

# Ensuring safe water and sanitation in the new millennium

## The water and sanitation challenge

The consumption of water and the generation of human wastes are such commonplace aspects of human life that planning for the appropriate use or removal of them may be overlooked. The evidence is abundant that failure to ensure an adequate supply of uncontaminated water or to arrange for safe disposal of excreta linked to health promotion and behavior change is a major contributing factor to disease transmission, ill health, misery and death.

Global Water and Sanitation Initiative

### Water and Sanitation and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

**MDG No. 2**  
Water and sanitation facilities are needed at schools worldwide. Both in the disaster scenario when International Federation supports rehabilitation or reconstruction of schools, we ensure there is a safe water supply and that sanitation facilities are established. During or post-disaster, continuing programmes at schools are often undertaken for which a safe water supply is crucial.

**MDG No. 3**  
In the developmental context, in many countries, schools will be closed by shortages of water and sanitation is not provided and for example in Zimbabwe, working with Red Cross volunteers and community members, we have to spend or keep schools open by building latrines or establishing water points near to schools.

**MDG No. 4**  
To further encourage school attendance, particularly for female students, adequate sanitation is a factor which can adversely affect attendance. Young girls can find uncomfortable during menstruation if proper facilities are not available or are not suitable for their needs. In some countries with particular cultural sensitivities, improved female attendance has been achieved by creating outdoor facilities as available.

**MDG No. 7**  
Women and children often bear the task of water collection, often from great distances. By ensuring that women are properly represented and engaged in community water and sanitation committees, they can influence the positioning of water supplies to reduce to a minimum the distances they have to walk. It is now standard practice when International Federation water projects are implemented that women are properly represented in community structures, are given the same training opportunities as men, and are given every opportunity towards increased empowerment.

**MDG No. 8**  
A recognized primary cause of under five mortality is poor water and sanitation linked to unsafe hygiene practices. Not only can this be significantly reduced by establishing safe water and sanitation facilities, but the wider that water and sanitation can give us encouraging better hygiene can and will have an even greater impact. Hand and body washing, cleanliness in the home and surrounding environment, safe water and food storage, washing hands after using the toilet and all potential routes to reduce mortality significantly. Water and sanitation combined with better nutrition, immunization and disease control addressed in an integrated manner has the potential to make the biggest impact.

**MDG No. 9**  
Community empowerment and engagement linked to the Federation's global network of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and volunteers can increase the coverage of sustainable safe water and sanitation among the world's poor. It is by engaging communities and National Societies at grass roots that coverage sustainability, the International Federation role being that of catalyst and booster to the process. The International Federation, already contributing in this fashion, intends to scale-up further. In addition to this approach, the use of low-technology opens the way to using simple, low-cost, low-maintenance hand water pumping systems, water catchment's potential that do not threaten the environment is a key element in International Federation water and sanitation policy and strategy.

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Today, more than one billion people lack access to clean water and over two billion do not have adequate sanitation facilities. Around **four million** people die each year including 4,000 children under five years old who die *every day* from diseases associated with the lack of

access to safe drinking water, inadequate sanitation and poor hygiene. Added to this, in times of disaster and crises, the urgency to meet basic water and sanitation needs saves lives, reduces diseases and restores dignity.

The overall water and sanitation challenge is best expressed in the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in particular goals No. 2, 3, 4 and 7, which have water and sanitation components. Our response is therefore to set our targets as a contribution to meeting those goals.



# International Federation response

Over the last ten years, the International Federation has established and consolidated a water and sanitation vision, policy and capacity to better address two principle Global challenges.

**1) Acute water and sanitation challenges**, mostly related to crises and disasters, where there is the urgency to provide basic needs to save lives, contain or reduce health threats and restore dignity.

Mapping of International Federation water and sanitation activities (1993–2006)



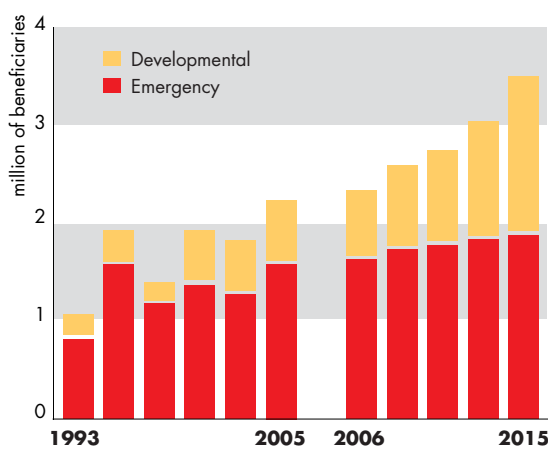
Over the last ten years, over **six million people** have been served with basic water and sanitation needs by the International Federation in times of crises and disasters. It is envisioned that disaster response demands in the water and sanitation sector will increase. Technology used needs to be revised periodically to incorporate new developments and improve response capacity. This improved response capacity will have a special focus upon sanitation and health promotion in post-disaster scenarios. The International Federation Secretariat (Water and Sanitation unit of the Health and Care Department) takes the lead not only in coordination of response, but also in the crucial further development of response capacity.

**2) Chronic water and sanitation challenges**, mostly related to the fact that still a large proportion of the world's poor do not have access to adequate safe water and sanitation, causing death, disease and loss of productivity.

**Around four million** people die every year as a result of poor water and sanitation access; many are children under five years.

Over the last ten years, **over 2.5 million people** have been served with sustainable water and sanitation facilities by International Federation efforts. The International Federation has decided to increase significantly its contribution to the UN MDG goal to reduce 'by half those without sustainable water and sanitation facilities by 2015'. Using the International Federation's unique network of National Societies, volunteers and grass root structures, a ten year **Global Water and Sanitation Initiative (GWSI)** has been launched this year to increase developmental Water and Sanitation beneficiaries to five million people by 2015. GWSI is also used as an umbrella for resource mobilisation and setting new standards for National Red Cross Societies worldwide. Under the GWSI, a special focus will be on water and sanitation and People Living with HIV/Aids. After one year, GWSI has identified 11 country projects, with secure funding for the next three years.

Overview of International Federation water and sanitation beneficiaries (actual and projected) 1993–2015



Beneficiary type	Actual beneficiaries served 1993–2005	Projected beneficiaries served 2006–2015
Emergency	6.5 million	9 million
Developmental	2.5 million	5 million
Totals	9 million	14 million



## International Federation and the global momentum

<b>1995</b>	International Federation begins long-term engagement with Inter-Agency water and sanitation San Group which represents the major players in emergency water and sanitation (Oxfam, Unicef, UNHCR, MSF, ACF, IRC, ICRC etc.).
<b>1996</b>	International Federation deploys the first water and sanitation Emergency Response Unit (ERU) to provide a rapid response capacity of equipment and personnel – to date over 30 major emergencies have been responded to, serving over six million people.
<b>1996-2000</b>	International Federation deploys regional water and sanitation delegates to provide support to country-based water and sanitation projects and initiatives in key regions especially Asia, Africa and the Americas. To-date, over 2 million people have benefited.
<b>2000</b>	UN launches Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with significant water and sanitation components for the period 2000–2015.
<b>2002</b>	UN declares access to safe water and sanitation a human right.
<b>2003</b>	International Federation had a significant impact at the 3rd World Water Forum in Kyoto, Japan with participation in the ministerial part of the conference, in order to strengthen and to advocate our position.
<b>2003</b>	International Federation Board and Membership adopts global federation water and sanitation policy.
<b>2004</b>	International Federation and Oxfam establish an MoU to formalize closer operational cooperation and International Federation joins the WHO led 'International Network to Promote Household Water Treatment and Safe Storage'.
<b>2005</b>	International Federation launches the ten years Global Water and Sanitation Initiative (GWSI) to scale up existing water and sanitation capacities in provision of sustainable water and sanitation as an increased contribution to the MDGs. International Federation establishes a special focus upon water and sanitation and People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) under the GWSI umbrella.

## Areas of action: building on comparative advantages

**Advocacy** – National Societies will advocate for water supply and sanitation improvements in communities. This will include volunteers and local branches encouraging communities to improve their water and sanitation. It will also try to persuade government water supply agencies to play a more active role as a community level facilitator, regulator and monitoring agency of improvements in water supply and sanitation. The International Federation will continue to call attention to the urgent need to improve water supply and sanitation in vulnerable communities.



**Participatory approach** – Working in communities with a strong volunteer base gives the Red Cross and Red Crescent a crucial advantage. The presence of trained volunteers in the community provides a ready base of sanitation and hygiene promotion agents. These volunteers will be given additional training in health and hygiene promotion and participatory approaches. Water and sanitation projects will also be used as a vehicle for the recruitment of volunteers.

**Relief to development** – The International Federation will include, in the design and implementation of emergency water and sanitation operations, components to allow projects to evolve seamlessly from relief to development programmes. An example of this approach is the involvement of local people, who will later use these facilities, in the design of water supply and sanitation services during a disaster response operation.

**Rapid response and quality assurance** – The International Federation has developed a system of Emergency Response Units (ERUs) to speed up response to a disaster. ERUs comprise trained specialist volunteers and standardized equipment ready for immediate use. A water and sanitation ERU consistent of four modules has been developed and widely used for water and sanitation emergencies providing up to 50,000 beneficiaries with safe drinking water and basic sanitation facilities. The ERU system together with regionally developed disaster response teams will enable the International Federation to scale up its interventions in emergency situations.

The International Federation will focus on improving the ability and capacity of National Societies to develop and make the most efficient use of new or available resources to ensure a safe and sustainable water supply and sanitation facilities.



## Partnerships

The International Federation is part of an interagency working group (ACF, ICRC, IRC, MSF, Oxfam, UNHCR, UNICEF) focusing on water and sanitation issues. The purpose of this group is to exchange information on activities and to standardise approaches and technologies.

Building on the successful cooperation with Oxfam UK during relief operations, a Global MoU has been established between the International Federation and Oxfam UK.

Under GWSI, a co-financing partnership is established with the European Community. The International Federation is recognizing an emerging and increasingly important role of promoting low-cost, low-tech household level water and sanitation interventions and has joined the WHO led 'Network to promote household water treatment and safe storage' to share experiences and partner on such interventions.

The International Federation has worked closely with the Loughborough University in the UK and other institutions on a number of publications.

### For more information, please contact:

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies  
P.O. Box 372 - 1211 Geneva 19 - Switzerland  
E-mail: [secretariat@ifrc.org](mailto:secretariat@ifrc.org)  
Web site: [www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)

Uli Jaspers, Head – Water and Sanitation Unit  
Health and Care Department  
Tel. +41 22 730 44 72  
E-mail: [uli.jaspers@ifrc.org](mailto:uli.jaspers@ifrc.org)