

**A UN-Water Dialogue Session on "Sick water is threatening the MDGs: A stakeholder dialogue to address capacity development and communication needs"**

**World Water Week, Stockholm, Sweden  
8<sup>th</sup> September, 9 a.m., room K21**



The session was opened at 9 a.m. by Adeel Zafar, Chair of UN-Water, who stressed the importance of water quality for UN-Water, its impacts on ecosystems, human health and the economy, and the connection to the topics of the 2010 World Water Week as well as World Water Day 2009 – the impetus for the publication of the Sick Water report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and UN-Habitat, with collaboration from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World

Health Organization (WHO).

From UN-Water's perspective, it is clear that investments are lacking in this area, that apathy in leadership needs to be overcome, and that data for monitoring and reporting needs to be improved and augmented. Institutional change is needed, and UN-Water can help facilitate this process by bringing together collective resources and communications strategies of the UN to work in this direction.

David Osborn of UNEP and Graham Alabaster of UN-Habitat then addressed the audience to introduce the Sick Water report, which lays out the argument for the importance of managing wastewater and its impact on numerous Millennium Development Goals (MDG) targets, thereby making meeting the wastewater challenge not a luxury but a prudent, practical and transformative act that has the ability to boost public health and secure the sustainability of natural resources.



The key messages from the report are that wastewater production is rising rapidly, that wise and immediate investments now will generate multiple future benefits, and that wastewater management is linked to poverty reduction and improved human health.



To do this, multi-sectoral, individualized management cocktails are needed which look at the entire lifecycle of a project to include long-term operation, maintenance and decommission in order to avoid stranded resources. These solutions need to plan for future scenarios and be socially and culturally appropriate. There is also a real need to education and train engineers, communities, policymakers and municipalities.

A panel of experts was then introduced to include the following aspects:

- James Winpenny: benefits of improving wastewater
- Gerard Payen: financing
- Iyenemi Ibimina Kakulu: capacity building
- Karl-Ulrich Rudolph: water management and resources



In addition, four stakeholders were present to represent the following issues/perspectives:

- Siegmien Staphorst: gender issues
- Samir Bensaid: water operators
- Robin Simpson: water consumers
- Samia El-Guindy: irrigation issues

The session that followed was a lively discussion moderated by David Osborn to include input from the audience and interaction among the stakeholders and experts. Six main topics formed the focal areas for discussions: economics (such as the opportunity cost of ignoring wastewater management), financing (a need for an individualized mix of subsidies, taxes, tariffs, transfers, etc), the need for changes in perceptions of risks and awareness, capacity development issues, gender equity/community acceptance, and issues of scale.



From the stakeholders, there emerged three important issues, which were trust in government, scale (local, municipal, catchment or basins), and the need for institutional as well as capacity development.

All agreed that change needs to happen and that local conditions, cultures and stakeholders need to be taken into account while scaling up to the highest possible level of authority to make real change happen. The Directors of the three programme offices of UN-Water took on roles to wrap-up and facilitate the session.