

# waterpoints

## Sphere Project

1 July 1997 saw the launch of a one-year project involving front-line international NGOs, the Red Cross, UN agencies, donor governments, host governments and Southern agencies in developing a set of standards for humanitarian relief. Spearheaded by the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR) and InterAction, the Sphere Project on Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response hopes to come up with standards which will improve both the quality of assistance provided in emergencies, and the accountability of agencies to their beneficiaries, their members, and

their donors. The standards will derive from a charter of humanitarian rights — drawn from existing international law — relevant to all those with a legitimate claim to assistance in disaster situations.

The SCHR represents eight international NGO families, and InterAction is an umbrella of 150 US-based NGOs, of which about 30 are involved in humanitarian relief. Many other organizations are interested in the project, and VOICE, a European consortium of agencies working in emergencies, and the ICRC both hold observer status on the project management

committee. UN agencies, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Department for Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) and World Food Programme (WFP) are contributing to the project.

The technical sectors addressed under Goal 2 are Water Supply and Sanitation, Food Security, Nutrition, Shelter and Site Selection Planning and Management, and Health Services. A sector manager has been appointed for each sector; he or she will consult widely with relevant people from the humanitarian-relief world — including refugees and other people affected by disasters — to reach consensus on a common set of standards which will encourage basic rights to be met in disaster situations, wherever they happen.

In the W&S sector, activities already undertaken include a review of current agency guidelines, and a workshop, involving technical staff from major international humanitarian agencies, set up to agree a framework for developing emergency water supply and sanitation standards, and to start drafting a set of operating principles, or guidelines for best practice that should promote the delivery of standards, in an appropriate way, in different situations.

The proposed standards are a measure of the outcomes of humanitarian efforts, rather than on the activities undertaken or resources invested, and shall be measured by indicators relating directly to those outcomes. It is common for agencies to report on their activities and resources mobilized (pumps supplied, engineers recruited, money spent etc.), but the only reliable measure of the success of the project is the direct

impact that it has on the people concerned. Standards are important to help staff set objectives for emergency actions and to help agencies, their donors, and the disaster-affected people themselves to measure the effectiveness of the agencies' work. Guidelines established by organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNHCR are already widely used as targets for emergency water and sanitation projects. SPHERE does not intend to rewrite or to challenge these guidelines, but to reaffirm and focus them, and promote the acceptance of standards as a means of improving the delivery of humanitarian assistance, in recognition of the rights of people affected by disasters.

A draft set of standards and best practice guidelines for the different sectors is being prepared over the next few months, with publication set for June 1998. The project team is keen to hear from readers, particularly those working for southern NGOs and governments who would like to contribute to the project. Contact John Adams, the water supply and sanitation sector manager, with your comments or, if you would like to be on a mailing list for drafts of the water and sanitation standards. This is a collaborative and inclusive project, and the more individuals and agencies that contribute, the more valuable it will be. Those with access to the Internet can look at the website at [www.ifrc.org/pubs/sphere](http://www.ifrc.org/pubs/sphere) where the humanitarian charter, a newsletter, and project updates will be posted.

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## Woman power halts work on dam

It was a scene Mahatma Gandhi would have

### SPHERE goals

**Goal 1:** To develop a humanitarian charter for people affected by disasters, in a style similar to the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGO Code of Conduct.

**Goal 2:** To compile, from existing material and current best practices, a set of minimum standards covering essential goods and services, implementation of assistance, and stakeholder accountability. Where necessary, the project will draft new standards.\*

**Goal 3:** To ensure that the resulting products are acceptable to the international humanitarian community, and that a high degree of ownership is felt towards them. International networks of individuals and organizations will collaborate to develop the charter and implementation standards.

**Goal 4:** To formulate and embark upon a strategy for the widest dissemination and adoption of the charter and implementation standards throughout the international humanitarian community.

#### The W&S sector will work on standards on:

- Water quality and water treatment
- Water quantity
- Access to waterpoints
- Water containers for collection and storage
- Washing and laundry facilities
- Hygiene promotion for water use
- Soap
- Access to and design of toilets
- Hygiene promotion for excreta disposal
- Protection from and control of disease vectors — notably malarial mosquitoes
- Solid waste management — including medical wastes
- Surface water drainage
- Communications support for solid waste management and surface water drainage

#### Best practice will address:

- Assessments, monitoring and evaluation
- Community consultation and participation
- Local environmental, social and economic impact
- Sustainability of systems and equipment
- Training and capacity building
- Preparedness and planning
- Programme management
- Co-ordination and integration
- Gender
- Equipment choice and procurement

\*See *Waterlines*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (July 1996) for detailed coverage of the issues involved in trying to set standards for emergency sanitation.

applauded. After months of secret preparations, the 10 000 villagers travelled in complete silence at the dead of night.

Led by women, they reached their destination at dawn. In the half-light they streamed down the steep valley to the huge partly built dam on the Narmada river in Madhya Pradesh. Within minutes they had surprised the few guards and cut radio communications between the construction camp and the outside world. By 6.30 am one of the largest peaceful sit-ins in Indian history had begun.

Details of the 12 January capture of the Maheshwar dam by villagers who will lose homes or land if the 100ft-high barrier is completed are still sketchy, but reports from Delhi suggested that 25 000 protesters were at the remote site.

The Maheshwar dam is part of the £3 billion Narmada Valley Development Project, which involves plans for 30 big dams, 135 medium-sized ones and 3000 small ones in the valley.

The World Bank pulled out of the controversial project five years ago because of fierce local and international protests against proposals that would have displaced more than 100 000 people.

The 400MW Maheshwar dam, the first privatized hydroelectric power project in India, will submerge the homes of more than 2200 families in 61 villages and destroy thousands of acres of cotton, chillies and wheat.

Opponents claim it will produce electricity for only a few hours a day, and that it has quadrupled in cost in 10 years. They say they have received no compensation and that the dam will destroy the economy of a large area. The government of Madhya Pradesh says the project will bring electricity and economic development to areas hundreds of miles away.

Projects against the damming of the Narmada began more than 10 years ago and thousands of women have said they are prepared

to drown rather than move. This is the first time that all work has been stopped on one of the dam sites.

'The people are demanding complete stoppage of all work on the dam and a review with people's participation. The siege will continue until the demands are met,' said a spokesman for the Delhi Forum yesterday.

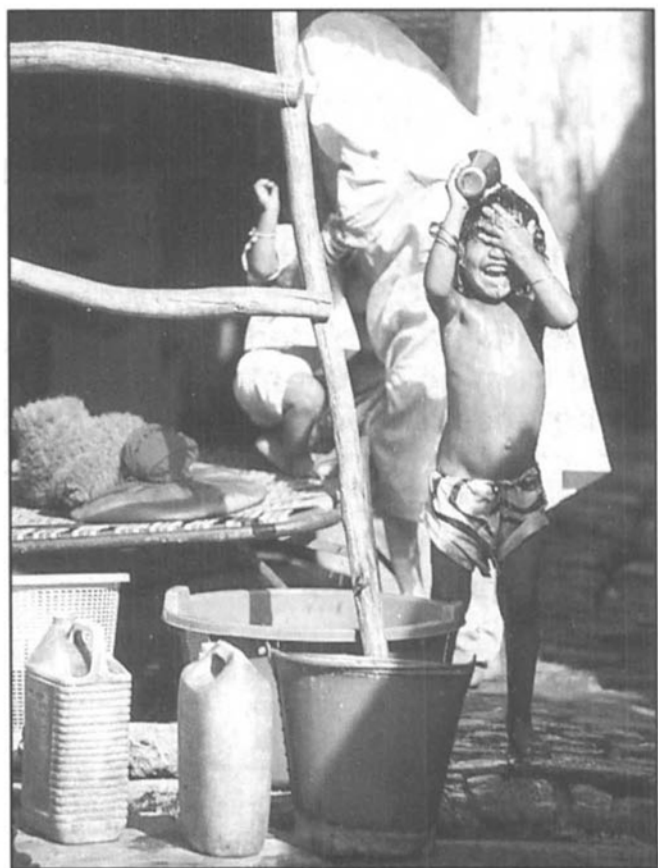
*Edited extract of John Vidal's article in the Guardian, 13 January 1998.*

### Developing an urban W&S infrastructure

In 10 years' time, more than 50 per cent of the world's population will live in towns and cities. Over the next 30 years, the urban population is expected to increase at the rate of 150 000 per day. These striking figures were quoted by Michael Mutter of the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), speaking in London at a recent follow-up meeting to Habitat II. He was emphasizing the increasingly urban focus of development in the South.

Nick Hall, of South Bank University, advocated the shaping and control of development projects by local communities as far as possible. But both he and Mutter agreed that, for infrastructure, notably urban water and sanitation projects, community involvement is, inevitably, limited. Certainly, local communities should be involved at project inception. Theirs is the need. But the continuing, day to day running of comprehensive systems can only be done effectively by local government. And comprehensiveness is needed. It was through the comprehensive approach to water and sanitation in industrial cities of the North like London that dramatic improvements in public health were achieved.

Having said that, a number of difficulties were noted, apart from the obvious ones of lack of money and existing land-ownership patterns. As Hall pointed out, local government often



Paul Harris

*'For infrastructure, notably urban W&S projects, community involvement is limited.'*

takes its model from the North, assuming one day that it will provide everything. It does not necessarily see the need to talk with the community, though schemes designed by traditionally trained professionals are often not a good starting point. Local government also needs to be more open and accountable generally.

One fieldworker pointed out that the involvement of aid agencies in such projects can also be problematic. Developing local government's capabilities and building water and sanitation systems can take around 5 to 10 years. The typical aid project of up to three years is likely to finish just as the work is getting to a critical stage. Mutter pointed out that the UK is involved in some longer-term training schemes. But the general issue of continuity of aid support was left unresolved.

*Barrie Evans, Chair, IT Building Panel*

### Sight saving

River blindness, which infects more than 17 million

Africans, could be eliminated within 10 years. The fourth most common cause worldwide of sight loss, onchocerciasis is passed on by a parasitic worm carried in the black simulium fly, which breeds in fast-flowing rivers mainly in remote parts of west and central Africa.

Catherine Cross of Sight Savers International, the main British charity working on the disease, said at the recent conference of the Onchocerciasis Control Programme: 'Aerial spraying of insecticides to kill the black fly used to be the most effective way of controlling the disease. But the development of Mectizan, which kills parasitical worms inside the body, will allow us to break the cycle of infection. The disease is eradicable. By the year 2007, it should be eliminated as a public health problem.'

The greatest problem facing the programme is ensuring that villagers in war zones receive a Mectizan tablet at least once a year. Sight Savers is trying to raise £1 million to extend its distribution network.