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## Bangladesh the 'Golden Boy' of South Asia: Global UNDP Report

The 2006 Human Development Report calls for 20 liters of clean water a day for all as a human right

**Dhaka, 9 November 2006:** The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2006 Human Development Report, launched globally today, reveals that although Asia's emerging giants are lagging in the water and sanitation sector, Bangladesh has shown impressive gains. "Income matters, but public policy shapes the conversion of income into human development," says the report, entitled ***Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty and the Global water crisis.***

"India may outperform Bangladesh as a high growth globalization success story, but the tables are turned when the benchmark for success shifts to sanitation: despite an average income some 60% higher, India has a lower rate of sanitation coverage. Similar gaps between wealth and coverage are observed for water," the report reveals.

Since 1975, Bangladesh has steadily improved life expectancy, education, and the standard of living. The nation moved into the *medium developed countries category* in the Human Development Index from 2003, which ranks 177 countries according to achievements in human development. In 2006, Bangladesh is again ranked among the world's medium developed countries at number 137, which is two steps up from its ranking than last year.

Ten years ago, Bangladesh had one of the lowest levels in the world of access to proper sanitation in its rural areas. Despite being one of the world's poorest countries, it is now on target to achieve nationwide sanitation coverage by 2010, thanks to a 'total sanitation campaign' promoted by NGOs and local authorities. The campaign appeals to three drivers of change: disgust, self-interest and a sense of individual responsibility for community welfare.

### **20 liters of clean water a day for all as a human right**

Across much of the developing world, unclean water is an immeasurably greater threat to human security than violent conflict, according to the 2006 Human Development Report. Each year, the report reveals, 1.8 million children die from diarrhoea that could be prevented with a glass of clean water and a toilet; 443 million school days are lost to water-related illnesses; and almost 50 percent of all people in developing countries are suffering at any given time from a health problem caused by a lack of water and sanitation.



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Yet unlike wars and natural disasters, this global crisis does not galvanise concerted international action, says the 2006 Human Development Report (HDR). “Like hunger, it is a silent emergency experienced by the poor and tolerated by those with the resources, the technology and the political power to end it,” says the Report. With less than a decade left to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, this needs to change, stress the authors.

“I fully support the call for a Global Action Plan to tackle the growing water and sanitation crisis,” said UNDP Administrator Kemal Dervis. “As the 2006 Human Development Report highlights, each one of the eight Millennium Development Goals is inextricably tied to the next, so if we fail on the water and sanitation goal, hope of reaching the other seven rapidly fades.”

The HDR 2006 recommends the following three foundations for success:

1. **Make water a human right—and mean it:** “Everyone should have at least 20 litres of clean water per day and the poor should get it for free,” says the Report: While a person in the UK or USA sends 50 liters down the drain each day by simply flushing their toilet, many poor people survive on less than five liters of contaminated water per day, according to HDR research.
2. **Draw up national strategies for water and sanitation:** Governments should aim to spend a minimum of one percent GDP on water and sanitation, and enhance equity, the authors urge: Water and sanitation suffer from chronic under-funding. Public spending is typically less than 0.5 percent of GDP. Research for the 2006 HDR shows that this figure is dwarfed by military spending: In Ethiopia, for example, the military budget is 10 times the water and sanitation budget—in Pakistan, 47 times.
3. **Increased international aid:** Development assistance has fallen in real terms over the past decade, but to bring the MDG on water and sanitation into reach, aid flows will have to double, says the Report.

## **Water costs the most for those who can least afford it**

Across the world, the poor are forced to pay much more for clean water than their affluent neighbours, says the Report. For those who must get water from tankers, access to water costs far more per litre than it does for their richer compatriots, or for people in the cities of the developed world.

While the rich usually get water from a single supplier, the poor have to reckon with a bewildering array of service providers, such as public standpipes, vendors, truckers, and water carriers. Some of the water vendors access water from the municipal source and then re-sell it at a premium to poor slum dwellers who do not have access to piped water. As a result, water delivered through a vendor is often 10 to 20 times more costly than water provided by the public utility.

## **Poor farmers face double water crisis: climate change and competition**

According to the Report, Poor farmers face a potentially catastrophic water crisis from the combination of climate change and competition for scarce water resources. Intensifying competition for water is now one



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of the gravest threats to sustained human development. Rising industrial demand, urbanization, population growth and pollution are placing unprecedented stress on water systems —and on agriculture.

There is a substantial group of countries that stand to be affected by climate change. Bangladesh, Egypt, Nigeria and Thailand have large populations living in delta areas threatened by saline intrusion. The low-lying regions of Bangladesh support more than 110 million people in one of the most densely populated regions of the world, and more than half of Bangladesh lies at less than 5 metres above sea level. The World Bank has estimated that by the end of the 21st century sea levels for the country could rise by as much as 1.8 metres, with worst case scenarios predicting land losses of 16%. The area affected supports 13% of the population and produces 12% of GDP.

## **Cross-border cooperation**

Challenging predictions that increasing competition for water will inevitably provoke armed conflicts, the newly released 2006 Human Development Report finds that cross-border cooperation over water resources is already far more pervasive and successful than is commonly presumed, offering many models for the resolution of future international water disputes.

In the past 50 years, there have been 37 cases of reported violence between states over water; all but seven incidences took place in the Middle East. Yet over the same period, more than 200 treaties on water were negotiated between countries, says the Report. For countries like Bangladesh, which depends on India for 91 percent of its water to irrigate crops and replenish aquifers, the case is clear for cross-border cooperation on water.

## **What could progress mean for the poor?**

The 2006 HDR estimates the total additional cost of achieving the MDG on access to water and sanitation—to be sourced domestically and internationally—at about \$10 billion a year. “The \$10 billion price tag for the MDG seems a large sum—but it has to be put in context. It represents less than five days’ worth of global military spending and less than half what rich countries spend each year on mineral water,” says the Report.

*ABOUT THIS REPORT: The Human Development Report continues to frame debates on some of the most pressing challenges facing humanity. It is an independent report commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Kevin Watkins is the Lead Author of the 2006 report, which includes special contributions from U.K. Chancellor Gordon Brown, Nigeria’s Finance Minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, President Lula of Brazil, Former U.S. President Carter, and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The Report is translated into more than a dozen languages and launched in more than 100 countries annually. Further information can be found at <http://hdr.undp.org/hdr2006>.*

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