



**World Health
Organization**

WATER & CULTURE

THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR WATER 2005-2015

*"Due to its fundamental role in society's life, water has a strong cultural dimension. Without understanding and considering the cultural aspects of our water problems, no sustainable solution can be found."
Session Water and Cultural Diversity, Statement to the Ministerial Conference,
3rd World Water Forum, 22 March 2003*

World Water Day (WWD) 2006 will focus on the theme '**Water and Culture**' under the leadership of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Water is probably the only natural resource to touch all aspects of human civilization - from agricultural and industrial development to the cultural and religious values embedded in society. The need and demand for water have been a driving force for health, for society, for economic prosperity, for cultural significance, and development throughout human history.

Cultural differences play a key role in the way water is perceived, valued and managed in different societies. World health and poverty eradication have cultural connotations; culture has positive and negative health impacts on individual well-being - in particular women's health. Water management practices should be adapted to specific cultures as they constitute distinct systems of knowledge and behavior. Water resources management strategies must take culture fully into account. Intercultural dialogue should be a guiding principle for raising awareness, promoting and developing educational tools. Cultural diversity is a source of sustainable practices and innovative approaches, and indigenous knowledge holders and scientists should cooperate in finding solutions to water-related problems.

Key water & culture messages

On the occasion of World Water Day 2006:

1. Promote the understanding that Water and Culture are inseparable elements of human life. Culture should be regarded as the permanently evolving set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group. It encompasses – in addition to art and literature – lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.¹ The way water is used and valued constitutes an integral part of a society's cultural identity.
2. Foster the dialogue of cultures to find solutions for water-related problems. Cultural diversity, stakeholder involvement and intercultural dialogue should be the guiding principles for the development of awareness raising, educational and capacity building material and methods.
3. Promote inclusive, solution-oriented water governance that takes into account all facets of cultural diversity and that seeks informed consensus. Indigenous knowledge holders should be involved as full partners.
4. Encourage the artistic expression on water issues as an important means of fostering understanding and sharing information. Drawings, photographs, audiovisual materials and the performing arts often help to get messages across cultural and language borders.

¹ UNESCO *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, UNESCO, Paris 2002 ; see also http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=2450&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

5. Encourage the creation, transition and dissemination of information on water and culture in your community. Involve schools, universities, those in your work-place and at home.

2005-2015 overarching Decade Messages:

- Water, sanitation and hygiene are three intertwined determinants of the water/ill-health/poverty spectrum, considering hygiene in its broadest sense, including environmental as well as personal hygiene.
- 83% of the world's population are using improved drinking-water sources, but 1.1 billion people are still without access to safe drinking-water.
- Progress in sub-Saharan Africa was impressive, moving from 49% coverage in 1990 to 58% in 2002. But at this rate it will not be sufficient to meet the MDG target by 2015.
- More than half the world's population use water piped to their homes, which frees them (mainly women and girls) from the drudgery of water collection and protects their health.
- Without a sharp acceleration in the rate of progress, the world will miss the sanitation target by half a billion people.
- An estimated 2.6 billion people — half of the developing world — lack access to improved sanitation.
- Despite major progress in South Asia, little more than a third of its population use improved sanitation; access to adequate sanitation in sub-Saharan Africa is only 36%.
- Global population growth is cancelling many of the gains already made. Though more than a billion people gained improved sanitation between 1990 & 2002, the population without coverage declined by only 100 million.
- From now until 2015, greater effort must be made to reach the poor and those in rural areas, whose deprivation is hidden behind national averages.

USEFUL WEBSITES

- **International Decade for Action Water for Life 2005–2015:**
<http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade>
- **2005–2015 is the International Decade for Action 'Water for Life'**
http://www.unesco.org/water/water_celebrations/decades/
- **World Water Day**
<http://www.worldwaterday.org/>
- **World Health Organization**
http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health
- **UNESCO Water Portal**
<http://www.unesco.org/water>
- **World Water Day 2006 website**
<http://www.unesco.org/water/wwd2006>

This resource sheet, number 2, is prepared specifically for World Water Day 2006. It forms an integral part of the Advocacy Guide, "*Celebrating Water for Life: The International Decade for Action: 2005-2015.*" Please refer to the advocacy guide as well as resource sheet 1 when planning your event for the day or the decade. The guide is available online in Arabic, English, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish

Celebrating Water for Life: The International Decade for Action Advocacy Guide and resource sheet 1 are available online at www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/2005advocguide/en
