



*Dear Colleagues,*

The most important environmental issue for the poor is being almost totally ignored. A billion people lack clean water. Two billion lack safe sanitation. And this is a lack which affects almost every aspect and every moment of their lives – their health, their dignity, their environment, the well-being of their children, and the development of their nations.

We ask your help in redressing this long neglect. Please use this publication – its tear-out posters, its postcards, its campaign stickers, its supporting information and its web-site – to become an active participant in the ‘WASH’ campaign.

By using these materials to proclaim the ‘WASH’ message in your own offices and departments, to your own meetings and conferences, and in your own papers and publications – you will be helping let the world know this is an issue that should no longer be ignored.

*We particularly ask that you post these messages in washrooms and toilets everywhere – so that they may be a constant reminder of the privilege of – and need for – safe water and sanitation.*

Health and dignity are surely the first steps towards sustainable development and a better quality of life. That is why I appeal to you to do all in your power to make sure that the ‘WASH’ issues – water, sanitation and hygiene – are no longer neglected in the national and international development debate.

With thanks,

Gourisankar Ghosh

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*“Are we to decide on the importance of issues by asking how fashionable or glamorous they are? Or by asking how seriously they affect how many?”*

Nelson Mandela

**Take a few seconds to imagine a life without clean, safe, plentiful water. To drink. To wash hands, face, body, clothes. To brush teeth. To cook food. To clean homes and kitchens.**

***The life lived by approximately 1.1 billion people.***

**And imagine a life without a clean, private place to defecate and urinate. Imagine every day using fields, streams, rivers, roadsides – or squalid, foul-smelling, disease-breeding buckets or insanitary latrines in slums and shanties.**

***The life of approximately 2.4 billion men, women and children – a third of the world.***

**The consequences – for human health and dignity, for the quality of life and for the environment – make this the most devastating of all the many problems associated with poverty.**

**Yet whether it is because the issue is seen as unglamorous, or whether because it affects mainly the poorest of the poor, the ‘WASH’ issue (water, sanitation, hygiene) is the great neglected cause of our times.**

**This publication can be read cover to cover in less than 5 minutes. It sets out some of the most important facts, issues, opinions, and lessons learned about water, sanitation, and hygiene in recent years.**

**After reading it, we hope that you will decide to become an active participant in the ‘WASH’ campaign – helping in whatever capacity you can (see final page) to end the long neglect of the very foundations of public health.**



**FOR QUALITY OF LIFE  
IT'S THE BIG ISSUE**

**Where does a better  
quality of life begin?  
Two billion people know  
the answer.**



**One of the biggest errors in the last fifty years of national and international development efforts has been the failure to make available clean water, safe sanitation, and knowledge about hygiene to all.**

**As a result, the frequency and severity of disease still saps the growth of both people and nations.**

**More than three-quarters of that disease is caused by lack of safe water, sanitation, and hygiene.**

**Yet the neglect continues:**

**In many developing countries, less than 1% of government spending goes to low-cost water and sanitation. And only about 5% of aid from the rich world.**

**In many countries, also, most of the available resources are allocated to high-cost water and sanitation for the few rather than low-cost services for the many.**

**Meanwhile, water and sanitation technologies have been improved, and per capita costs have fallen sharply.**

**Given a new priority and a new political commitment, safe water, sanitation and hygiene for all are now achievable and affordable goals.**



**FOR GOVERNANCE  
IT'S THE BIG ISSUE**

**The test of a government's  
commitment to the  
poor is its commitment  
to clean water and safe  
sanitation.**



**One gram of faeces can contain 10 million viruses, 1 million bacteria, 1 thousand parasite cysts, and a hundred worm eggs.**

**That's what makes the safe disposal of faeces the most important of all public health priorities.**

**Still today, the majority of illness in the world is caused by the fact that faecal matter enters the human body because of lack of safe sanitation and lack of hygiene.**

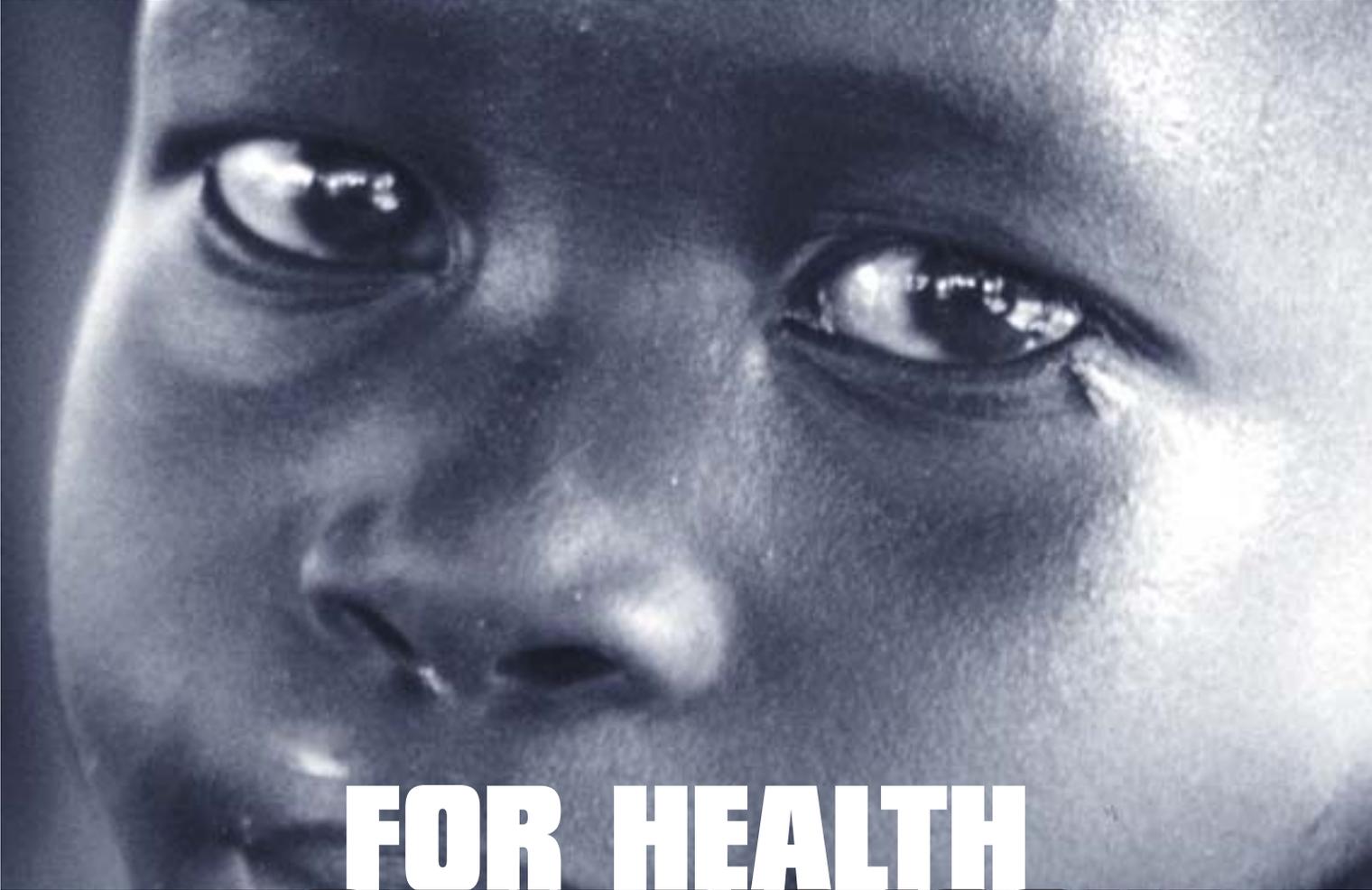
**To prevent this huge burden of illness, safe water and sanitation are only half of the answer. The other half is getting people to use them wisely and well.**

**Millions of people have still not been adequately informed about the link between faeces and disease – or about the hygiene imperatives that could do so much to protect their own and their family's health.**

**In part this is because 'WASH' issues have been accorded so little priority. But in part, also, it is because sanitation and hygiene are surrounded by taboos, embarrassment, and silence.**

**But in the age of communication, the time has surely come to find ways to break the taboos and end the silence.**

**Safe water and sanitation, and knowledge of hygienic behaviour, are the greatest of all public health breakthroughs. And the priority for human health and development in these early years of the 21st century must be to make sure that their benefits are finally made available to all.**



**FOR HEALTH  
IT'S THE BIG ISSUE**

**At any given moment half of the developing world's people are sick from the same cause.**



**The consequence of neglecting the 'WASH' issue is 5 million premature deaths a year and many billions of illnesses. Including:**

- *Diarrhoeal disease, including cholera and dysentery, which kills more than 2 million young children a year*
- *Intestinal worms, which afflict more than a third of the developing world's population and cause malnutrition, poor physical and mental growth, iron deficiency, anaemia, and lack of energy*
- *Trachoma, which has taken the eyesight of 6 million people and is related to infrequent washing and inadequate water supply*
- *Schistosomiasis, which affects 200 million people and can be largely eliminated by good water, sanitation, and hygiene*
- *Skin infections which impose suffering on individuals and strain on health services (sometimes accounting for half of all visits to outpatient clinics).*

**Overall, it can be estimated that at any one time almost half of the developing world's people are suffering from diseases associated with lack of water, sanitation and hygiene.**

**The strain on families – on earnings, time, energy, and budgets – is enormous.**

**But so too is the strain on health services and health budgets; about half of all hospital beds in the developing world are occupied by victims of poor water, poor sanitation and poor hygiene.**

**Yet in most countries, doctors and hospitals acquiesce in the neglect of 'WASH' issues.**

**A medical profession that was truly concerned about health would be in the forefront of the struggle for better water, sanitation, and hygiene.**



# FOR HEALTH SERVICES IT'S THE BIG ISSUE

Half the developing world's hospital beds are occupied by victims of the same problem.



**The very young are hit hardest by neglect of the 'WASH' issue.**

**Inadequate water and sanitation makes the job of keeping young children healthy almost impossible.**

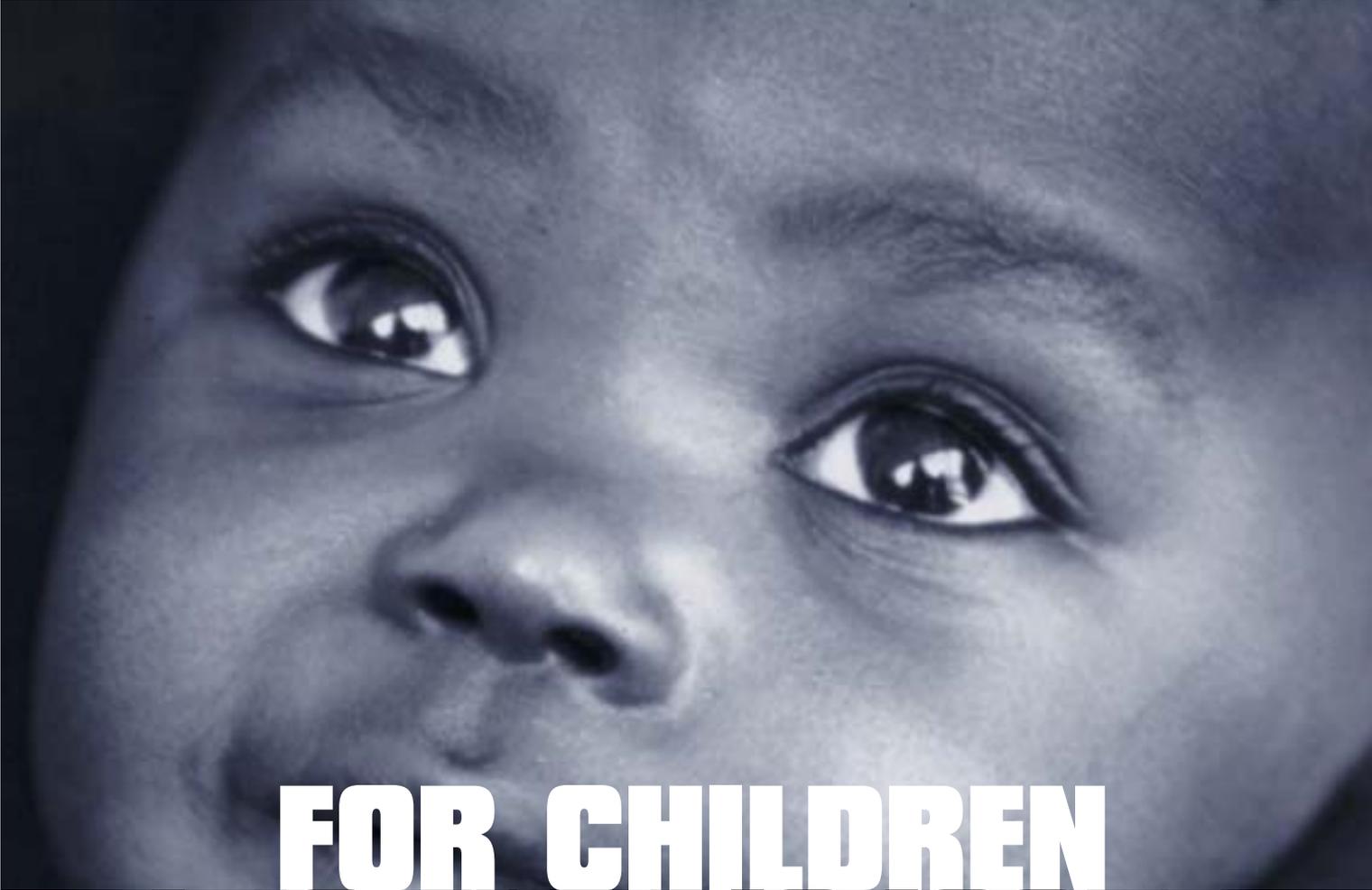
**The worst consequence is diarrhoeal disease – which kills six thousand children every day of the year (when the simple act of washing hands with soap and water could alone cut this toll by almost half).**

**And for the infants of mothers who are persuaded to bottle-feed rather than breastfeed, poor water supply and sanitation is frequently lethal. Dissolving milk powder in contaminated water and feeding it to a baby from an unsterilised bottle and teat is a process that causes hundreds of thousands of infant deaths.**

**Then there are the hookworms, roundworms and whipworms that breed in insanitary conditions and debilitate millions of children's lives.**

**Furthermore, 'WASH' related illnesses are also one of the most important causes – perhaps *the* most important cause – of child malnutrition. It is frequent illness, not shortage of food in the home, that causes most child malnutrition. Every episode of illness sets back growth – by lowering appetite, reducing absorption of food, burning calories in fever, and draining away nutrients in sickness and diarrhoea. If such illnesses are frequent, then the child's physical and mental growth will falter.**

**Lack of attention to 'WASH' issues therefore undermines the physical and mental development of hundreds of millions of children in the world today.**



**FOR CHILDREN  
IT'S THE BIG ISSUE**

**Recurring disease.  
Poor physical and mental  
growth. And for two  
million children a year –  
an early death.**



**Lack of private sanitation is an acute problem for the women and girls who live in poor and overcrowded urban neighbourhoods.**

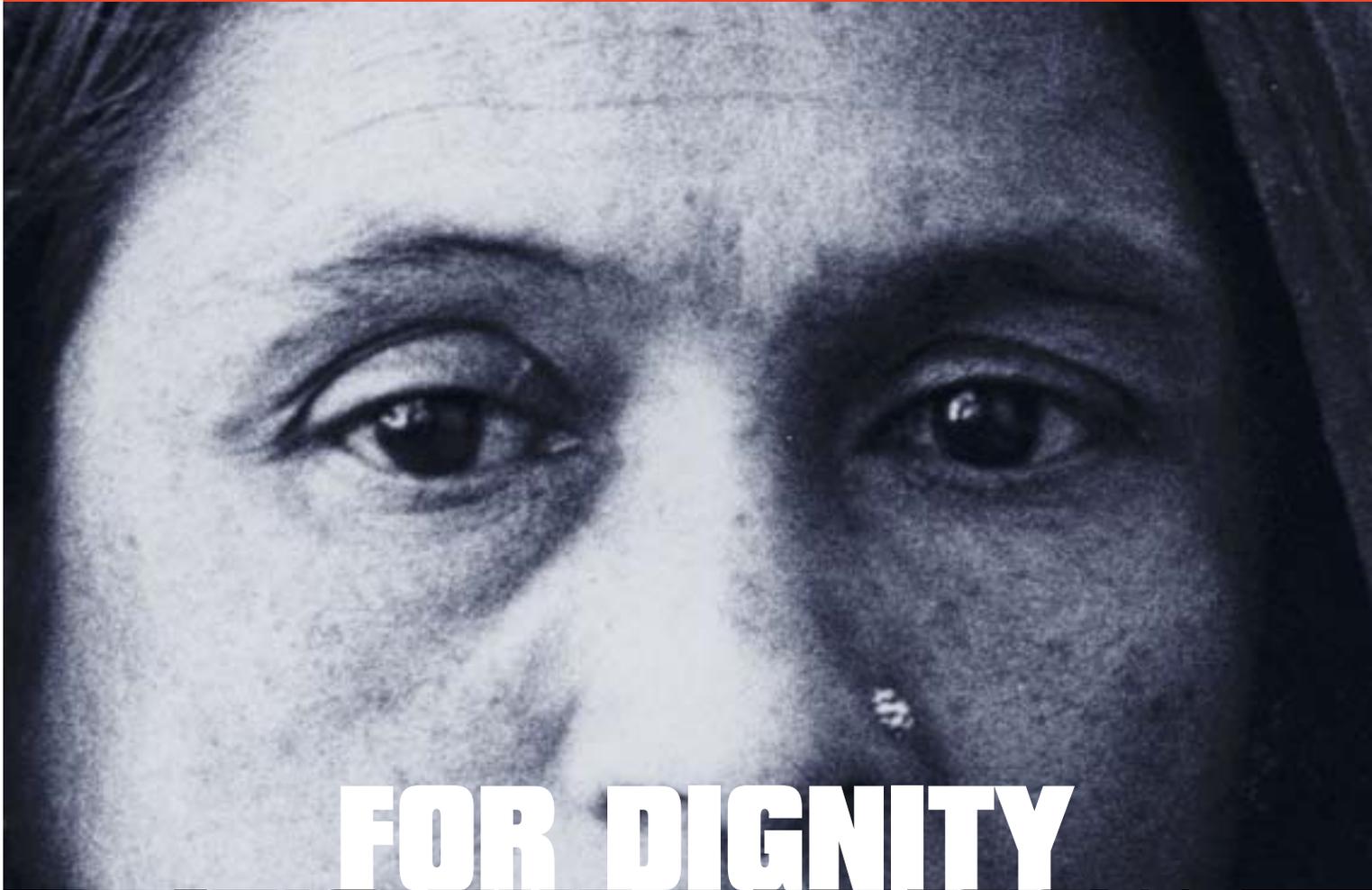
**Some get up in the small hours of the morning to visit public facilities at a time when they are private and uncrowded.**

**Many bathe themselves and wash their clothes in canals and rivers – upstream from their own latrines but downstream from the many other latrines built out over the city's waterways.**

**Many millions of women have to wait until after dark before going to defecate. And often this is an excursion to be dreaded; by going out alone and at night into an out-of-the-way place, at a predictable time and by a predictable route, they must confront the fear, and sometimes the reality, of harassment and sexual assault.**

**And in some areas of the developing world, school attendance by girls has been shown to be lower, and drop-out rates higher, where schools have no separate toilet facilities for boys and girls.**

**Modesty, embarrassment, humiliation, dignity, fear, reputation – these are values that are not susceptible to measurement by fact or statistic. Yet they are real. And private, dignified sanitation would be a significant advance in the quality of life for millions of men, women and young people in poor communities throughout the developing world.**



# **FOR DIGNITY IT'S THE BIG ISSUE**

**And for the daily distress  
of a billion urban women.**



**Women also bear the burden in other ways:**

**It is almost always the woman who is responsible for fetching and carrying water; for preparing, cooking, storing and serving food; for cleaning homes and clothes; for washing infants; and for the disposal of household waste and children's faeces.**

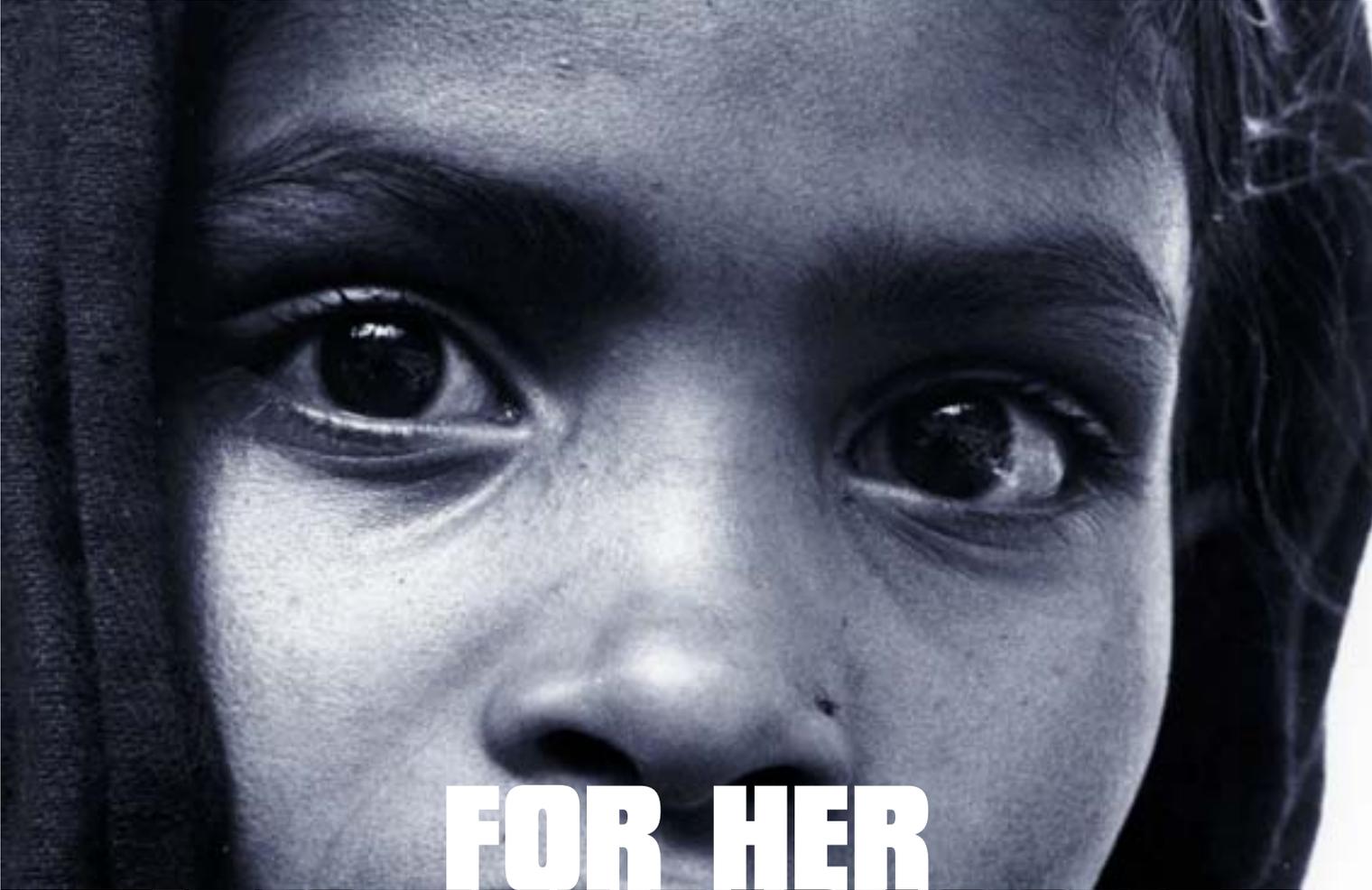
**But without adequate water supply and sanitation, this daily struggle for cleanliness and dignity is almost unwinnable.**

**But the struggle continues. And women in many rural areas of the developing world spend a quarter of their time in drawing and carrying water – often of poor quality.**

**In arid areas of Africa or Asia, they may walk many kilometres carrying water jars weighing up to 20 kg (the normal airport allowance for check-in luggage).**

**A considerable proportion of a family's time and energy and cash is also consumed by the million small tasks involved in coping with frequent illness.**

**And again this is a burden which falls most heavily on women and girls – who are often obliged to stay home from school to help carry water and look after brothers and sisters who are ill.**



**FOR HER  
IT'S THE BIG ISSUE**

**For her privacy and dignity.**

**For her time and energy.**

**For her health and safety.**

**For the quality of her life.**



**The environmental movement that has achieved so much in so many different areas over the last thirty years has very largely ignored the 'WASH' issue.**

**Yet for the poorest third of the world, lack of water and sanitation it is the biggest environmental issue of them all - inflicting a daily toll of squalor, disease, and degradation of surroundings.**

**Millions live in slums and squatter settlements that are latticed by ditches clogged with faeces, rubbish, and fetid water so that insects, smells and disease are ever-present.**

**And even when piped water is available, there may be only one trickling standpipe to serve three hundred or more people.**

**Without action, this environmental disaster will rapidly worsen. Another 800 million people are expected to migrate to urban areas over the next 15 years. And without a successful 'WASH' effort, the numbers without adequate sanitation will double to almost 5 billion.**

**In rural areas, too, lack of sanitation is a major environmental threat. Rivers and soils are being degraded. And the greater problem is not industrial waste but human waste, not pollution by chemicals but pollution of soil and water by faeces.**

**The level of sewage in Asia's rivers, for example, is already 50 times higher than the United Nations standard. And in Latin America, only about 2% of sewage receives any treatment at all.**



# **FOR THE ENVIRONMENT IT'S THE BIG ISSUE**

**The greatest environmental crisis isn't something that might happen in the future. It's something happening right now to a third of the world's people.**



**Economic development is also weakened by neglect of the 'WASH' issues.**

**The surest foundation for sustainable development is a rising generation that is growing well in both mind and body – a generation that will be able to fulfil its own and its nation's potential.**

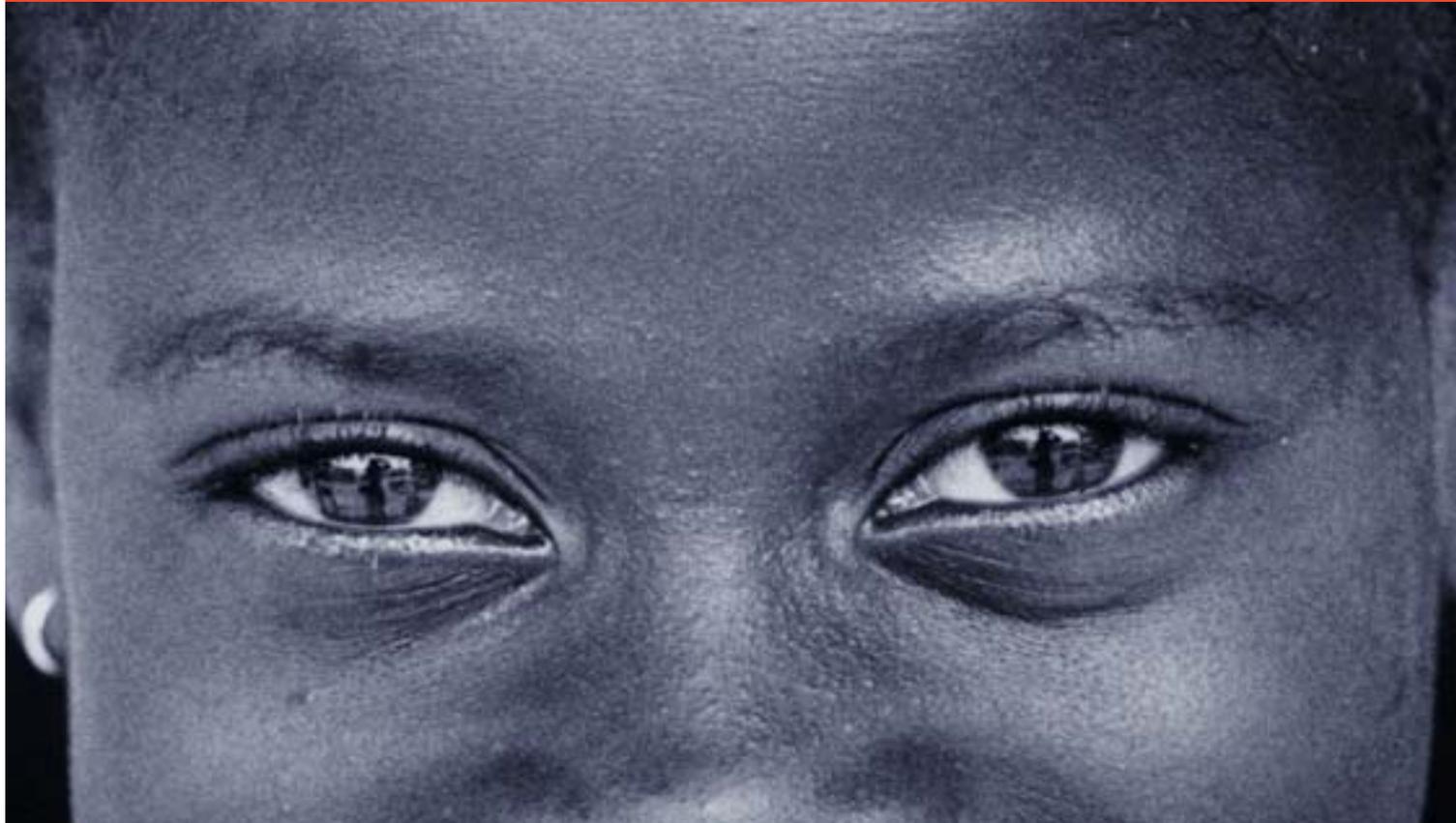
**And the single most important step towards a healthy and productive new generation is clean water, safe sanitation, and the knowledge of how to use them.**

**Currently, the scale of ill-health in the developing world causes huge losses in productivity and reduced returns on both private and public investment (including investments in education).**

**Export revenues from food exports are also vulnerable to outbreaks of water-related diseases such as cholera.**

**Public squalor and the threat of disease is also a major deterrent to investment and reduces the potential for tourism.**

**Finally, water supply and sanitation is important to the productivity and quality of life of the urban poor upon whom most big cities depend. Those who work in the 'informal sector' help keep cities fed, clothed, shod, and housed. They carry construction materials, keep the transport system going, repair appliances, recycle wastes, and sell daily necessities in small quantities. In short, they usually serve the city better than the city serves them.**



**FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH  
IT'S THE BIG ISSUE**

What costs the poor world  
five *billion* working days  
a year?



**Major mistakes have been made and even when 'WASH' problems have been addressed the results have often been disappointing.**

**Learning from the mistakes could multiply the effectiveness of future 'WASH' efforts.**

**Perhaps the biggest mistake has been an overemphasis on water supply alone. Sanitation and hygiene have often either been ignored or tacked on to water supply programmes as an afterthought.**

**But water supply alone does not transform human health. If anything, the research shows that sanitation is even more important. And hygiene is most important of all.**

**In practice, the relationship between the three is not one of competition but of synergy. All three acting in concert have been shown to have an impact that is far greater than the sum of the parts.**

**The crucial breakthrough is *hygiene* – personal, domestic and community. Safe water supply and sanitation can help achieve hygiene – but they cannot do it alone.**



**FOR DEVELOPMENT  
IT'S THE BIG ISSUE**

**Sustainable development  
starts with people's health  
and dignity.**



**Resources have also been wasted** by 'top-down' approaches that see solutions only in terms of delivery.

Simply installing free latrines for free use, for example, does not work. Experience has shown that they become insanitary, unhygienic and unsustainable.

Successful programmes respond to people's desire for dignity, privacy, and freedom from drudgery. They create awareness of hygiene's role in protecting health – and of how water and sanitation can help achieve it.

Poor communities everywhere are desperate to raise the quality of their lives. If they are aware of hygiene, and if they have access to micro-credit and technical advice, then they do not usually expect services to be free.

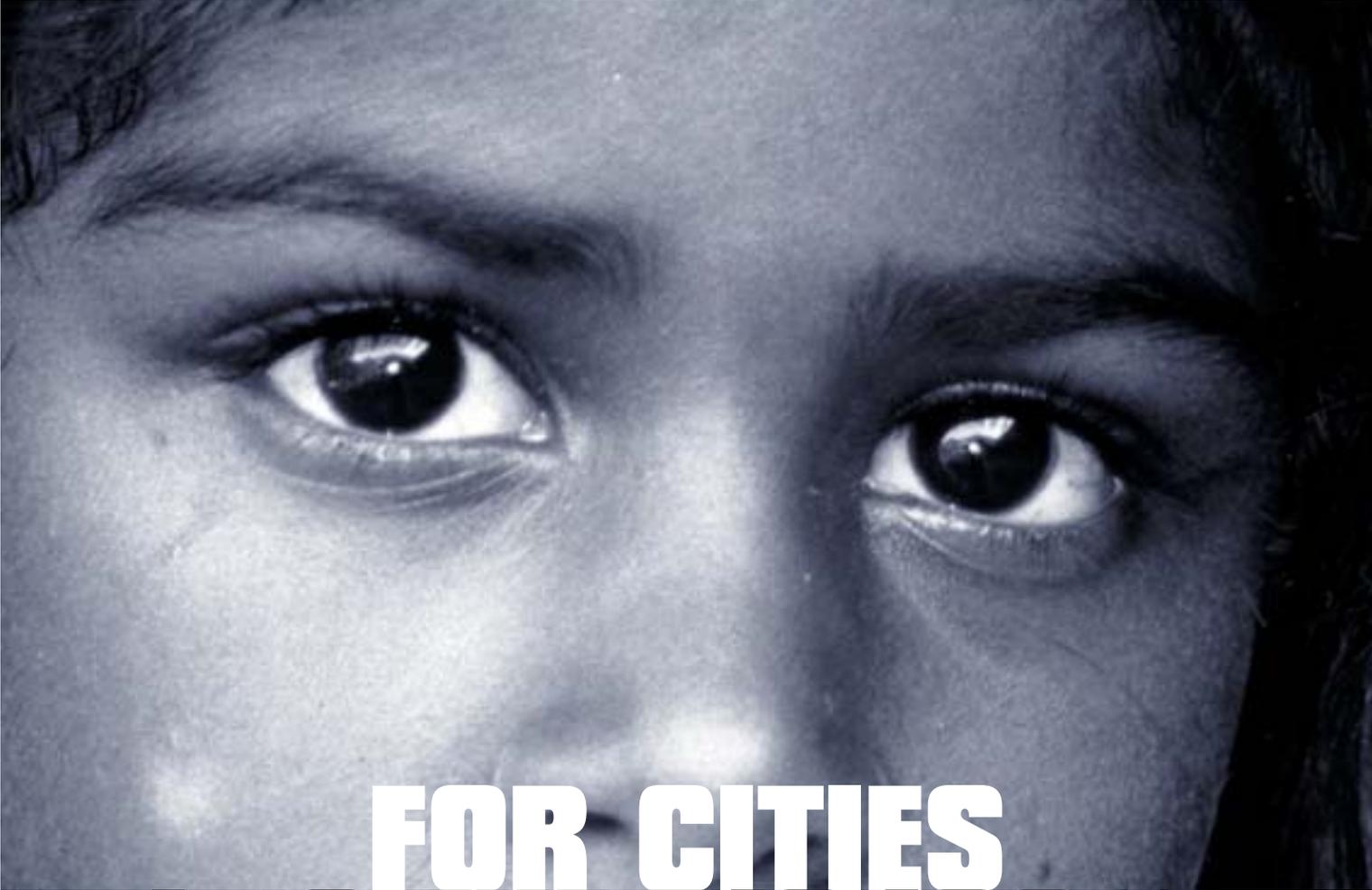
Charges for water and sanitation are controversial. But without them a sense of ownership and responsibility is often lacking, and supply and maintenance are often negligent, unaccountable, and financially unsustainable. The poorest should not be deprived by charges. But where subsidies are necessary they should be targeted, time-bound, and transparent.

And it should be remembered that millions of the poor are already paying for water – often buying from vendors at prices far higher than those paid by the better-off for government-subsidised water supply.

In short, what poor communities need is not delivered solutions but access – to knowledge about hygiene, to credit, to advice, and to affordable technologies.

External support will obviously be necessary to achieve this.

But there could be no greater investment in the human environment or in human health and well being.



**FOR CITIES  
IT'S THE BIG ISSUE**

**Cities will soon house two-thirds of the world. Some will have water supply and sanitation. Others will be known for squalor, smells, disease. Which will your city be?**



**A brief summary of what water supply, sanitation, and hygiene has to offer:-**

- ***attacks one of the worst symptoms and most important causes of poverty***
- ***decimates disease and liberates productivity***
- ***offers greater dignity and safety – especially for women and girls***
- ***improves nutrition and the physical and mental growth of children***
- ***improves the living environment – cleaner communities, streets, fields and rivers***
- ***reduces the burden on women of water-carrying***
- ***reduces the burden of looking after sick children***
- ***liberates energy for self-employment***
- ***reduces absenteeism from work***
- ***boosts school enrolment, attendance and performance***
- ***reduces private expenditure on health by families***
- ***boosts tourism and national image***
- ***creates jobs, as installation of water supply and sanitation is labour intensive***
- ***serves justice and equity by bringing the greatest benefits to the lives of the poorest***



**FOR NATIONAL PRIDE  
IT'S THE BIG ISSUE**

**Missiles and motorcades  
cannot confer prestige on  
nations without taps and  
toilets.**



## Yes, but what can I do?

Making water, sanitation and hygiene for all into a reality is one of the most difficult challenges for sustainable development. It takes time to demonstrate results, to work with communities, and to change behaviour. But it is not impossible. In just seven years, South Africa has put clean water and safe sanitation at the disposal of half its people. And Bangladesh, one of the world's poorest nations, is also showing what can be done when water and sanitation are given a greater priority.

If you're convinced that this great cause can be neglected no longer – and that you can do something ...

If you're a policy maker, government official, health professional, journalist, educator, business leader, non-governmental organisation, or community organiser ...

then these are some of the major challenges and next steps:-

**Speak up:** The first need is for effective and sustained advocacy of water, sanitation and hygiene at all levels. Politicians, professional bodies, press and public need to be convinced that the greatest public health breakthrough of the last thousand years must now be put at the disposal of all.

**Be informed:** Discuss the basic principles of the approach – and the lessons of past experience – with all those who become involved. It should be widely known, for example, that clean water alone will achieve little, and that without a sense of community ownership and participation most projects will fail.

**Monitor progress:** Seek to establish clear goals and agreed indicators for monitoring progress towards those goals.

**Reach out:** Build alliances and collaborate with others – the media, schools and universities, scientists and technologists, medical and public health professionals, religious organisations, the business community, the entertainment industry, women's groups, community organisations – to advocate and work towards water and sanitation goals.

**Research and identify:** With the help of such allies, seek out and promote acceptable and affordable technologies upon which people and communities can draw.

**Promote hygiene:** The key hygiene messages are few. But they need to be identified and communicated for each culture and society, so that knowledge of hygiene and its importance is part of the information environment in which communities live and in which children grow up.

**Mobilise resources:** Identify all possible sources of funds and campaign for the resources needed. This includes making estimates of initial and ongoing costs – and planning for the financial sustainability of water and sanitation programmes.

**Document and disseminate:** Publicise success, analyse failure, and share with all those involved the evolving principles and practical strategies that will advance water and sanitation goals.

**Scale up:** Demonstration projects have their uses. But the real challenge today is to 'go to scale' by building the institutional capacity that will put known solutions into action on the same scale as the known problems.



## Vision 21

The 'WASH' campaign is based on the Vision 21 principles.

Vision 21 is the result of a world-wide consultation initiated by the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council. Based on the experience of governments, non-governmental organisations, community groups, and individual men and women from many nations, it is an attempt to distill what has been learnt in recent decades about the collective struggle towards reaching the goals of water, sanitation, and hygiene for all. It is also a clear statement of what is now possible, and of how the vision of universal access to water, sanitation, and hygiene can be turned into reality in the years immediately ahead.

Above all it is a call to action, particularly by political leaders, professional bodies, and the private sector who have the power to bring this vision closer, but also by community groups and non-governmental organisations who have the potential to be the centre of the people-based strategies that can sustain the ideal of a world in which every person has safe and adequate water and sanitation and lives in a hygienic environment.

The four decisive components which determine the Vision 21 approach are:

**Building on people's energy and creativity at all levels**, requiring empowerment and building the capacity of people in households and communities to be part of the planning process, to take action, and to apply technologies that respond to actual needs.

**A holistic approach**, acknowledging hygiene, water and sanitation as a human right, and relating it to human development, the elimination of poverty, environmental sustainability and the integrated management of water resources.

**Committed and compassionate leadership and good governance**, changing long-accustomed roles, leading to new responsibilities of authorities and institutions to support households and communities in the management of their hygiene, water and sanitation, and in being accountable to users as clients.

**Synergy among all partners**, encouraging shared commitment among users, politicians and professionals; requiring professionals within the water and sanitation sector to combine technical expertise with an ability to work with users and politicians and with the sectors of health, education, environment, community development and food.

Vision 21 was endorsed by the Second World Water Forum meeting at The Hague, Netherlands, in March 2000. The full text is available for download from the web-site of the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council ([www.wsscc.org](http://www.wsscc.org)).

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### **The Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC)**

The Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) was mandated by a 1990 UN resolution to try to speed up progress towards safe water, sanitation and hygiene for all. This it attempts to do by arguing the need for action on water, sanitation and hygiene in every possible forum, and by stimulating and coordinating action by governments, aid donors, professional bodies, non-governmental organizations, community associations, women's groups, and the private sector.

In 2001, the WSSCC launched the 'WASH' campaign (water, sanitation, and hygiene) – a global advocacy effort involving all partners and supporters of the Council. With the help of regional and national co-ordinators, the 'WASH' campaign is attempting to put water, sanitation, and hygiene on the global agenda in the early years of the 21st century. In particular, it seeks to mobilise political support for this cause.

All concerned organisations and individuals are invited to join in this global partnership and help make water, sanitation, and hygiene into a reality for all and a foundation stone of sustainable human development.

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