

World Water Week Daily

Tuesday, August 23, 2011

Record attendance for World Water Week 2011

World Water Week 2011 opened yesterday with speakers calling for increased investments in disaster-resilient infrastructure and smarter water management to avoid droughts, floods and pollution.

“More than 800 million people live in slums today, and the situation in these urban areas often leads to water-related diseases, which have devastating effects on the livelihoods of families and the economies of their countries,” said Anders Berntell, Executive Director of the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI). “Securing water, energy and food is central to alleviating poverty and creating a robust and climate resilient, green economy.”

Over 2,600 politicians, business leaders, international organisations, scientists, mayors and water professionals, a new record attendance, have gathered in Stockholm for World Water Week, which this year carries the theme *Water in an Urbanising World*, to explore the best courses of action to ensure that the world’s limited water resources are allocated to meet the growing demands of urban areas, in balance with nature’s capacity.

“Now more than ever we need new technologies and policy solutions to sustain water production and consumption, especially in developing countries,” said Hon. Gunilla Carlsson, Swedish Minister for International Development Cooperation. “Increased access to clean water supplies and sanitation is an important catalytic force for development. The costs of not acting far exceed the costs of well-functioning, sustainable water resource management.”

According to Berntell, World Water Week is the only annual water meeting with such a broad participation from different sections of society and provides an important platform for sharing experiences and learning from success stories that can be replicated in different parts of the world.



Anders Berntell, Executive Director of SIWI



Dr. Sheela Patel, Chair of Shack/Slum Dwellers International



Hon. Gunilla Carlsson, Swedish Minister for International Development Cooperation



Professor Stephen R. Carpenter, University of Wisconsin-Madison

“The quality of life in Stockholm reflects the quality of water,” said Sten Nordin, mayor of Stockholm. “Today Stockholm enjoys probably the best drinking water in Sweden and our success and experiences are something that we are happy to share with the world. Water is important to all of us and we have to share it. This is why this conference and this week is so important.”

Dr. Joan Clos, Executive Director of UN-HABITAT, emphasised the need for water and sanitation professionals to propose solutions that fit with urban planning strategies for future populations.

“We need to go back to basics when it comes to urbanisation and this is why we

at UN-HABITAT are proposing to refocus on urban planning, which has been out of fashion for the last 30 years.”

Concluding the morning session of the opening plenary, the 2011 Stockholm Water Prize Laureate, Professor Stephen R. Carpenter of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, emphasised that producing food for bigger cities with larger populations will strain available freshwater resources.

“We need an agriculture that can feed 9 billion people while maintaining the water supplies and other ecosystems services that populations need,” said Professor Carpenter. “The connections between food and water security have never been more important.”

Nairobi water company tackles illegal water connections



Dr. Mary Kimani, Nairobi Water and Sewerage Company

In the session on pro-poor water and sanitation provision, Dr. Mary Kimani, Vice-Chair of the Nairobi Water and Sewerage Company, said that the biggest challenge to provision of water in the slums of Kenya's capital has been criminal gangs.

The population of the informal settlements at 0.6 million people makes up 28 per cent of the total city population and gangs are exploiting the lack of services by making illegal connections and charging 2 to 20 Shillings per 20 litres of water compared to the 18 Shillings per cubic metre charged to those in formal settlements.

The water company is fully aware of the inequities of this system and has formed a specialist department to spearhead development in the informal settlements. "The informal settlements are our biggest opportunity for customer growth," said Kimani.

By providing extension pipelines into the slums with yard taps, and by constructing water and ablution kiosks, the gangs can be circumvented. The key is to encourage management at the community level. "Communities need to take charge of these services and manage them so people cannot take them away," said Kimani.

In Ahmedabad, India's seventh largest city, the city government has provided a model for delivering water and sanitation services to slum dwellers, which can be scaled up throughout the country and on a more global basis, according to Professor Dinesh Mehta of CEPT University in Ahmedabad.

In terms of sanitation, the city government began a subsidy programme in 1981 providing 80 per cent of the cost of building toilets in informal communities. This was raised to 90 per cent in 1991 and now 87 per cent of the city population has access to toilets. From 1 per cent of the city population in 1996, now 90 per cent of citizens have access to water.

An important part of the programme's success has been to treat the slum dwellers as an integral part of the city and not to treat them apart. The knock-on benefit has been that, in Ahmedabad, informal settlers have upgraded their housing to a much better extent than any public housing could achieve. "Infrastructure is a key driver to unleashing the wealth that exists in the slum community," said Mehta.

According to Mehta, Nairobi and other cities can learn from the case of Ahmedabad. "Reaching out to the poor is not impossible and in 15 years you can cover a large number of slum dwellers," said Mehta.



Professor Dinesh Mehta, CEPT University, Ahmedabad

Not every city will enjoy the commitment that Ahmedabad's government has shown with 10 per cent of city funds being dedicated to pro-poor funding. As well as the need for strong political will, it is important to scale up quickly and not to rely on pilot projects or worry unduly about land tenure. "Anyone who wants a water tap, give them one," said Mehta, who added that simplifying the actual process to get connected was also an important factor in securing take-up for water and sanitation connections.

A final lesson from Ahmedabad for other cities was to seek to provide individual not community services. "Individual toilets are more cost effective in the long term and families will maintain those services," said Mehta.

Tsunami recovery better than expected

Early reports show that hydro-ecological processes – soil and groundwater – and socio-economic systems for agriculture were revived between one and three years after the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, but that socio-psychological conditions only improved after a longer period of five years.

"Even though relief and farm land recovery took place within two years, rehabilitation and building are still incomplete," said Dr. K. Palanisami of the IWMI-TATA Water Policy Program. "Investment in long-term measures, notably infrastructure, will help in building resilience in coastal zones."

Palanisami said that community-based disaster preparedness, new educational programmes and alternative employment were needed to "help residents recover from post-traumatic stress disorder syndromes and the challenge of rebuilding their lives".

Yoshiyuki Kawazoe of the University of Tokyo said that the tsunami that hit Japan earlier this year had led to a need to find a balance with nature when rebuilding villages and cities. "We should learn from that and create a new balance between nature and the environment," said Kawazoe.



Yoshiyuki Kawazoe, University of Tokyo

New report reveals threat to food security



Alexander Müller, Assistant Director-General at the FAO

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has unveiled a groundbreaking report with its first global publication examining the use of water in agriculture and how we will face critical problems in food security if policy makers and governments do not act now.

The State of the World's Land and Water Resources (SOLAW) highlights how important it is to take account of agricultural use of water in terms of population growth, water quality and food supply.

According to Alexander Müller, Assistant Director-General at the FAO, agriculture is responsible for 70 per cent of withdrawal of renewable water sources yet there are still 900



million people who are going hungry. "We need to produce 70 per cent more food which is putting a huge pressure on natural resources," said Müller. "How do we feed people in a rapidly urbanising world?"

Parviz Koohafkan, Director in the Land and Water Division at the FAO, said that while we have been very successful at producing food in the last 50 years, we now need to increase agricultural production in developing countries by 100 per cent. And this doubling of production must be done in a sustainable way. Contamination of water through pesticides, degradation and desertification of land, and the depletion of groundwater sources mean past methods cannot continue. Additionally, a change in diet has put a

greater reliance on water to produce food as people are now eating more meat. It takes 15,000 litres of water to produce a kilo of meat, 10 times the amount required for a kilo of cereal.

"We need a paradigm shift: we cannot use natural resources thinking they are abundant and degrading them," said Koohafkan.

The State of the World's Land and Water Resources will be published in October 2011.



Share your ideas at the Stockholm World Water Cube!

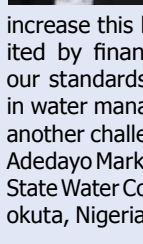
What is the biggest water challenge in your city?



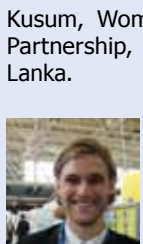
"Our challenge isn't a lack of water, it's that we have too much water, and as a small island we are prone to climate change effects. Also we have a lack of infrastructure. It's a growing city, but it's built on a swamp, so it floods a lot and the water is very unclean as factories are allowed to put their waste water into the river." Saba Loftus, International Youth Council, Cork, Ireland.



"It is finance. Currently we have a service coverage that is less than 50 per cent in our cities. We want to increase this but we are limited by finance. Improving our standards and practices in water management is also another challenge for us." Farooq Mustafa, Iraq Foreign Ministry, Baghdad, Iraq.



"One is major flooding due to the filling in of wetlands. The second one is solid waste being dumped in waterways." Athukorala Kusum, Women for Water Partnership, Colombo, Sri Lanka.



"Flood management is the biggest issue. Cologne being next to the Rhine river is very prone to annual floods. Sometimes, like this year, they can flood the whole city centre. But they have developed easily constructible walls which can be built within hours to protect the city from the flood which is very cost efficient." Philipp Wagnitz, DEG, Cologne, Germany.



"The rivers are usually polluted, so you can actually smell the stench in winter. In the city you only get municipal water once a week, otherwise you have to truck in potable water, or buy bottled water from local vendors." Sylvia Lee, Skoll Global Threats Fund, Kathmandu, Nepal.



"Our water problems are to do with the management of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers between our neighbouring countries of Turkey and Iran."

Farooq Mustafa, Iraq Foreign Ministry, Baghdad, Iraq.



"It's not only cities where there is concern but also rural areas and the agricultural sector. The sustainability of a city cannot be considered without these factors." Chieko Umetsu, Research Institute for Humanity and Nature, Kyoto, Japan.



"Pricing is the biggest challenge. Pricing is fixed for everyone, but I think there should be different levels of pricing. So when you use less you pay less, and if you use more you should pay more. This way you can protect the poor and punish those who use water in a less efficient way." Caner Aktus, Istanbul International Water Forum, Istanbul, Turkey.

Interview with UN-HABITAT Executive Director Joan Clos

In your address at the open session, you emphasised the need to go back to basics with urbanisation and that UN-HABITAT is proposing to refocus on urban planning. What initiatives is the agency proposing in relation to urban planning and in what regions of the world?

We are going to focus particularly on projects relevant to the enlargement or expansion of cities, and those cities that are growing very fast. In order to plan in advance of problems, we have to be able to plan for new spaces and major enlargements. Planning for such expansion is a necessity because otherwise we are always going to arrive after the problems have emerged. Given the extensive city growth that is occurring, especially in the developing world, we need to stay ahead of any problems. To get there we are therefore focusing our attention on the significant expansions planned for future cities.

Do cities across the world, particularly in developing countries, lack the technically trained and skilled professionals required to improve water and sanitation management?

Of course there is always a need for more technical training and knowledge but this is something that we can acquire quite rapidly. The issue is not about technical capacity. I think it is about vision and political will. Once we have these and make the decisions then you can gather the knowledge that you require. The technologies of sanitation are quite old and need to be updated by new, innovative ones but providing clean water, collecting sewage and having good drainage systems is something that we know how to do. The most relevant issue is not technical, it is more the political capacity to anticipate the problems and to commit the resources to take a strategic decision.



Joan Clos, Executive Director, UN-HABITAT

How important is World Water Week as a platform for international discussions on water and sanitation and the sharing of experiences and good practices?

World Water Week has become a yearly reference and meeting point. I think this is very interesting because everyone knows that once a year in Stockholm there is a diverse and interesting group of people that gather to discuss the most relevant issues about water and sanitation and this is a great service from the city of Stockholm.

Mayors call for more dialogue with rural areas

The key to better water management in cities is to look more broadly at areas that have previously not been taken into account, a cross panel of city leaders from four continents said during the Mayors' Panel.

Delegates were told that by focussing more attention on the surrounding natural resources outside the city and in rural areas, cities can more effectively manage their often dwindling reserves in the face of increasing growth.

"We need to look at the countryside and rural areas," said Dr. Aisa Kirabo Kacyira, Governor of Eastern Province, Rwanda. "If we look after the rural areas we are then reducing the attractiveness of the city and also reducing further pressure on city water supplies."

Serge Lepeltier, mayor of Bourges, France, highlighted agriculture as another external factor that needs more consideration. With one of France's longest rivers running through his city, he stressed the importance of building relations with the agriculture sector as it shares the same water supply as Bourges and hence there is a mutual need to protect the natural water supply.



Four continents were represented on the city leaders' panel

With the issue of agriculture on the table, Dr. Joan Clos, Executive Director of UN-HABITAT and former mayor of Barcelona, Spain, asked the panel: "Water prices for agricultural purposes are almost free, but for urban use this is very high so is this right? Not when there is increasing technology in hydroponics. The agriculture sector and cities need to go hand in hand in regards to reducing consumption, and pricing is one way to reduce this."

Reducing consumption is one way that cities can lower the pressure on water supplies, said Mary Jane Ortega, Secretary General of Citynet and former mayor of San Fernando, Philippines. "If you don't have enough water, perhaps you should

reduce your demand?" she asked cities from the North.

With the developed world consuming far more water than the developing world, the mayors from Northern cities said that they are slowly but increasingly leading from the front in this regard.

"What grabbed my attention so far from this conference was a photograph from a developing country of a toddler in a bucket depicting his daily water use," said Jennifer Hosterman, mayor of Pleasanton, USA. "In my city we used to use 923 litres per capita, per day. We are now actively reducing this by 20 per cent by educating the population and raising rates on what I call our liquid assets."