



Today, and tomorrow, the future of water resources management is increasingly in the hands of women.

# Business Needs Security to Invest in Water

**The business sector's role in global water and sanitation issues has grown in recent years. During the annual World Water Week in Stockholm, this growth has also resulted in heightened interest for the Founders Seminar.**

Arranged by the Stockholm Water Foundation, the Founders Seminar attracts a broad spectrum of World Water Week participants and has interviews, panel debates and discussion sessions focussed on private sector water issues.

### Business – and the world's water

Two panels of experts discussed and debated at the August 2004 Founders Seminar the different roles vis-à-vis water which business and industry can have in a community or region. The panels were comprised mainly private sector experts and former Stockholm Water Prize Laureates.

The experts said that business and industry are important economic drivers, through production and employment, but that they are also water consumers and, on occasion, excessive polluters of the local resource. But business and industry can often be innovators and, as profit-driven enterprises, investors in infrastructure development and sustainable water resources management.

In support of greater access to water and sanitation in the developing world, the

private sector panel voiced the importance of business and industry as a legitimate stakeholder with responsibility. Increasingly, umbrella groups such as the World Business Council for Sustainable Development are seeing their memberships grow – an indicator of heightened corporate engagement. Similarly, private sector initiatives, like the World Economic Forum's "Water Initiative," are helping to build functioning coalitions, heighten awareness and raise the bar for corporate social responsibility in the water sector.

Several of the participating companies however, raised concern over their investments in and collaboration with countries lacking the institutional and administrative capacity to regulate the water sector in a proper way. Lack of rules and regulations are hindering investments. An increasing number of companies are not willing to risk a financial investment and their reputation related to involvement in certain countries.

When it does take the risk, direct investment in infrastructure development and improvement was given as an example. Natural resources stewardship was another, and the experts emphasised that business productivity can be increased by reusing water in manufacturing processes. Taking a holistic approach, and considering the "eco-system mosaic" when planning for expansion or increases in production capacity, was cited as a key.

Beyond the direct role that water has in industrial production processes – where improvements in efficiency, recycling and treatment can positively impact overall water availability and quality for drinking and sanitation – there is a broader role that business and industry can play. Namely, the experts said, water is important for overall economic development, health, employment and markets in the communities and regions where the companies operate. Healthier people make better customers and are more productive. Thus, business and industry contributions to water and sanitation improvement, and hence to poverty reduction, can in the future create individual purchasing power which the companies would benefit from.

### Prize-winning insights

The Stockholm Water Prize Laureates, Professor Sven Erik Jørgensen from Denmark and Professor William J. Mitsch from the Ohio State University, as well as Mr. Shailendra K. Jain of the 2004 Stockholm Industry Water Award-winning company, The Staple Fibre Division of Grasim Industries Ltd, India, were also interviewed.

Much of the focus for the Laureates was on wetlands, which they say provide opportunities for local sanitation improvements because they are among the best wastewater treatment possibilities for poor rural regions of the world, and because they can be constructed relatively inexpensively. Mr. Jain said that environmentally sound production and efficient resource use go hand in hand. ■

### Private Sector Panel

Mr. Robert L. Ayers, ITT Industries  
Mr. Daniel Gagnier, Alcan Industries  
Mr. Gourisankar Ghosh, Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council  
Mr. Carlo Prola, Grundfos  
Mr. Björn Stigson, World Business Council for Sustainable Development  
Mr. Stephen Turner, Water Aid

### Laureates Panel

Professor Takashi Asano, University of California at Davis, USA  
Professor Mogens Henze, Head, Department of Environmental Engineering, Technical University of Denmark, Denmark  
Professor Sven Erik Jørgensen, Danish University of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Denmark  
Professor William J. Mitsch, The Ohio State University, USA  
Mr. Stephen Turner, Deputy Director, Water Aid, UK  
Professor Peter A. Wilderer, Technical University of Munich, Germany