



## Seminar Report

*Stockholm World Water Week 2008  
Seminar titled "Environmental Flows and Human Well-being"  
Held 19 August 2008*

Convenors: USAID Global Water for Sustainability Program, Swedish Water House, WWF, The Nature Conservancy, Environmental Flows Network, DIVERSITAS, Global Water Systems Project, UNESCO International Hydrology Program, IUCN, Wetlands International

This seminar explored the linkages between environmental flows and human well-being through research reports and case studies, and proposed new actions applying cutting-edge scientific and political approaches. An environmental flow is the quantity, timing, and quality of water flows required to sustain aquatic ecosystems and the human livelihoods dependent upon them. Case studies from Australia, Bangladesh, China, India, Iran, and multiple African nations were used to illustrate how human health and well-being are inextricably linked to the ecological health of aquatic systems. Human communities depend directly on goods and services of aquatic ecosystems, including food to meet nutritional requirements, clean fresh water from springs, rivers, and lakes, and natural controls on pathogens. These ecosystem services underpin all subsequent interventions promoted by health, sanitation and hygiene programs, either supporting or counteracting them. They also strongly influence efforts to combat disease, prepare for climate change, and achieve Millennium Development Goals.

Among the key findings to emerge from the presentations and subsequent discussion are: 1) an environmental flow is not an unproductive allocation of water but an allocation to support key elements of human well-being and

achieve the goals of integrated water resources management; 2) environmental flows can reduce the prevalence of flow-related diseases like malaria and, through the preservation of aquatic biodiversity, epidemic diseases like schistosomiasis (bilharzia); 3) establishment of environmental flows must be tackled at regional scales and be strategically incorporated into development programs; and 4) climate change poses daunting challenges to future water supply and allocations for instream uses, so action should be taken now to reduce the most obvious non-climate and climate threats to sustaining water and freshwater ecosystems. More information on these and other priorities can be found on the web pages of the convenors.

More information on World Water Week at <http://www.worldwaterweek.org>