

## TASK FORCE: Water and Sanitation

### Lack of Access to Water and Sanitation Hampers Efforts to Reduce Poverty in Developing Countries

**Report suggests infrastructure important, but training in hygiene, focus on service delivery also keys to success**

17 January 2005, New York—Four out of every 10 people in the world lack access to even a simple pit latrine and must resort to open defecation. Nearly 2 in 10—more than 1 billion people—have no source of safe drinking water. As a result 3,900 children die each day of this totally preventable but silent humanitarian crisis.

According to the Task Force, the knowledge, tools and financial resources are available to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of halving the number of people without access to water and sanitation over the coming decades. In addition countries need to improve their water management to protect the environment and use scarce water resources effectively.

The Task Force report—*Health, Dignity and Development. What would it take?*—released today is part of a detailed global action plan for fighting poverty, disease and environmental degradation in developing countries. The Task Force on Water and Sanitation was headed by **Dr. Roberto Lenton**, executive director of the Secretariat for International Affairs and Development at the International Research Institute for Climate Prediction (IRI), a member center of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, and by **Dr. Albert M. Wright**, chairman of the Africa Water Task Force, member of the Technical Committee of the Global Water Partnership, and an urban sanitation policy adviser to several developing countries. They led a team of experts in studying barriers to adequate water and sanitation and sought solutions to “the silent humanitarian crisis that each day takes thousands of lives.”

“Expanding water and sanitation coverage is not rocket-science,” the report said. “It requires neither colossal sums of money nor breakthrough scientific discoveries and dramatic technological advances.”

The Task Force on Water and Sanitation has provided broad recommendations for improving the basic services that are so critical to achieving economic progress in impoverished areas. It also notes the importance of working with local communities in developing countries to provide hygiene education, teach proper use of sanitation facilities, and to focus on service delivery, in addition to upgrading or building new water and sewage systems.

The recommendations to end the global water and sanitation crisis include the following:

- **National governments and other stakeholders must commit to moving the sanitation crisis to the top of their agendas.** To make this happen, the words used to describe the crisis must communicate “the plain, ugly truth about what really happens—namely open defecation,” note the authors of the task force report.
- **Investments must be increased—particularly for sanitation.** In the case of the poorest countries, this will require substantially increased development assistance. Reforms of utilities are critical, but cannot happen without an increase in financing. Reform and investment should be carried out in parallel.
- **Investments in water and sanitation must focus on sustainable service delivery**, rather than construction of facilities alone.
- **Governments and donor agencies must empower local authorities and communities with the authority, resources, and professional capacity** required to manage water supply and sanitation service delivery.

- **In building a system for collecting revenues, users who can afford to pay should be charged for the use of water and sanitation services**, but care must be taken to cover the costs that poor households cannot meet.
- **Within the context of national poverty reduction strategies based on the Millennium Development Goals, countries must elaborate coherent water resources development and management plans** that will support the achievement of the Goals.
- **Innovation must be encouraged to speed progress toward reaching several development goals simultaneously.** For example, developing new ways to use waste water in agriculture could boost crop yields and reduce hunger while improving sanitation as well.
- **Coordinating mechanisms should be put in place to improve** and assess the impact of country-level activities funded by international agencies.

The Millennium Development Goal target of halving the number of people who lack water and sanitation will not be reached unless rich countries direct sufficient aid to the poorest countries, and countries reallocate their resources to their poorest communities.

The Task Force views access to water and sanitation as critical to meeting commitments forged in 2000 at the Millennium Summit, where world leaders agreed to make the fight against poverty—and all of its faces—in developing countries their priority. The summit inspired the Millennium Development Goals, which are built on the recognition that, from health to the environment, from education to gender equality, a growing list of development issues can no longer be managed solely within the boundaries of a single nation.

The report is part of the Millennium Project, which was commissioned by the UN Secretary-General in 2002 to develop a practical plan of action for enabling developing countries to meet the Millennium Development Goals and reverse the grinding poverty, hunger and disease affecting billions of people. As an independent advisory body directed by Professor Jeffrey D. Sachs, the UN Millennium Project submitted its final recommendations in January 2005.

The Task Force on Water and Sanitation is one of 10 UN Millennium Project Task Forces that together comprise some 265 experts from around the world, including members of parliament; researchers and scientists; policymakers; representatives of civil society; UN agencies; the World Bank; International Monetary Fund; and the private sector. The UN Millennium Project Task Force teams were challenged to diagnose the key constraints to meeting the Millennium Development Goals and present recommendations for overcoming the obstacles to get nations on track to achieving them by 2015.



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