



Increasing demand and climate change threatening world water resources says new UN World Water Development Report

Paris, 28 February - Unprecedented growth in demands for water are threatening all major development goals, warns the latest edition of the UN World Water Development Report, *Managing Water under Uncertainty and Risk*. It notes that rising food demand, rapid urbanization and climate change are significantly increasing pressure on global water supplies. This complex situation requires a radical rethink of the way water is managed, concludes the Report, to be launched by the Chair of UN-Water Michel Jarraud and UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova at the World Water Forum in Marseille (France) on 12 March.

“The conclusions are clear,” states Irina Bokova in the Report’s Foreword. “[...] Freshwater is not being used sustainably, according to needs and demands. Accurate information remains disparate, and management is fragmented. In this context, the future is increasingly uncertain and risks are set to deepen.”

“The challenges, risks and uncertainties blocking the road to sustainable development and the achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals require a collective response by the whole international community,” according to Michel Jarraud. “UN-Water will bring the important messages of this UN-Water Report to the Rio+20 Summit in June 2012.”

According to the Report, people in many parts of the world enjoy improved access to safe drinking water –86 per cent of the population in developing regions will have it by 2015. But there are still nearly one billion people without such access, and in cities the numbers are growing. Sanitation infrastructure is not keeping pace with the world’s urban population, which will almost double by 2050 to 6.3 billion people. Today, more than 80 per cent of the world’s waste water is neither collected nor treated.

At the same time, the Report estimates that the world will need 70 per cent more food by the middle of the century, with demand increasing especially for livestock products. A surge in food production will lead to an increase of at least 19 per cent in the water required for agriculture, which already accounts for 70 per cent of freshwater use. The authors warn that these figures could climb even higher if agricultural efficiency does not improve significantly.

Increasingly, underground water sources have been tapped to respond to growing demand. Water extraction has tripled over the past 50 years to become a “silent revolution.” In some underground basins, water is not replenishable and has reached critically low levels. Many countries respond by acquiring fertile land outside their jurisdiction, particularly in Africa. Transnational land acquisition has risen from 15-20 million hectares in 2009 to more than 70 million hectares today. The

United Nations
World Water
Assessment
Programme



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



World Water
Assessment Programme



supply of water is never explicitly addressed in the agreements between the countries concerned.

Climate change will make a bigger impact on water resources in years to come. It alters rainfall patterns, soil humidity, glacier-melt and river-flow and also causes changes to underground water sources. Already, water-related disasters such as floods or droughts are rising in frequency and intensity. The Report's authors say that climate change will drastically affect food production in South Asia and Southern Africa between now and 2030. By 2070, water-stress will also be felt in central and southern Europe, affecting up to 44 million people.

The Report predicts that these pressures will exacerbate economic disparities between countries, as well as between sectors or regions within countries. Much of the burden, it says, will fall on the poor. Chronic under-financing has left water managers poorly equipped to cope with the adaptations that are required. Unless water becomes a more central consideration in development planning, billions of people, mostly in developing countries, could face reduced livelihoods and life chances. Better governance of water resources is required, including investments in infrastructure from both private and public sectors.

The Report is the result of a broad collective teamwork of UN-Water agencies and partners, implemented through its World Water Assessment Programme.

A press conference will be held on 12 March at 5 pm at the World Water Forum (Jardin 1, Palais des Congrès) with UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova and the Chair of UN-Water Michel Jarraud.

Media contacts : Agnès Bardon, UNESCO Press Service. Tel: +33 (0) 1 45 38 17 64. Email : a.bardon@unesco.org

Hannah Edwards, Communication Officer, World Water Assessment Programme in Perugia (Italy). Tel : + 39 0755911009. Email: h.edwards@unesco.org

Simona Gallese, Communications Assistant, World Water Assessment Programme in Perugia (Italy). Tel: +39 0755911026. Email: s.gallese@unesco.org

Programme Office on
Global Water Assessment,
Division of Water Sciences, UNESCO
Villa la Colombella
Località Colombella Alta
06134, Colombella, Perugia, Italy

Office tel.: +39 075 591 10 11
Fax: +39 075 591 33 23 / 075 691 96 67
www.unesco.org/water/wwap