

The world faces a water crisis:

“Access to safe water is a fundamental human need and, therefore, a basic human right. Contaminated water jeopardizes both the physical and social health of all people. It is an affront to human dignity.”

Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary-General.

Some statistics:

- 97% of the earth's water is seawater - unfit to drink.
- Of the 3% that is fit to drink, 70% is in glaciers or polar ice-caps.
- Only 1% is available to support life.
- It is generally accepted that a person needs 50 litres per day (l/p/d). This “Basic Water Requirement” (BWR) is made up as follows:
 - 5 l/p/d for drinking
 - 20 l/p/d for sanitation and personal hygiene
 - 15 l/p/d for bathing
 - 10 l/p/d for basic food preparation

This does not include water for growing food.

In 1990 fifty-five countries, with a population of 1 billion, fell below this level, 33 of them in Africa.

At least 1.1 billion people lack access to a supply of safe water, and 2.4 billion lack access to basic sanitation.

Every year millions of people, mostly children, die from diseases associated with unsafe water and inadequate sanitation and hygiene.

Each day, some 6000 children die for want of clean water and sanitation.

Contrast this with usage in high-economy countries:

- In Europe domestic use is four times BWR.
- In the USA and Canada domestic use is, on average, ten times basic BWR

The Goal

The United Nations set a Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of cutting in half, by 2015, the proportion of people without access to sustainable safe drinking water and basic sanitation. **This requires reaching some 275,000 additional people with clean water every day for the next 12 years.**

The International Conference on Water and the Environment in Dublin (1992) stated four principles:

- 1) Fresh water is a finite and vulnerable resource essential to sustain life, development and the environment.
- 2) Water development and management should be based on a participatory approach involving users, planners and policymakers.
- 3) Women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water.
- 4) Water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognized as an economic good.

Clean water supply is essential for human health and survival.

Water is also critical to other aspects of sustainable development, including environmental protection, food security, empowerment of women, education of girls, etc.

Increasing access to safe water and sanitation services and improving the management of water resources are critical to helping developing countries fight poverty and hunger, safeguard human health, reduce child mortality, promote gender equality, manage and protect natural resources. Sufficient water for washing and safe private sanitation facilities is essential to personal dignity and self-respect.

Many countries face “absolute water scarcity” - they will not be able to meet the water needs of their people. They include Afghanistan, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Kuwait, Pakistan, Singapore, South Africa, Tunisia and Yemen. Other countries, including India, have a severe regional water scarcity.

More countries face “economic water scarcity” and they must more than double their efforts to extract water to meet their needs but lack the necessary financial resources. They include:-Angola, Benin, Botswana, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Haiti, Nigeria, Paraguay, and many others in equatorial Africa.

Other more economically advanced countries including Australia, Belize, Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Morocco, New Zealand, Peru and Turkey must increase water development between 25 and 100 percent to meet their needs.

Few countries can afford to ignore the challenge. For many it is the greatest threat to the survival of their people.

“Water scarcity is the greatest threat to human health, the environment and the global food supply. It also threatens peace as countries in Asia and the Middle East try to cope with shortages.”

The Water Institute

Those who will suffer most are the people in the world's poorest nations. Already women and children walk great distances to get water for cooking, drinking and sanitation. Farmers are losing their land as water sources decline. Wildlife is disappearing as wetlands dry up.

The greatest impact will be on food supplies of the poor.

Another facet is the rapid depletion of groundwater resources. India, Pakistan, Mexico and most of the Middle East and North Africa have been depleting groundwater at unsustainable levels. Unless checked, this will have catastrophic impact on their ability to produce enough food to feed their populace.

The opposite dimension—rising water tables of polluted and saline water is a serious problem in most of the arid areas of Asia and the Middle East - especially Pakistan. Higher levels of salt kill the crops. Rising water levels are often accompanied by raw sewage.

The Politics of Water

Another critical issue that Rotarians need to be aware of is the politics of water. Potential conflicts between regions and countries are considered a greater threat to peace than conflict over oil. For example:

- 261 watersheds cross the political boundaries of at least two countries.
- International basins cover 45% of the earth's surface and affect 40% of the world's population.
- Mexico and the State of Texas are in disagreement over withdrawal of water from the Rio Grande.
- Demand for water in Milwaukee's western suburbs will pit the needs of the people against those concerned with protecting the Great Lakes system.
- Who has priority over the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates—upstream Turkey or downstream countries Syria, Iraq and Iran?
- How should the waters of the Nile be shared among Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia—all desperately short of water, all with growing populations, all facing food shortages?

Mission Statement of the Water & Sanitation Rotarian Action Group:

Rotarians working to improve Life and Livelihood through the provision of Safe Water and Sanitation

Goals

Providing information, support and encouragement to Rotarians, Rotary clubs and districts to take active roles in projects/programs to develop safe water and sanitation as a means of promoting health and alleviating hunger

Strategies for Achieving Goals

Creating awareness among Rotarians of the importance of conservation and sustainability and of local and global water issues

- Creating awareness of the need for, and benefits of, safe water and sanitation
- Developing a compendium of best practices to ensure sustainability and cost-effectiveness
- Distributing information on appropriate technologies for supplying, conserving and purifying water and for sanitation
- Developing and encouraging mutually beneficial relationships with other organizations, corporations, agencies and NGOs sharing common water-related goals.
- Identifying alternative sources of financing to complement The Rotary Foundation e.g. Private foundations, corporations, government agencies etc
- Assisting in identifying and formulating programs and projects that will promote sustainability
- Implementing mechanisms to determine the effectiveness of projects.
- Creating a network of experts accessible to Rotarians and Rotary clubs
- Providing training and education on water/sanitation technologies and issues
- Creating a forum for exchange of information
- Creating a bibliography of relevant materials, references etc
- Providing information on relevant conferences
- Acting as advocates on water issues
- Providing support to Rotary clubs seeking financial and/or technical assistance
- Creating "Centers of Excellence" on water/sanitation
- Operating a web-site, producing a newsletter.
- Implementing procedures to ensure sustainability and cost effectiveness



How to Introduce WASRAG to your Club/District



"Water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink"

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

Visit us at www.wasrag.org
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