

## conference call

### DFID's water stakeholder forum

What can the UK's Department for International Development do to speed up progress towards the sanitation target of the millennium development goal, and also towards better water resources management? These two questions opened an afternoon (20 January 2005) in which the DFID Water, Environment and Minerals Team, led by Peregrine Swann, not only presented its work and that of a number of its partners, but also sought advice from NGOs, academics and water research institutions.

In many parts of the developing world, especially south Asia, countries appear set to achieve the water-supply target, but the global provision of sanitation is lagging behind. Eddie Ijjasz of the Water and Sanitation Program (WSP, <http://www.wsp.org/>) described some initiatives aimed at increasing sustainable access to sanitation. The first is the 'Total Sanitation' project started in Bangladesh, and now being tried in India, south-east Asia, central Asia and Africa. This campaign aims to persuade whole villages, rather than only individuals, that open defecation is not acceptable – indeed signboards outside villages state this fact. This social movement is costly to mobilize, but once started it can grow like a snowball; WSP covers only the promotion costs of the campaign, and households are expected to pay for building their own latrines.

Lyla Mehta, who, with Robert Chambers and others from IDS Sussex, has carried out research into the Total Sanitation approach, raised some questions about it. The initial work in Bangladesh stressed the importance of conscientization to build grassroots support, and also presented a range of technologies for latrines to suit the culture and income of users. The way total sanitation has been applied in Maharashtra, India, however, suggests a more top-down, standardized approach by the state government. It remains to be seen whether this unsubsidized approach, relying on peer pressure, will be affordable by the poor without hardship.

Eddie Ijjasz also described the Global Public-Private Partnership for Handwashing with Soap, in which the marketing know-how of private-sector soap manufacturers is brought on board to persuade people to get into the habit of handwashing after defecation. An important footnote for this campaign is that, where soap is unavailable, washing with ash or earth can also be effective.

The WSP is a partnership between international donor agencies and the World Bank, and it carries out research as well as targeted support for governments and local support organizations. The WSSCC (Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council, [www.wsscc.org/home](http://www.wsscc.org/home)) is also a coalition of water and sanitation agencies, but aimed more at advocacy and communication between a wide range of national organizations. Caecilia Martinsen described how it provides tools and guidelines for practitioners. WSSCC was also involved in the community-level consultation process that led to 'Vision 21', endorsed in the Hague in 2000, which in turn led to the two water supply and sanitation targets of the millennium development goals. More recently, the growing WASH campaign, which has hygiene at its centre, has become the flagship of the WSSCC. This campaign has been recognized by the UN Secretary General, and there are now 15 national WASH campaigns. The first Global WASH Forum took place in Dakar in December 2004.

Jamie Bartram, who writes an article in this edition, also appeared to talk about the Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP, [www.wssinfo.org/](http://www.wssinfo.org/)) of the MDGs, which is executed by WHO and UNICEF. Part of the difficulty with targets like the MDGs has been the absence of data on households' access to water and sanitation facilities. Since 2000, efforts have increased to provide accurate data, and 350 surveys have been carried out. Data from different sources often seem to differ considerably, and this may be because definitions of what is 'safe' or 'improved' vary, or because national figures may be based on facilities constructed rather than in use. These JMP surveys will benefit from standardized criteria for coverage.

The EU Water Initiative (EUWI, [www.euwi.net/](http://www.euwi.net/)), which is a joint programme of the 25 European Union member states and the EU Commission, is the most ambitious commitment towards achieving the water and sanitation MDGs of any donor. Martin Walshe reported that efforts have concentrated on achieving donor harmonization and co-ordination. Policy dialogues with national governments and other local actors have led to agreement over a MDG 'road map'; this has taken time, but the result is that it is easier 'to speak with one voice'.

WaterAid ([www.wateraid.org.uk](http://www.wateraid.org.uk)) is a British NGO supported by DFID and by public donations, and working in 15 countries, 11 of which are in sub-Saharan Africa. Belinda Calaguas reported that WaterAid, which used to concentrate on rural provision, is more recently working in urban areas as well. Together with the British Labour Party and faith-based organizations, WaterAid is working on the 'Make Poverty History' coalition in the UK, which demands trade justice, dropping international debt repayments and more and better aid in 2005. Advocacy is seen as an important element, and is aimed at moving water and sanitation issues up the agendas of national governments and into their Poverty-Reduction Strategy Papers. Research has shown that for every \$1 spent on water and sanitation, there are returns of between \$2 and \$30, and arguments like this are important in persuading governments to set a high priority on water and sanitation spending.

A question from the floor related to competition between water users. Farmers near Chennai, India, had been observed deliberately smashing a pipe that carried water to a low-income settlement, because the pumping required for this new supply was drying up their water for irrigation. Clearly efforts to extend water supply coverage cannot be done without attention to water resource management (WRM). DFID is contributing towards international policy and advocacy on WRM through the Global Water Partnership ([www.gwpforum.org](http://www.gwpforum.org)).

*Clare Tawney, Editor*