

waterpoints

Water 'single, most important issue' at Habitat II

More people, more of them living in cities, need more food, and more water for industrial and home consumption. And droughts, or pollution of water through human or industrial wastes, mean ever more countries suffering

from what the experts term 'water stress', or outright water crisis. That, in a nutshell, is the challenge facing city planners and water professionals world-wide.

Water is the 'single most important issue at this conference', Wally N'Dow, Secretary General of Habitat II

cent, with productivity rising accordingly, if the poor could be supplied with uncontaminated water ... the lack of basic services — water, sanitation, street drainage, basic roadways — saps their strength and denies society the full contribution they can make', added Ismail Serageldin, World Bank Vice-President for Environmentally Sustainable Development.

Finite

Only 3 per cent of the world's water is fresh, most of it is being locked in



Stephen Wilson

\$20 000 in data grants

Colorado-based company Hydrosphere Data Products is awarding data grants totalling US\$20 000 during 1996 to support environmental research worldwide.

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The closing date for all applications is October 1996. For more details and applications contact: Tim Smith, Hydrosphere Data Products, Inc., Boulder, Colorado, USA. Tel: +1 303 443 7839. E-mail: tim@hydrosphere.com

told hundreds of participants at the Water Dialogue component of June's UN Conference on Human Settlements.

By the turn of the century, 21 megacities, and innumerable smaller cities and towns, will have to satiate their thirst for fresh water by drawing from ever-more distant and degraded resources.

More than one billion people world-wide — unsurprisingly, mostly in the South — have no access to safe drinking-water. And a staggering 1.7 billion do not have access to safe waste-treatment facilities.

'Many cities could see illness drop by 30 per

the ground or in ice caps. And it is a finite resource: water evaporates and returns to the earth as rain, but the quantity never increases ... unlike human demand.

'My biggest problem is water. We just don't have enough for residents or industries. We are looking for more all the time, poking holes in the ground. We have to do all our planning around water', said Michael Rotich, Mayor of the city of Nakuru in Kenya.

One of Habitat's central missions is to help cities solve (these) technical social problems and the hope was that the Dialogue on 'Water for Thirsty Cities' would offer truly specific affordable ideas. Did it succeed?

Habitat delegates reached consensus on the most fiercely contested issue of the conference: whether or not governments should commit themselves to the 'full and progressive realization' of every human's right to adequate housing. The newly assertive language increases government responsibility for

creating enabling conditions that housing-rights activists believe will help increase access to housing. Lobbying from the Water Dialogue contributed to the wording which now includes water and sanitation as major elements of an adequate standard of living, in addition to food, clothing, and housing as laid down in the Global Action Plan.

The Water Dialogue adopted the Beijing Declaration, drawn up by the International Conference on Managing Water Resources for Large Cities and Towns at the March 1996 UN Fourth Global Women's Conference. The key elements are:

- adjusting national development plans and scenarios to reconcile the fresh-water needs for rural and urban populations, food production, industrial development, and the environment in order to attain or maintain sustainable economic growth;
- an integrated management of water resources management, taking the (river)water basin as the basis, allocating water at the appropriate scale to competing uses and users according to social, economic, and environmental priorities; and
- sound planning, management, and financing of urban water and sanitation, such as choices on levels of service, cross-subsidies, and social tariffs to facilitate services to low-income urban communities.

The NGO water caucus in Istanbul spelled out the urgent need for action by all sectors of society. The *international community* needs to put an immediate stop to all irreversible pollution of water; while *national governments* can legislate against irresponsible use of water/waste water discharge, and encourage programmes for responsible water use and treatment. *Local governments* can adopt stringent criteria for the selection of new and modified water use and treatment systems; support citizen participation in selecting systems; and citizen action to adopt measures to preserve water quality and quantity. The *research community* can identify key criteria for developing and assessing systems which are truly sustainable in the long run. *Communities* themselves can promote health and sustainable practices, spread awareness of the importance and urgency of water issues, and facilitate participation in decision-making processes.

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Lightening the load

Although not proven to be determined biologically, women and men 'do' transport differently: women use donkeys while men rely on mules; women travel on one particular type of path or track; and they need access to transport at different times.

Likewise, the development of rural infrastructure has differential impacts on the transport burden of the sexes. An improved water supply may reduce a woman's time and effort spent in travelling to collect water. On the other hand, the rehabilitation of an irrigation scheme may *increase* the need for her to travel and use transport if she is to take full advantage of the resulting increased crop production.

In most rural communities in Africa and Asia, women shoulder a disproportionately large share of the transport burden. Do development interventions have any impact on the gender allocation of this burden? Without a clear understanding of these gender dimensions, agencies are constrained in their ability to design projects and interventions that have a positive impact on the most vulnerable people in poor rural communities.

Research programme

The Secretariat of the International Forum for Rural Transport and Development is launching a programme of research into the impact of transport and 'non-transport' interventions on the gender allocation of the transport burden. 'Non-transport interventions' refer to projects such as water-supply schemes, which have the potential to reduce the need for travel.

The programme will culminate in two workshops — one in Asia and one in Africa — in the third quarter of 1997. The outcome: practical guidelines for incorporating gender concerns into the planning, design, and implementation of rural accessibility interventions. The workshops are open to anyone involved in rural transport and 'non-transport' development interventions in Africa and Asia.

National organizations will be encouraged to run country workshops for women's groups who, on the basis of the information from the programme's studies, will be encouraged to demand their right to better transport.

If you would like to know more about participating in the programme, the Forum would like to hear from you. Participants will be required to



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analyse their projects/initiatives from a gender perspective using an agreed analytical framework. A researchers' meeting will be held in each region in early 1997. Their case studies will generate the key issues for discussion at the workshops.

The Secretariat expects to select 20 papers each from Asia and Africa, taking into account the range of interventions and potential impacts, and geographical balance.

Please write to the Forum Secretariat with a brief description of your work, together with a short personal profile. Indicate whether you would be interested in organizing a national workshop for women's groups in your country.



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