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World Water Week: 70 million people connected to drinking water thanks to EU aid

Between 2004 and 2012, the European Union (EU) financial support has helped more than 70 million people in developing countries gain access to drinking water and more than 24 million people to improved sanitation facilities.

Around 9 out of 10 people now have access to drinking water. The EU has contributed actively to this achievement. In all, the EU has allocated a total of almost €2 billion (€1 919 billion) to the water and sanitation sectors in 62 countries over the period 2008-2013.

EU's support to water and sanitation is channeled through different instruments, being one of them the EU's Water Facility, with a budget of €212 million from 2010 to 2015, and focusing on the most vulnerable people in rural and peri-urban areas. During this period, aware that the challenges are still considerable, 105 additional projects are planned in 35 countries to supply drinking water to 7.7 million people. These projects will also aim to provide sanitary installations for 2.8 million people and make hygiene education programmes available to 4.9 million people.

Millennium Development Goals – What has been achieved on water?

In 2000 the international community agreed on eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by 2015. Water is covered by MDG 7.c (the objective was to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to drinking water and basic sanitation.) Although the overall objective has been attained, 768 million people still lack access to this vital resource.

Furthermore, 2.5 billion people are still without adequate sanitation, which is one of the goals in which results are insufficient. At the current rate of progress, just 67% will have these facilities by 2015, which is well below the goal of 75%.

Taking up the challenge, José Manuel Barroso, the President of the European Commission, announced to the UN General Assembly in September 2010 that the European Union was going to roll out a €1 billion MDG initiative to help achieve the goals more rapidly, of which €267 million have now been allocated to water and sanitation projects in 19 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries.

Results from the ground – How is the EU providing access to water and sanitation where it is most needed?

Togo: supplying water to neglected sectors of the population

In the Maritime region in the south of Togo, where almost half of the population lives and 90% of economic activity is concentrated, only 13% of the population has access to drinking water.

People in villages and small towns draw water at traditional water points or at pumps which are insufficient for their needs and are often out of order. In the countryside, water needs can be supplied by man-powered pumps.

Only large towns are equipped with proper water distribution systems. Significantly increasing access to drinking water is therefore a priority, as is sanitation. A total budget of €16.7 million has been allocated to the water and sanitation sector by the European Union's MDG initiative in the Maritime region.

In addition, four projects to be implemented between 2011 and 2016 cover the construction or rehabilitation of 467 water points and 6,000 latrines and the training of 8,500 public officials. For example, two of these projects, organised jointly with UNICEF and the German Red Cross, aim to supply drinking water and sanitary installations to 140 rural communities in the Maritime region. This involves the implementation of projects valued at €4.5 million, over €3 million of which is provided by the EU. In addition, training in hygiene is being provided to families, with particular emphasis on children.

Support for Pioneering Water plant in Djibouti

A new project aims to build a desalination plant in Djibouti, which will use renewable energy to provide water to 200,000 inhabitants - one-fourth of the country's population - in some of the country's poorest areas. The announcement was made by Development Commissioner, Andris Piebalgs, and former Djiboutian Prime Minister, Mr Dileita Mohamed Dileita, during his visit to Brussels in 2013.

Djibouti suffers from an acute water shortage and has recently endured a prolonged drought, which has led to a serious food crisis in the country. The water produced is taken from the local aquifer; the only source of potable water for the city, which has reached its physical limit. Its quality is poor due to sea water intrusion, which has health and social consequences for the most vulnerable parts of the population, in particular children and women. The situation is aggravated by the high population growth in the capital which is expected to see demand for water more than double in the next 20 years.

The lack of access to water has led to recent fighting and riots in the country.

Current demand for water in the capital Djibouti City (where around 75% of the population lives) is estimated at 80,000 m³ per day but only 36,000m³ per day is currently being supplied.

The new EU-funded project PEPER (Producing Safe Drinking Water with Renewable Energy) will set up a desalination plant in the capital, Djibouti City, where there is a clear shortage in the current demand for water.

The new facility will have a capacity of 22,500 m³ per day, which in a second phase could be easily extendable to 45,000 m³ per day. The EU will provide €40.5 million out of the total estimated budget of €46 million for the new water desalination plant.

Bolivia: Water and Sanitation programme in peri-urban areas

This project was set up to improve the living conditions of the population in peri-urban areas (suburban areas next to a city with a population of more than 10,000 inhabitants) of La Paz, El Alto, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz and other major localities.

With an EU support of €28.5 million, it helped to promote the sustainable management of water resources, promoting systems to adapt the region to the impact of climate change. It also helped to increase access to the sustainable water supply and sanitation for the population, establishing systems based on the management of available water resources and applying new technologies (such as lower water consumption toilets, leakage reduction systems, etc) to promote the more efficient use of water.

Results achieved so far include:

- 37,095 new connections to water (for 167,000 inhabitants)
- Sanitation: 30,319 new connections, or 135,580 inhabitants
- Increase in Wastewater Treatment plants (2011-2012), benefiting 30,000 inhabitants (three new plants with 80% fulfillment of the projects at the end of 2012)

World Water Week takes place in Stockholm between 1st and 6th September.

For more information:

To find out more on World Water Week:

<http://www.worldwaterweek.org/>

For more on Djibouti PEPER project:

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/acp/country-cooperation/djibouti/djibouti_en.htm

Website of EuropeAid Development and Cooperation DG:

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/index_en.htm

Website of the European Commissioner for Development, Andris Piebalgs:

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/piebalgs/index_en.htm