



Energy Co2 : Climate Business

The Business Case for Sanitation

Access to sanitation is a precondition for development. However, the issue is not high enough on the international agenda. Water expert Jürg Gerber explains the reasons and why sanitation is so key to our future.



Jürg Gerber, Chief Operating Officer of the Water Project by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development

"If there is no water, there is no business."

How many people are living in countries with water problems?

One third of the world's population lives in water-stressed areas, defined as having access to less than 1,700 cubic meters of fresh water available per person and year. We estimate that figure to grow to 40 percent by 2025. The same disappointing fact holds for access to sanitation. Forty percent of the world's population does not have access to a minimum quality of sanitation services.

What is the bigger problem, water scarcity or the access to clean water?

It can be either one or a combination, and would need to be answered in a local context. But in general we can say that the per capita water availability has been decreasing and it will further decrease, which is a real call for action if we consider that only 2.5 percent of the total quantity of water available on the world is fresh water.

China has one of the fastest growing economies in the world. To what extent will water shortages put a brake on this growth?

As a starting point: if there is no water, there is no business. Full stop. And in many parts of China, water is an issue not so much of availability yet, but of quality. We need a certain quality of water, whether we are talking about drinking water, water for industrial purposes, or water for irrigation and agriculture. If we do not start to manage that resource more wisely, the brake will be pulled in almost any part of society.

Is water stress mainly an issue for the developing world?

South and East Asia and Africa are most affected, but it is definitely an issue in the European Union, as well, Especially when we talk about water supply and sanitation there is a lot of infrastructure which is obsolete. In many countries we are losing fresh water through the

leaking of underground pipes. The same is the case with sewage systems where you contaminate the groundwater, which again increases the treatment costs immensely. We have to place it higher on the agenda in order to maintain wealthy communities in the future.

10 Places Where Water Matters



10 Places Where Water Matters

Click on the picture to learn more about some of the regions coping with water scarcity, lack of sanitation, and other challenges.

One of the UN Millennium Development Goals is to halve the number of people without access to safe drinking water and sanitation by 2015. We are on track with the water target, but sanitation lags behind. Why?

The reasons are manifold, but one is certainly human attitude. People prefer to talk about the nice, clean things, and less about the dirty parts that create burdens and legacies. But with the support of the MDGs, which are actually still not going far enough, we are finally talking about the linkage of water access and sanitation, which were completely separate targets before. To understand that these two things belong together is already a great achievement.

Do you still see a chance for achieving the MDGs?

Water is the main enabler of human life! They have to be reached. The question is by when. Looking at the update reports, there are some countries that are faster and some that are behind. Because 2015 is basically tomorrow, it may be too soon. But we have to give them all the support available to make this happen.

You say there is a business case for sanitation. What would that be?

Sanitation has a direct link to health issues. For example, if you have less costs to the health sector, you will probably have a wealthier society. If you have less days lost from your employees due to illnesses that will directly affect your bottom line.

Related Articles

Water Fund: "The True Value of Water"

International Year of Sanitation: A Royal Flush?

A company depends on the society it operates in. If you do not understand this fact, you will run into serious problems. I would like to invite everyone to think about their business' water exposure and the critical linkages. Help may come from making use of our water scenarios in combination with the water tool. Understand your exposure, and then act!

editor: Miriam Wolf

publishing date: March 18, 2008

Readers' Comments:

It is very correct that sanitation needs to be promoted only on business principles. However, subsidising the sanitation programmes and improper implementation by the governmental agencies makes the things very complicated.

Anonymous Reader

© Allianz 2007, All Rights Reserved