



Water stress is the next new global headache

May 2010

A third of the world's people might have access to only half the water they need in the next decades if nothing is done on a sustainable basis right now. And South Africa is particularly vulnerable.

The high amount of water usage in South Africa – as much as 25% of its renewable freshwater resources – puts it way above that of its sub-Saharan neighbours. And causing water stress, that is when the amount of water used exceeds 10% of renewable resources.

Companies that rely on water for manufacturing or production processes need to look at ways of re-using their waste water for energy and irrigation. This is one way of stretching existing resources.

This is a global problem and it has been estimated that as much as 80% of waste water is being discharged untreated in developing countries because of lack of regulations and resources.

Global giant Coca-Cola is an industry leader in this regard – all its production facilities in South Africa have water treatment plants. It has a long-standing commitment to not only replace the water that it uses in the production of its beverages, but also on broader issues of water stewardship.

It is one of the biggest industrial consumers of water in the world – with products that are about 90% water-based and so invests half its CSI budget on water-related programmes globally.

Says William Asiko, President of the Coca-Cola Foundation: “We are mindful of our responsibilities of preserving shared resources.

“We are achieving this with three main strategies: to reduce the water we use in our bottling plants through increased efficiencies, to recycle or treat all the process water to a standard that supports aquatic life and to replenish by supporting water community projects in Africa with our partners to improve access to water and sanitation, to protect water resources and habitats, and to raise awareness about preserving water.”

As part of its contribution to solving these water issues under its Replenish Africa Initiative (RAIN), Coca-Cola has committed \$30 million over six years, with the aim of providing over two million people with access to clean water and sanitation and hygiene education. They will also launch over 100 sustainable community water accesses, sanitation and hygiene programmes across Africa and contribute to the sustainability of water resources for communities across Africa.

And on a local level, Coca-Cola is using its partnership of the 2010 FIFA World Cup™, to not only highlight the need for water stewardship in South Africa but to also bring clean drinking water to 100 of the most vulnerable schools in its “Water for Schools” campaign.

Coca-Cola’s “Water for Schools” programme will focus on all nine provinces in communities most vulnerable to water-borne diseases.

“We are trying to help children, who, perhaps, are drinking out of the same river that they wash in. Our programme includes the installation of sanitation facilities as well as hygiene education,” says Asiko.

Other projects that form part of Coca-Cola’s commitment to water stewardship under the RAIN strategy include those being run by the global NGO, the Family Health Institute (FHI), in priority districts which have been earmarked as high risk areas by the Department of Health.

Their first project will be at the remote Ramotshinyadi village in the Limpopo province, where 12 400 people rely on only two boreholes – the other 11 have stopped functioning – and a river for their water needs.

The Elliotdale Rural Water Project is another project where Coca-Cola, together with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and its Water & Development Alliance (WADA) programme are funding improved access to safe water in the Mbashe area of the Eastern Cape.

The project, which is run the by the Mvula Trust, will bring piped water to approximately 5 500 people living in villages surrounding the town of Elliotdale in the Amathole District Municipality. This involves the refurbishment of existing infrastructure and the construction of more than 13km of new pipeline.

It is estimated that 1.1 billion people globally rely on unsafe drinking water sources.

Lack of safe water and sanitation is the world’s single largest cause of illness, according to UNICEF.

The toll on children is especially high. About 4 500 children die each day from unsafe water and lack of basic sanitation facilities. Countless others suffer from poor health, diminished productivity and missed opportunities for education.

“In a groundbreaking McKinsey report, commissioned by a group of global companies which included Coca-Cola - the 2030 Water Resources Group - it was found that if no action is taken, projected population and economic growth will lead to global water demand that is 40% in excess of current supply by the year 2030,” adds Asiko.

This means that one-third of the world’s population would have access to only half the water they need.

Yet there is hope. The report, “Charting our Water Future”, released in November last year, not only provided clarity on the scale of the water challenge but also charted a way forward using cost-effective measures and existing technologies.

The 2010 FIFA World Cup™, is a major focal point for Coca-Cola community initiatives this year: “Not only are we trying to capture the spirit of the match in all the work that we do, but we are also trying to bring some of the joy and excitement of football to as many South Africans as possible through initiatives such as the World Cup Trophy Tour,” says Asiko.

“The Trophy Tour should help highlight the challenges that we face in South Africa. And, hopefully, behind all the hoopla and merrymaking, communities will have a chance to focus on the more serious and compelling issues around water stress- issues that ultimately affect their daily lives.

“At Coca-Cola we believe that water is a basic human need that is essential for life. While it is government’s role to provide water services – piping, purification and sanitation – for its citizens, business has a responsibility to manage water responsibly. We respect the critical role water plays in community development and we work to manage our use of water in a sustainable way.”

For more information on the South African leg of the FIFA World Cup™ Trophy Tour please visit www.cocacola.co.za/2010

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For further media information, please contact:

For media enquiries:

Sammy Mohlaoli

Senior Communications Manager Coca-Cola South Africa

Tel: +27 11 644 0528

Fax: +27 11 644 0766

Mobile: +27 79 525 6934

E-mail: smohlaoli@afr.ko.com

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