



WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION COLLABORATIVE COUNCIL
CONSEIL DE CONCERTATION POUR L'APPROVISIONNEMENT EN EAU ET L'ASSAINISSEMENT
CONSEJO DE COLABORACIÓN PARA EL ABASTECIMIENTO DE AGUA Y SANEAMIENTO

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LACK OF PROGRESS ON HYGIENE, SANITATION AND WATER SUPPLY ONE OF BIGGEST SCANDALS AFFECTING THE WORLD'S POOR

A new publication by the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) addresses one of the dismal failures of the last 50 years - that of laying the foundation stones of public health in the developing world - hygiene, sanitation and water supply.

Entitled « **Kyoto ... the agenda has changed** » the ten-minute briefing » (the time that it takes to read it) is aimed at decision-makers and other stakeholders attending the Third World Water Forum that is being held in Kyoto, Japan from 16 to 23 March.

According to the WSSCC, this largely hidden scandal:

- causes some three million deaths every year, mostly poor women and children in the developing world.
- deprives hundreds of millions of their health as well as productivity.
- undermines the normal mental and physical growth of rising generations.
- pollutes fresh water resources with faecal matter on a massive scale.
- condemns more than a billion people to live with a daily environmental crisis of squalor, smells and disease.
- holds back the development of people and of nations.

The statistics are by now familiar to many in this International Year of Freshwater: some 1.1 billion people are without access to a safe water supply and 2.4 billion lack adequate sanitation.

However, there are signs that the situation is slowly changing, says the WSSCC. Last September, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg adopted the clear goals of halving the proportion of people without proper sanitation and water supply by the year 2015. « The agreement on time-bound targets should not be taken to imply a 'more of the same' stepping up of current efforts or a continuation of the top-down, supply-driven approaches that have failed in the past, » says WSSCC Executive Director Gourisankar Ghosh.

He stresses that even successful water and sanitation programmes have frequently failed to bring the expected gains in human health. « The old models have underachieved and new models will need to be evolved if more political priority is to translate into more practical progress, » Ghosh says.

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Established in 1990 under a mandate by the United Nations General Assembly, the WSSCC has been charged with the task of advocating the WASH - Water, Sanitation and Hygiene - campaign. Working with its partners and members comprising UN agencies, bilateral and multi-lateral donors, the private sector, academic, research and training institutions in over 140 countries, the Geneva-based organization helps debate and define new approaches that are needed to address these vital issues towards alleviating poverty and achieving sustainable development.

WSSCC cites examples of these 'new-style' water and sanitation programmes: from low-income communities of Orangi in Karachi, Pakistan, in the Brazilian capital Brasilia, to the poor peri-urban areas of Kumasi, Ghana, and the rural villages of Midnapur, India. The most important lesson learned from these experiences is that official agencies are most effective when they seek not to do the job themselves but to stimulate and support community-based initiatives.

Drawing on experiences from its « Vision 21 » initiative and the growing WASH activities at the country level, the WSSCC believes that when people feel they are responsible for, and benefit from, water and sanitation services, these are more likely to be beneficial. They are also more likely to be capable of being scaled up. It is in this context that modern versions of old strategies such as household rainwater harvesting have enormous potential. Here, the private sector can become productively involved, with local artisans, masons and small-scale manufacturers in developing and marketing low-cost technologies. In this way, better sanitation and water supply can also contribute to and benefit from the local economy.

According to WSSCC Chair Sir Richard Jolly, a renewed 'WASH' effort should begin with locally viable plans drawn up with communities themselves, starting with their organizations and resources, with their present struggles and coping strategies. WSSCC has long argued that it is not only increasing access to water and sanitation but also increasing access to the management of water and sanitation that will determine whether progress is made and sustained.

Sir Richard Jolly adds: «The Third World Water Forum can help lead the way in the search for the means to reach WASH goals. » But as the Kyoto paper says: «The task must first be re-defined in the light of past efforts and experience. Better hygiene is the goal; creating demand is the starting point; building accountable local institutions to support communities is the means and a better quality of life for over 2 billion people is the prize.»

Copies of « **Kyoto ... the agenda has changed** » and other WSSCC materials for WWF-3 can be found on its website at www.wsscc.org/ For interviews, please contact: Ms. Eirah Gorre-Dale, New York, USA Tel. +1(917) 367-2420; E-mail: gorre-dale@un.org At WWF3, c/o Kyoto Nikko Princess Hotel, Tel. +81-75-342-2111; Fax: +81-75-342-2410.

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