

Water management in urban areas in Asia

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Demand for fresh water is growing due to the exponential population growth from a current 7.2 billion, to a projected 9 billion (2050) and 11 billion by the end of the 21st century. It is expected that 80% of this growing population will be living in urban areas. Asia will experience much of this growth, with 60% of the towns and cities needed to house this population yet to be built. In a way, this challenge of urban growth provides an opportunity to plan and build new cities and towns, having sustainability as the core principle. However, the growing urban population and the changes towards more affluent urban lifestyles will also affect freshwater demand. However, freshwater availability in urban areas is limited and in fact, in many cases is declining. Thus freshwater demand, and its management, is likely to be one of the most important sustainability issues to be addressed by urban authorities. Guidance such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the current discussions in the Post-2015 Development Agenda and UN Water, can contribute to achieving sustainability in the water sector at the global level. However, at the local level access to water and better management of water quality and quantity needs to be increasingly prioritized. However, while technological advances have contributed positively to our wellbeing and comfort, they have also marginalized traditional wisdom in water management. An important question that remains is whether in the 21st century we can utilize modern science and technology to enhance the traditional systems and wisdom.



Surendra Shrestha is the newly appointed Director of United Nations Environment Programme's International Environmental Technology Centre (UNEP IETC), Osaka. He brings with him over twenty years of experience and expertise mobilizing political and financial support for UNEP's programs and leading multi-disciplinary teams in the areas of assessment, policy development and multilateral agreements at the regional and global level. Dr. Shrestha joined UNEP in 1993 and he has been involved with UNEP as Special Advisor and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Focal Point in New York, Director at the Strategic Resource Mobilization and Special Initiatives in Nairobi, and Regional Director and Representative for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok. Prior to joining UNEP, he held senior positions at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). A Nepali national, Director Shrestha holds a degree in Economics and Computer Science from Keele University, UK, and completed his postgraduate studies at AIT. He provided intellectual leadership for the establishment of the global secretariat for Atmospheric Brown Cloud and Black Carbon consisting of over 35 institutions and 250 scientists, the UNEP Eco Peace Leadership Centre in Seoul (2006), the Asia Pacific Sub-regional Environment Policy Dialogue (SEPD) (2003), the UNEP-Tongji Institute of Environment for Sustainable Development (2002), the Regional Resource Centre for Asia and the Pacific (RRC.AP) and UNEP's presence in Central Asia.

