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UN report outlines investment strategies to reduce water scarcity



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An annual investment of \$198 billion, or 0.16 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP), in the water sector could reduce water scarcity and halve the number of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation in less than four years, the United Nations said today.

In the water chapter of its Green Economy Report, the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) [said](#) that investing in sanitation and drinking water, strengthening local water supply systems, conserving ecosystems critical for water supply, and developing more effective policies can help avert the high social and economic costs resulting from inadequate water supplies.

Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Viet Nam, for example, lose an estimated \$9 billion a year, or 2 per cent of their combined GDP, due to problems caused by poor sanitation, according to the report, which was released during the World Water Week conference in Stockholm.

“Improving access to cleaner drinking water and sanitation services is a cornerstone of a more sustainable, resource-efficient society,” said UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner.

“The Green Economy Report shows how accelerated investment in water-dependent ecosystems, water infrastructure and water management, coupled with effective policies, can boost water and food security, improve human health and promote economic growth,” he added.

With the recommendations outlined in the report, global water use could be kept within sustainable limits and the Millennium Development Goal ([MDG](#)) of reducing by half the

proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation could be met by 2015.

Improving the efficiency and sustainability of water use is also vital if the world's increasing energy demands are to be met, said UNEP.

“As countries become wealthier and more populous, industrial demand for water is expected to increase. In China, for example, more than half of the increase in demand for water over the next 25 years is expected to result from a significant expansion in its industrial sector,” it stated in a news release.

Water use for bioenergy production is the subject of another new report, also released at World Water Week today, entitled “The Bioenergy and Water Nexus.”

Jointly produced by UNEP, the Oeko-Institut and the International Energy Agency, the report found that bioenergy's water demands are in large part linked with the cultivation and processing of feedstocks, such as crops, which in turn have important implications for sustainable agriculture, land use and food production.

In a world where more than 70 per cent of global freshwater is used for agriculture, the report says bioenergy development needs to be carefully planned to avoid it adding to existing pressures. This planning needs to reflect the increasing and competing needs for the same raw materials for uses such as food, animal fodder and fibre as the world's population climbs to an expected nine billion by mid-century.

Among the report's recommendations is taking a holistic approach and a long-term perspective, basing decisions on impact assessments to ensure sustainable water management, designing and implementing effective water-related policies, and promoting technology development.

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