



## Backgrounder

### Water Stress

- Water stress is characterised as having insufficient water of satisfactory quality and quantity to meet human and environmental needs. While many people are already living in regions facing water stress, it has been estimated that by 2025, the share of the world's population living in water stressed areas will increase to 35% or about 2.8 billion people. In fact, it is predicted that, in the near future, there may well be conflicts over water on the same scale as those for oil.
- 70% of global water withdrawals are made for agriculture and the share of withdrawals accounted for by urban water use would appear to be less than a quarter with even smaller shares in Africa, while in Asia and the Pacific, agriculture accounts for about 85% of water withdrawals.
- Despite this, it has been found that water resource problems do not make a major contribution to the inadequate urban water and sanitation problem in most low income cities. The problem is poor management of water resources.

### Pollution:

- Urban development can contribute to water stress in other ways. Cities pollute ground water supplies and aquifers and coastal waters. 53% of Africa's land surface has no discharge to the sea which means that contaminants in aquifers are likely to persist which will be costly, if not impossible, to purify.

### Disasters:

- Floods and disasters that disrupt provision for water and sanitation carry the risk of disease epidemics. Floods can contaminate water supplies and are associated with epidemics of dysentery or other water-borne diseases. Outbreaks of Leptospirosis, usually caused by drinking water infected by rat urine, have been associated with floods in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo and those living in poor quality settlements at risk of flooding with high levels of overcrowding and inadequate provision for garbage collection are particularly at risk.

*Guadalajara, Mexico's second largest city with around 3.5 million inhabitants is also the motor of its economy, generating 7 percent of Mexico's GNP at the turn of the 21st century. But the city faces a very serious water shortage because Lake Chapala, the country's largest lake, from which it draws more than half its fresh water supply is drying up. This is largely the result of a long history of poor water management of the Lerma-Santiago Basin.*

*In Dakar (Senegal), as in many other cities, water supplies have to be drawn from ever more distant sources. This is both because local groundwater supplies are fully used, and polluted, and local aquifers over-pumped, resulting in saltwater intrusion. A substantial proportion of the city's water is brought in from the Lac de Guiers, 200 kms. away.*

*In Algeria, the lack of rain during the last ten years with particular severity during 2000-2002 has cut water availability and affects most urban centres. Eighty-six percent of the urban population is connected to the water network but the availability of water has declined – from several hours a day to several hours every two, three or even four days.*

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