THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR ACTION
WATER FOR LIFE - 2005-2015
Coping with Water Scarcity
World Water Day 2007

World Water Day (WWD) 2007 will focus on the theme 'Coping with Water Scarcity'. The theme highlights the increasing significance of water scarcity worldwide, and the need to increased integration and cooperation to ensure sustainable, efficient and equitable management of scarce water resources, both at international and local levels. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) acts as a coordinator for the celebration of World Water Day 2007, on behalf of all the UN agencies and members of UN-Water.

The most dire, most direct effects of water scarcity will undoubtedly be on health. When water is scarce, people will have to rely on drinking water sources that may not be safe, and they cannot wash themselves, their clothes or their homes properly or often enough to prevent infection.

- Lack of access to water sources will encourage people to store water for drinking and for domestic use in their homes.
- This will increase the health risks posed by household contamination of drinking water.
- This will create favourable conditions for the breeding of Aedes mosquitoes, which transmit dengue and dengue haemorrhagic fever. Breeding of malaria vectors may also increase in some places.
- Often sanitation is inadequate, increasing infestation with fleas, lice and other insects.
- Diseases associated with this combination of factors include trachoma, plague and typhus.
- Poor quality water may also carry diarrhoeal diseases such as cholera, typhoid fever, salmonella, poliomyelitis, other gastrointestinal viruses and dysentery.

In many parts of the world, irrigated agriculture is associated with increased transmission risks of malaria and other vector-borne diseases. These risks can often be traced down to inadequate irrigation water management. Water scarcity underscores our need for better water management, and as a result the environmental receptivity to disease vector breeding may be reduced. This will lead to reduced transmission of malaria, lymphatic filariasis, schistosomiasis and Japanese encephalitis.

International health security, essentially depends on fulfilling basic needs, first and foremost safe water and adequate sanitation. Whenever people's basic needs go unfulfilled, community health status suffers. This is best illustrated in areas struck by natural disasters or humanitarian crises. The breakdown of access to safe water and sanitation is invariably followed by a breakdown in international health security. Investing in water security therefore also means investing in health security, and in sustained poverty alleviation.

About 20% of the world’s population live in countries where water is scarce, or where they have not been able to access the natural sources available. At present 1.1 billion people lack access to safe water, and 2.6 billion lack access to proper sanitation. Climate change is affecting water resources in both developed and developing countries. The result may be an increase in diseases such as cholera, typhoid, malaria and dengue. The existing gap in water availability is likely to further widen: in the North, rainfall is increasing, while in the South, drought periods are becoming longer. A country with increasing threat to its water supply is known as “water stressed”. It has been estimated that, by 2025, 1.8 billion people will be living in countries or regions with absolute water scarcity, and two-thirds of the world population could be under stress conditions.

Some water scarcity messages

1. Imbalances between availability and demand, the degradation of groundwater and surface water quality, intersectoral competition, interregional and international conflicts, all bring water issues to the fore

2. Freshwater bodies have limited capacity to process the pollutant charges of the effluents from expanding urban, industrial and agricultural uses. Water quality degradation can be a major cause of water scarcity.
3. Water development is linked closely to poverty reduction, especially in low-income countries that are highly dependent on a rural economy.

4. In arid and semi arid regions, where water scarcity is endemic by definition, groundwater has played a major role in meeting domestic and irrigation demands. In many regions massive use of groundwater has been practiced for some time for irrigation. Groundwater mining and the lack of adequate planning, legal frameworks and governance have opened a new debate on the sustainability of the intensive use of groundwater.

5. Water conflicts can arise in water stressed areas among local communities and between countries because sharing a very limited and essential resource is extremely difficult. The lack of adequate legal instruments exacerbates already difficult conditions. There should be a greater focus on the peaceful sharing and management of water at both international and local levels. In short, water scarcity is also about equity and rights, and cultural and ethical issues warrant due consideration.

5. Water scarcity affects all social and economic sectors and threatens the sustainability of the natural base. Addressing water scarcity calls for an intersectoral and multidisciplinary approach to water resources management.

6. Water scarcity issues and they way they are addressed will affect the successful achievement of most of the Millennium Development Goals.

7. Water scarcity is also linked closely to Secretary-General's 5 key areas of action - water, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity.

**2005-2015 overarching Decade Messages:**

- 83% of the world's population are using improved drinking-water sources, but 1.1 billion people are still without access to safe drinking-water.
- Progress in sub-Saharan Africa was impressive, moving from 49% coverage in 1990 to 58% in 2002. But at this rate it will not be sufficient to meet the MDG target by 2015.
- More than half the world's population use water piped to their homes, which frees them (mainly women and girls) from the drudgery of water collection and protects their health.
- Without a sharp acceleration in the rate of progress, the world will miss the sanitation target by half a billion people.
- An estimated 2.6 billion people — half of the developing world — lack access to improved sanitation.
- Despite major progress in South Asia, little more than a third of its population use improved sanitation; access to adequate sanitation in sub-Saharan Africa is only 36%.
- Global population growth is cancelling many of the gains already made. Though more than a billion people gained improved sanitation between 1990 and 2002, the population without coverage declined by only 100 million.
- From now until 2015, greater effort must be made to reach the poor and those in rural areas, whose deprivation is hidden behind national averages.

1 Coping with Water Scarcity: A strategic issue and priority for system-wide action, August 2006

**USEFUL WEB-SITES**

World Water Day web-site: [www.unwater.org/wwd07](http://www.unwater.org/wwd07)
UN-Water web site: [www.unwater.org](http://www.unwater.org)
FAO web-site [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)
WHO Water, Sanitation and Health web-site [www.who.int/water_sanitation_health](http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health)