



**UNITED NATIONS  
UNIVERSITY**

## **Health, Morbidity, Mortality and Development**

Commission on Population and Development: UNU  
Statement to the General Debate

April 2010

Mr(s) Chairman, Excellencies and honoured guests, on behalf of Konrad Osterwalder, Rector of the United Nations University, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to make a statement today. The United Nations University was established in the 1970s as a think tank to resolve the pressing global problems that are the concern of the United Nations, its Peoples and Member States.

Safe water provisioning is the key to global health. Drinking water, sanitation and sound hygiene practices play a critical role in achieving all of the MDGs. The most vulnerable populations in all countries and the lowest income countries of the world unfairly bear the burden associated with unsafe water provisioning. As one of the fundamental pillars of primary health care, access to safe water provisioning is also critical for child and maternal health. Economic costs accrue from public health costs associated with providing care for the sick, days of missed work and reduced productivity levels as a result of sickness.

Under global environmental change scenarios, the global distribution of water is highly likely to change in terms of when, where and how much precipitation occurs. This will have significant implications for food security, water quality and social capital, all of which are drivers of health and development. Attention needs to be focussed on building resilience, particularly in small, rural, remote or otherwise marginalised communities – vulnerable populations who bear a disproportionate burden and who are least able to actualise resilience. Education, access to electricity, diverse economic activities and cohesive communities all play a role in enhancing resilience.

The United Nations University believes that human health and wellbeing benefits significantly, and primarily, through safe water and sanitation provisioning. We argue for making a global commitment to provide 100% coverage by 2025, at an annual cost of 0.002% of GDP from donor countries. In particular there is a need for smart investment of these funds – initiatives that develop the market at the bottom of the pyramid and initiatives that facilitate local business development and entrepreneurship. It is not simply a question of sanitation provisioning, but strengthening the local economy.

We believe that attention to safe water provisioning will not only reduce the attributable global burden of disease, but will promote education, sustainability, gender equity and strong economic development. There is a moral, civil, political and economic need to bring adequate sanitation to the global population – adequate for human health and adequate for ecosystem integrity.

