

Switzerland and the International Year of Freshwater 2003: The Involvement of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

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Water follows mountains

For the **Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)**, the United Nations (UN) International Year of Freshwater 2003 (IYFW2003; see Box) is a logical continuation of its significant engagement in the International Year of Mountains (IYM2002). IYM2002 allowed Switzerland to confirm its leading role in sustainable development of mountain regions and establish itself as a source of assistance on mountain issues within the UN.

IYFW2003 also offers an opportunity to further the cause of mountain regions, provided that their importance in sustainable management of water can be demonstrated. More than half of the world's population depends on mountains for drinking water. Mountains are the water towers of the 21st century: they store water in the form of ice and snow, in lakes, and in reservoirs. This water is used not only by mountain populations but by the surrounding lowlands as well.

Water knows no boundaries

Switzerland is fortunate to have not only a good supply of water—an irreplaceable resource that is becoming increasingly scarce in many parts of the world—but also a great deal of experience in management of water resources. As a mountain country, Switzerland is aware of the need to conserve water for the benefit of countries further downstream. It makes efforts to use and protect water resources, with their respective ecological functions, in sustainable ways, while also protecting people from the hazards posed by water.

A focus on water offers ideal conditions for national and international cooperation. Switzerland's role as the water tower of Europe is well known, and questions linked with water are a central concern in development cooperation. SDC will accordingly pursue two overall aims during IYFW2003: (1) raising awareness at

The UN resolution on IYFW2003

On 20 December 2000, the 87th General Assembly of the UN adopted Resolution 55/196, sponsored by Tajikistan and cosponsored by 120 other countries, declaring 2003 as the International Year of Freshwater. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Division of Social and Economic Affairs (UNDESA) were named as task managers for IYFW2003. In addition, substantial inputs will be provided by the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The General Assembly set the following goals for IYFW2003:

“...to encourage Governments, the United Nations system and all other actors to take advantage of the Year to increase awareness of the importance of sustainable freshwater use, management and protection. It also calls upon governments, national organisations, non-governmental organisations and the private sector to make voluntary contributions and to lend other forms of support to the Year. The International Year of Freshwater provides an opportunity to accelerate the implementation of the principles of integrated water resource management. The Year will be used as a platform for promoting existing activities and spearheading new initiatives in water resources at the international, regional and national levels. The International Year of Freshwater is expected to follow up on agreements reached at the World Summit on Sustainable Development WSSD in Johannesburg in August/September 2002 and should have impact far beyond the year 2003.”

home and abroad and (2) continuing its long-standing commitment to water issues.

For SDC it is important to collaborate with other federal offices during the International Year of Freshwater in order to take better advantage of synergies, reach as much of the public as possible, and have the greatest possible impact. SDC will engage in a joint campaign with the Swiss Agency for the Environment, Forests, and Landscape (SAEFL) and the Swiss Federal Office for Water and Geology (FOWG) for this purpose.

The Swiss national campaign (www.water2003.ch)

In the Swiss campaign for IYFW 2003, SDC will be responsible for international activities, while FOWG and the SAEFL will be responsible for the national program of action. A joint Internet site (www.water2003.ch) will contain a lexicon on water, useful links

to different topics concerned with water in Switzerland and abroad, a calendar of important events, and details about programs carried out by Switzerland's partners. Additional joint outputs and events are being planned.

The International Year of Freshwater will be launched on 21 March 2003 with a “Water Day” in the public square in front of the Federal Parliament building in Bern. This event will include an exhibition on groundwater and presentation of a special postage stamp issued by the Swiss Post.

Water and development

SDC has set the following priorities for IYFW2003:

- Access to water as a key factor related to the problem of poverty.
- Water as the primary factor in production for food security.
- Water as a central component of rural development.

- Water and sanitation in human settlements.
- Water governance.

Protection and sustainable, efficient management of water, an increasingly scarce resource, are also important in the context of development. In this respect, it is of primary importance to take an integrated view of the hydrologic cycle. The aim of SDC's activities is to help achieve the UN millennium/WSSD goals of halving the number of people with no access to clean drinking water and improving sanitation facilities by the year 2015.

Information, training, and exchange of experience

Both in Switzerland and internationally, SDC will call attention to the global importance of water in the context of development. For primary and secondary teachers, SDC plans an Internet portal containing an overview of instructional material concerned with water, and presentation of attractive posters. In addition, there are plans for financial support of international events such as cultural exchanges, exchanges of experience, and local activities that will take place in Switzerland. Finally, Switzerland's long experience with water issues in the areas of development, cooperation, and humanitarian aid will be processed and documented in a brochure scheduled for publication in September 2003.

At the international level, SDC intends to foster and support specific, selected activities focusing on water in its priority countries and regions, with a main focus on Central Asia. SDC will support international water conferences in Almaty and Dushanbe, as well as construction of a "House of Water" in collaboration with the joint SDC/CDE Central Asia Mountain Partnership Programme (CAMP). On

the global level, SDC will take part in the Third World Water Forum in Kyoto in March 2003.

Fostering sustainable and integrated water management: SDC's long-term commitment

Beyond IYFW2003, SDC will continue its long-term commitment to sustainable and integrated water management in developing countries. Water and sanitation have played an important role in SDC's programs since the early 1960s, when priority was given to rural water supply. During the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade from 1980 to 1990, additional attention was given to sanitation. In the early 1990s the importance of a more global approach to protection and sustainable use of freshwater resources was recognized. The integrated water resource management approach was designed to lead to a more balanced use of this precious resource: water for people, water for nature (irrigation), water for ecosystems, and water for other uses (eg. energy production). Two international institutions, the World Water Council (WWC) and the Global Water Partnership (GWP) have taken the lead in this area and receive support from SDC.

Special attention is also being given to disaster prevention and disaster relief. Due to increasing vulnerability, ecological degradation, and climatic change, natural disasters have been occurring with increasing frequency. Ensuring an adequate and safe supply of water, as well as necessary sanitation measures, is a central humanitarian concern in protecting people affected by disasters.

SDC also plays an active role in many international networks. In particular, it was one of the funding institutions of the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council in the

mid 1980s. SDC has actively supported the World Bank's Water and Sanitation Program since its early days, as well as the World Water Council and the Global Water Partnership.

SDC was one of the first institutions to support the buildup of the International Training Network in the South, which includes the *Centre Régional de l'Eau Potable et l'Assainissement* (CREPA) in Ouagadougou, covering the West African region, and the Network for Water and Sanitation in Nairobi (NETWAS), covering East and South Africa. In collaboration with Aguasan, SDC has organized the Aguasan Gersau Workshops for the last 18 years, which are open to project staff from SDC and other institutions and are designed to deal with major technical, social, and institutional issues in the water and sanitation sectors.

Although priority will still be given to water supply and sanitation in rural areas, SDC will increasingly include the urban and peri-urban context. Aspects of good governance and conflict prevention will play an increasingly crucial role in achieving SDC's main aim of poverty alleviation through water and sanitation activities. Bearing in mind the continuous depletion of scarce water resources, aspects of integrated water resource management—in terms of the needs of the different ecosystems and, in particular, protection and integrated sustainable use of soil and water resources—must always be considered. Particularly in mountain regions, which are fragile ecosystems where agriculture is difficult, the relation between sustainable soil and water use and an integrated view of the hydrologic cycle are important approaches for promoting sustainable development.

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International Year of Freshwater



2003



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