

At the UN CSD 16 - Water and Sanitation Review the Business and Industry major group renews the call to action that it made at CSD 13 in 2005.

Business Confirms its Call for Action

1. Developing access to water and sanitation stimulates economic development.

Business needs the MDGs to be met

The business community as a whole needs the MDGs to be met. We are convinced that the MDG's can only be met with the engagement of the business community. This community includes companies of all sizes from the very smallest local family businesses up to the largest international companies. Thriving societies are necessary for business success, and poverty is a clear sign that too many societies are in a precarious state today. The health, dignity and lifestyles of nearly half of the world population are restricted by inadequate sanitation. This also means that half the world's potential markets are restricted too.

The water and sanitation MDGs must be met for all the other MDGs to be met.

The water and sanitation goals are of particular importance. They are a precondition for meeting all the others. Water and sanitation services and systems underpin both the physical and social infrastructure of societies. Without freshwater supply and appropriate sanitation systems that work effectively, properly functioning communities are impossible. This means that without these services, poverty can never be eliminated.

"Meeting the CSD 13 targets is a minimum requirement. It is only a stage on the way to meeting the needs of 'the other half' and more complete satisfaction of societies' fundamental needs. Even if the MDGs are achieved we will not be in good shape unless we pay attention to the poor, the needs of the developing economies and the legacies of developed world water infrastructure" says Jürg Gerber, COO of WBCSD.

2. The acceleration that was agreed at CSD 13 is not apparent. The pace must be increased substantially now and progress better monitored.

It remains possible but increasingly unlikely that the water target will be met in all parts of the world. Unless there is a major step change in progress it is certain that the sanitation target will be missed by a very large margin. In itself this failure is unacceptable. The repercussions on the rest of the efforts to overcome poverty make it even more serious.

This potential failure in achieving the water and sanitation MDGs was already recognised at CSD 13. A political commitment to accelerate progress was made. It is because of that fact that we are reviewing the progress again in CSD 16. We can now see that the commitment to accelerate progress has not been converted into significant action in all countries. The need to accelerate is therefore even more important than it was three years ago.

3. Creating controversy over public versus private management is a waste of time and energy. This is not the issue. Both are necessary. The real challenge is to succeed in providing universal access to water / sanitation services. The private sector is contributing to meeting the MDG water and sanitation targets.

The UN Human development Report 2006 stated clearly that public versus private was not the issue. A number of official publications have reiterated this position. In spite of this much time and energy continues to be wasted through an ideological opposition of public versus private management. In reality both sectors, as well as the philanthropic and informal sectors, make a real contribution. They can often be complimentary to one another and it is useful for decision-makers to be able to choose between these different approaches.

"The private sector has been making a contribution to meeting the MDG targets and will continue to do so. For example in Manila 3.4 million people have been provided access to drinking water in the past decade by private operators. Business has supported the individual right to access to water in CSD13.

Press Release

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It is implementing this right in practice in many cities in the developing world." stated Gérard Payen, President of AquaFed, the international Federation of Private Water Operators.

4. Increasing Water scarcity in many countries makes it necessary to ensure that available water resources are allocated equitably between the various categories of users: population, industries, agriculture, power generation.

Human activities continuously demand more water. Farmers need to irrigate more to produce more food. Industries need water for their economic development. Power producers also need water. Population growth and changes in way of life also require more water. The result is increasing water scarcity in both developing and developed countries. In some countries water scarcity is worsened by climate change.

"Businesses of all sizes are significant investors in water, wastewater and sanitation. They are making their contribution at local and at regional level, often in conjunction with public authorities, who they recognise must usually give the lead." Stated Bjorn von Euler of International Chamber of Commerce

To satisfy all needs in a coherent manner it is increasingly necessary for responsible and accountable authorities to manage the various demands and to make sure that locally available water resources are allocated equitably and used reasonably in the interest of the community. Enabling frameworks, policies and markets will optimise the contributions of the private sector to attaining the MDGs for water and sanitation.

For all these reasons, Business is calling on politicians to take urgent steps to increase commitment at all levels to the water and sanitation MDGs. This commitment needs to be sustainable over the long-term and focused on action not rhetoric. With strong political leadership, business and civil society can, and will, make a significant contribution. Sanitation systems and water services are essential for the protection of the environment, to economic development and the future well-being of the world. Millions are dying from lack of them!

Business asks CSD States participants to take this appeal very seriously and convey it to their Heads of State, Finance Ministers, other colleagues and responsible authorities. The whole world is counting on their leadership and action.

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See AquaFed's paper, "2005 – 2008 Progress on CSD 13 decisions on water and sanitation – Perception of Private Water Operators" at:

http://www.aquafed.org/pdf/AquaFed_Contribution_to_UNDESA_report_toCSD16_Pc_2007-09-21.pdf

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See WBCSD paper: "2008 UN International Year of Sanitation: It is time for business to act" at:

www.wbcsd.org/web/sanitation.htm