

# waterpoints

## US water experts brief Congress

Leading water experts have briefed congressional staff in Washington on the risks for disease and conflict as a result of water scarcity. Timothy Ford and Mary Wilson of Harvard University highlighted the fact that there was an increased risk of waterborne diseases in developing countries because their water and sanitation systems could not cope with the rate of urbanization. Sandra Postel, of the Global Water Policy Project, and member of the *Waterlines* Editorial Advisory Board, told how water scarcity was contributing to political instability in parts of the world, especially the Middle East. She also called for the provision of safe drinking-water for all.

## Public-private partnerships, not privatization

'Less politics and better management' rather than privatization is the way ahead for Brazil's state-owned water companies, was the message that emerged from the 20th Congress of the Brazilian Association of Sanitary and Environmental Engineering in Rio de Janeiro last May. There was support for public-private partnerships as long as the responsibility for co-ordinating services remained with the public sector, because that was 'the only way the poor would have safe access to water.' Since 1998, municipalities are authorized to manage their own water services and, therefore, are no longer obliged to rely on state-owned water companies.

## Vision 21: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All

Between 1990 and 1997, 300 million more people were added to the 2 600 million already without adequate sanitation services. Water-related diseases are on the upswing with nearly 250 million cases reported each year, and between 3 and 10 million deaths, many of them children. Vision 21 focuses on the stark challenge of a failure to keep pace with need.

People's own strength and initiative form the core of Vision 21; it is a global mobilization campaign looking to bring



Giacomo Pirozzi/Panos Pictures

integrated water, sanitation and hygiene to the 3 billion people who do not currently have access to these services. The campaign by the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), will be based on a document 'Vision 21: A Vision for Water for People' — one of three components in an overall vision for the management of water resources in the next century (other components cover 'Water for Food' and 'Water for Nature'). The overall Vision document is to be presented at a Global Forum and Ministerial Conference being held in The Hague in March 2000.

The first draft of Vision 21 — 'A practical picture of the future we seek to create' — is now been prepared by the Collaborative Council. It argues for the following changes:

- *A holistic approach* — placing the future of water, hygiene and sanitation squarely within the long-term perspective on human development, poverty reduction, the rights of people to an acceptable quality of life, and the integrated management of water resources.
- *Building on people's energies and creativity at all levels* — including capacity building and empowerment of people, households and communities, and the application of technologies that have an empowering function and respond to actual needs.
- *Sound and compassionate leadership* — in support of change, leading to new responsibilities for service users. The role of authorities should be to support households and communities in the management of their activities, with their being accountable to these users as clients.
- *Sustained dialogue and collaboration*

The rapid urbanization of developing countries has implications for both the quantity and quality of water.

### Conference call

In May, development NGOs and water sector professionals gathered in Accra, Ghana, for the 10th Mole Conference on Rural Water Supply and Sanitation. Three days of workshops covered sanitation; capacity building for service provision, policy analysis and lesson sharing; institutional arrangements between government, private and NGO sectors in implementing rural water and sanitation projects; gender issues; relations with district assemblies and communities; monitoring and impact of projects.

Mole conferences, named after the site of the first meeting in 1989, are key events for Ghanaian policymakers, practitioners and development activists in the water and sanitation sector.

*between users and their representatives* — to encourage a shared commitment between users, politicians and professionals. Professionals within the sector will be required to combine technical expertise with an ability to work with the health, education, environment and community development sectors, and will maintain a proactive involvement with the key social, political and managerial challenges that are at the heart of Vision 21.

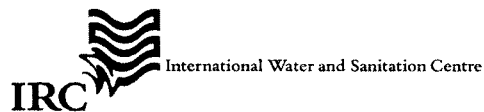
This first draft is the result of participation by over 2000 people from every continent, sharing strategies and aspirations for practical action toward universal access to water supply, sanitation and hygiene. The intention is that the first draft should be widely circulated for comment, published on the WSSCC's Web Page (<http://www.wsscc.org>) and further developed during regional and global consultations later this year. Many of the background papers developed as part of the Vision process will also be accessible via the Web Page. The up-to-date version of the draft will also be presented at the Stockholm Water Symposium in August, as part of a discussion of the World Water

Council (WWC) Vision for Water, Life and the Environment.

WSSCC emphasizes that this is more than an academic exercise to assemble dreams. The final Vision will include national and regional targets for short and medium-term action to work towards a practical and achievable goal. Unlike past initiatives, these targets will be backed by all those involved in the delivery and use of basic services, with governments responding to user-generated demands rather than dictating solutions from the top down. It is therefore vitally important for all those concerned with the development process to subscribe to the Vision and to commit to making it a reality. The extensive consultative processes used to develop Vision 21 will remain as catalysts for follow-up activities.

Readers are encouraged to keep checking the Web Page for developments on the Vision, to send their own comments to the Council's Vision 21 Programme Director, Hans van Damme (E-mail: <[hansvandamme.wsscc@wxs.nl](mailto:hansvandamme.wsscc@wxs.nl)> Fax: + 31 252 422 570), and to join the e-mail listserver for updates on the Vision process by e-mailing the Council Secretariat on <[wsscc@who.ch](mailto:wsscc@who.ch)>

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