

## MEDIA RELEASE

### 1.4 MILLION ETHIOPIANS TO GET CLEAN WATER THROUGH \$29 MILLION EUROPEAN UNION/UNICEF PARTNERSHIP

ADDIS ABABA, 21 December - More than 1.4 million Ethiopians are to get clean drinking water close to their homes for the first time through a new US\$29 million partnership between the European Union and UNICEF.

The ground-breaking programme will reach children, women and men in every region of Ethiopia over the next five years.

"This is a hugely exciting development," said Bjorn Ljungqvist, UNICEF's country representative in Ethiopia. "Thanks to the commitment of the European Union, we are going to see some real, concrete changes over the next five years.

"Children are going to be healthier. Whole communities are going to get new, clean water supplies. And Ethiopia is going to have a much better chance of reaching the Millennium Development Goals."

It is estimated that 250,000 Ethiopian children die every year from preventable water and sanitation-related diseases.

Lack of access to safe water and sanitation facilities has a devastating impact on the health and productivity of the Ethiopian people – particularly in rural areas where the vast majority of the population live and where coverage is alarmingly low. Around 80% of the disease burdens in the country are communicable diseases mainly caused by unsafe water and poor sanitation facilities. Less than 50 % of health facilities have access to safe water.

The impact of not having these services is even more acute for children and mothers affected by HIV and AIDS in terms of increasing vulnerability to opportunistic diseases.

Unavailability of water within a reasonable distance has been shown to correlate directly to low rate of school attendance and high rate of drop out by girls. This is due to the disproportionate amount of domestic work, such as water fetching which rests on girls.

In 2004, The World Bank commissioned an assessment that found Ethiopia was not on track to meet these targets. Less than 40% of the population has access to safe water and less than 20% has access to sanitation facilities. That is way below the Sub-Saharan Africa average of about 60% for both water and sanitation.

The partnership will boost Ethiopia's chances of reaching the two main Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for water and sanitation – to halve the population without access to water and environmental sanitation and to ensure adequate sanitation facilities for all boys and girls in school, both by 2015.

The new partnership will have a special focus on protecting children's health. More than 156 schools around the country will get safe water supplies, sanitation facilities and hygiene education sessions.

That will improve the health and well-being of more than 160,000 school girls and boys. Past experience has shown that an improved water supply and sanitation facilities at school also reduces drop-out rate and increases school attendance.

The EU/UNICEF deal takes the form of a 'co-financing contribution agreement'. That means that each partner will take on half of the total cost – EUROS 21.6 million, just short of US\$29 million by today's exchange rates.

The cash will go into scores of wells and other water supply schemes together with a nationwide programme in water and sanitation management skills and hygiene education. The wells will be dug and managed by the Ethiopian government, using equipment, staff and training paid for by the new partnership.

"We welcome the excellent partnership between all the stakeholders in this programme: the local communities themselves, the regional and federal authorities, UNICEF and the EC: it is through collaboration such as this that there is a REAL chance that one of the MDG priorities for Ethiopia can be achieved," said Tim Clarke, European Commission head of delegation in Ethiopia

In recent years, Ethiopia has made large strides to change this situation. The Government's commitment is marked by the national Universal Access Plan and a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding for integrated development and implementation of water, sanitation and hygiene education. For instance, the "sanitation revolution" in Amhara and SNNP regions has significantly increased hygiene awareness and latrine-use by the communities in those regions.

With these practical in-country examples available, it is hopeful that with increased resources and support more can be done to put Ethiopia back on track to meet the MDGs and provide a better life for children and women.

UNICEF has been a major partner in the country's endeavor for provision of water and sanitation services to its population. In the past five years (2002-2006), UNICEF has closely worked with regional, federal and non-governmental partners to provide access to WASH services to more than 5.5 million people.

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