalists to present their experience on reporting on the theme of sustainable urban water management and present their successful media reporting stories.
- We invite all journalists to contribute in making the World Water Day 2011 a success and as such putting the topic of 'Water and Cities' high on the international agenda.

Participants and Cities present in the Conference

More than **200** national and international representatives, including:

- Decision makers/politicians (ministers, mayors, local authorities).
- Stakeholders (water operators, NGOs...).
- Regional representatives from Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America.
- Experts in urban water management.
- International journalists.
- The United Nations.
- The SWITCH consortium.

A total of **26 Cities** representatives, of which 8 are from SWITCH Cities:

- **Africa – 7**
- **Latin America – 11**
- **Asia – 6**
- **Europe – 2**

WHERE to look for further information?

For more information, please consult

- The **Zaragoza Conference** website www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/swm_cities_zaragoza_2010/index.shtml
- The **International Decade for Action 'Water for Life' 2005-2015** website www.un.org/waterforlifedecade
- The **Reader "Water and Cities"**, which presents the latest and most relevant UN publications related to the theme water and cities.