



*****PRESS RELEASE*****



**A Feature Story on
Water and Girls' Education in Bangalore, India**

1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit

In the lead up to the 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit, the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC) in Singapore, is producing a series of feature stories on water and sanitation issues across the Asia-Pacific region, which the Asia-Pacific Water Forum will release weekly until the Summit early December.

In the first of the series, Mr. Kalinga Seneviratne, travels to the slums of Bangalore – India's information technology hub – to report on the link between water and girls' education. While girls' education is considered a key determinant to development progress, this report with photos explores how water and sanitation are powerful strategies to benefit girls' education.

"Before, we could not send our children to school because they had to fetch water at midnight," said Muniamma, a resident of MRS Palya, India.

The 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit (1st APWS) will be held in Beppu, Oita prefecture, on December 3rd and 4th, 2007, with top-level decision-makers' participation from 49 countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

Exchanging on the central theme of "Water Security: Leadership and Commitment," top level dignitaries will make keynote speeches, while a series of thematic panel sessions are scheduled to discuss in further depth some of the issues of concern, such as:

- Regional Launching of the International Year of Sanitation 2008, by JBIC, UNESCAP, UNDESA, UNICEF, WHO: The chair of the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB) will declare the regional launching of the International Year of Sanitation (to be confirmed). Regional representatives will also deliver speeches and discuss "water and sanitation" issues.
- Increasing Capacity for Local Actions (KRA 2) by Streams of Knowledge and UNHABITAT: Dealing with the theme of improvement of capacity building, the Executive Director of UNHABITAT will deliver a speech, and the session will be facilitated by UNHABITAT Goodwill Ambassador in Japan, Ms. Marie Christine.

The conclusions from the 1st APWS will be conveyed to upcoming political events in Japan, namely TICAD IV and the G8 Summit in 2008.

※The 1st APWS is sponsored by Coca-Cola Company, Limited (Japan), Canon Inc., with support from The Asian Development Bank and the Government of Japan, among others.

※The Asia-Pacific Water Forum (APWF) is working to increase the region's access to improved water supplies and sanitation, protect and restore river basins, and reduce people's vulnerability to water disasters. The APWF champions efforts aimed at boosting investments, building capacity, increasing public outreach and enhancing cooperation in the water sector at the regional level.

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The press is required to pre-register for the Summit to obtain press accreditation: "Instructions for Pre-registration" document, to be downloaded at www.apwf.org or www.watersummit.jp.

For questions or detailed information on the Summit (participants list, steering committee members, programme, etc.), please contact:

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INDIA: Lack of Water, Lack of Education

By Kalinga Seneviratne

BANGALORE - While social taboos may hinder the education of girls in India's poor communities, the experience in some slum communities in this southern Indian city indicates that the lack of access to water could be just as responsible.

"Women used to travel two to three miles to fetch water. Girls and women used to do this work. To wash clothes on certain days we had to go to the road at 1 (a.m.) and do without sleep. We were not able to send our children to school because they had to come with us to fetch water," said Muniamma, a 40-year-old mother of two living in MRS Palya, a slum community near a large Muslim cemetery.

"There was no peace in this community those days. They had to wait in a queue all night to get a bowl of water. Some young girls who go there get molested," said Rahat Begum, a community organiser and coordinator of the non-government organisation Association for Volunteer Action and Services (AVAS) where she has worked for 34 years among the slums of Bangalore.

This city is known as India's information technology capital. In some areas, slums have given way to spanking new buildings of high-tech companies -- local and foreign -- employing thousands of graduates from India's elite technological institutions, servicing global markets from the United States to Japan.

A stone's throw away is a reminder of another India -- the slums housing the so-called untouchables shunned by the rest of the community. Bangalore has about 365 slums, which are home to a fifth of the city's 6.5 million population and most lack water and sanitation services.

Salma Sadhika, a social development specialist with the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), observed: "The contrast between the two only serves to reinforce the enormous difficulties faced by the urban poor and the urgent need for new initiatives to address the situation."

Public service utilities like the Bangalore water and sewerage board could not give water and sanitation connections to the informal settlements because the latter do

not have land titles. Years of lobbying by community-based organisations like AVAS finally persuaded public authorities to find a way around this legal requirement.

At Sundamnagar, for a community of around 300 households, mostly involved in casual labour and the service industry, AVAS was able to collectively buy land and work out a land title. AVAS also gave collateral to the bank so each family could borrow up to 20,000 rupees (500 US dollars) to build a house.

"We're building people before building houses," explained M. Nagarajaiah, a community organiser at AVAS. "We have to build, empower, organise and educate them."

AVAS gave emphasis to educating women, particularly in water and health management, by setting up a water and sanitation (WATSAN) committee in each community. Most committee members are women.



WATSAN Women at Sundamnagar

At MRS Palya, Begum said, it is the women who maintain the system. "If the water doesn't come and leakages happen, they immediately take it up (with those concerned)," she said. "Most of the men watch TV at home all day, and those who work spend most of their money on alcohol."

Sundamnagar was supposed to be the pilot project of the partnership between the Bangalore water board and the slum communities in creating water connectivity. "Today it is a collapsed project," said Nagarajaiah. "Water is not coming to the homes and people are refusing to pay."

The women in the WATSAN committee, with the support of AVAS, took the case to the chairman of the Bangalore water board. The problem, they said, was that water was being diverted to other communities and water pressure was not enough to bring water into their home taps. They had to dig pits in front of their homes to get water from the pipes at ground level.



Sundanagar residents Taking water from pits

"Monthly meter readings are also not being made, and we refuse to pay bills for a service we are not receiving as promised," said Josephine, a water and sanitation committee member and community health coordinator. "(But) water is essential for us, so we are trying to work out a solution."

In MRS Palya, the residents regularly get two hours of water a day. "That is more than enough for each family," says Begum. "They have time to sleep, take a bath and do all the housework."

The community is clean because there are toilets inside the houses and they have adequate water supply.

"Before, we could not send our children to school because they had to fetch water at midnight," said Muniamma. "Today, the children go to school regularly and they are doing well."



Muniamma in her washing room

"Society thinks that we are a poor slum class and we will not get our children educated and we will allow them to just roam around the community," said Vanitha, whose husband died 20 years ago. Their two children have completed high school.

"We are proud to say that since we got this water facility our children have been doing well. Many of them are going to pre-university college, technical education. All the residents are happy," she said.

"The environment is very clean, there is no pollution in the slums. We used to get many diseases, now we are getting trained in computers, in management, and many are getting degrees. I'm very happy," said Murthy, a youth leader at MRS Palya who has already completed one year of a hotel management diploma.



MRS Palyan Mother with two

"Politicians used to think that people are too poor to pay for water services, so they put up taps in the streets," said Begum. "We have shown that by organising and motivating the community, informing them about the norms, rules and regulations, they will not only pay but will also help maintain the systems properly".

(END / 8 October,2007)