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WATER & SANITATION IN THE WORLD'S CITIES



Water and Sanitation in the World's Cities; Local Action for Global Goals

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National statistics often disguise the real problems of the urban poor. Most existing surveys presume that, with 'improved' provision of water and sanitation, all city dwellers are better served than the rural poor. Based on such criteria, official statistics confidently report that 94% of all urban populations have improved water provision and 84% have improved sanitation.

However, city level data of 43 African cities shows that 83% of the population lack toilets that are connected to sewers; for the large cities of Asia it is 55%. In Mahira, a section of Haruma slum in Nairobi, there is one toilet with ten units and two bathrooms for a settlement of 332 households or 1,500 inhabitants. A 1998 survey of 7512 slum households in Ahmedabad found that 80% had no water connection and 93% had to rely on unclean and dirty communal toilets. In other words, what these individual city studies indicate is that if assessment is widened to measure the proportion with access to safe water and those with access to clean toilet facilities the number of urban dwellers who are inadequately served is much higher than officially acknowledged.

Using these criteria, UN-HABITAT's new report **Water and Sanitation in the World's Cities**, estimates that in Africa as many as 150 million urban residents representing up to 50% of the urban population do not have adequate water supplies, while 180 million, or roughly 60% of people in urban areas lack adequate sanitation.

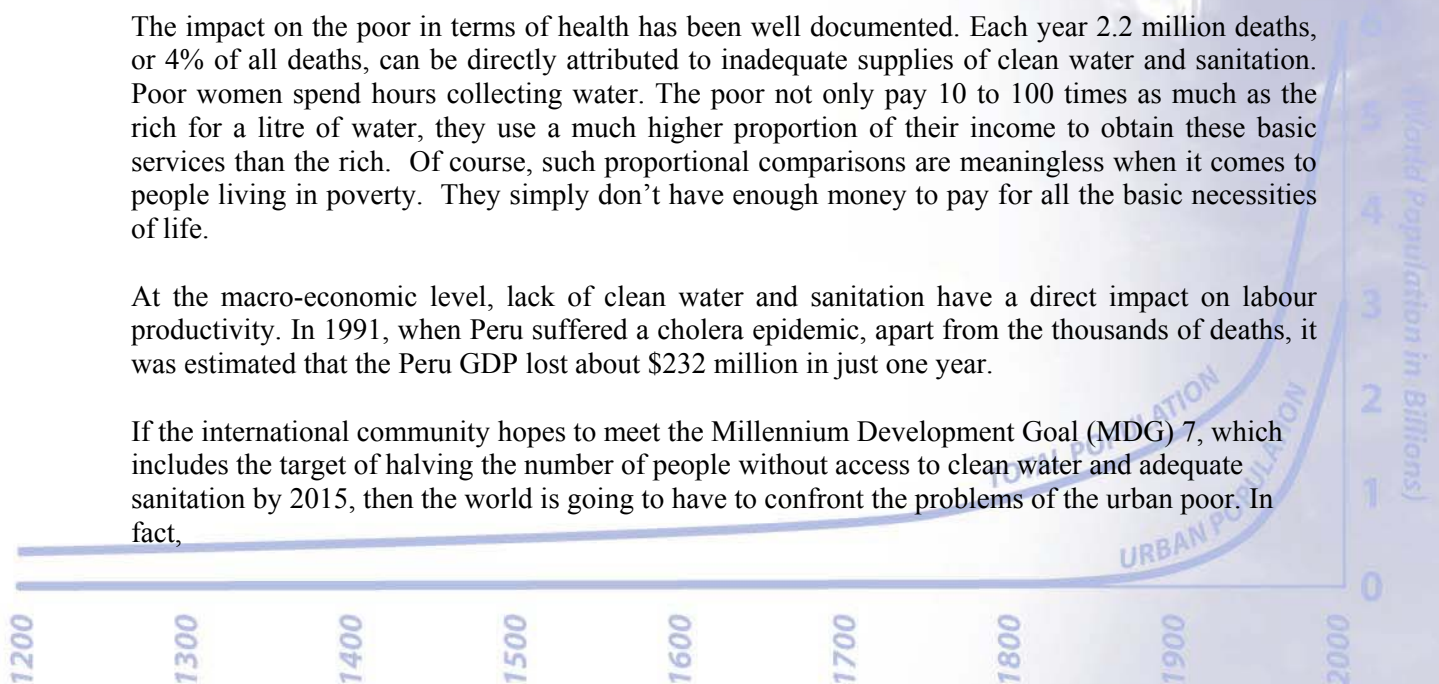
In urban Asia, 700 million people, constituting half the population, do not have adequate water, while 800 million people, or 60% of the urban population is without adequate sanitation.

For Latin America and the Caribbean 120 million urban dwellers representing 30% of the urban population lack adequate water. Those without adequate sanitation number as many as 150 million, or 40% of the urban population.

The impact on the poor in terms of health has been well documented. Each year 2.2 million deaths, or 4% of all deaths, can be directly attributed to inadequate supplies of clean water and sanitation. Poor women spend hours collecting water. The poor not only pay 10 to 100 times as much as the rich for a litre of water, they use a much higher proportion of their income to obtain these basic services than the rich. Of course, such proportional comparisons are meaningless when it comes to people living in poverty. They simply don't have enough money to pay for all the basic necessities of life.

At the macro-economic level, lack of clean water and sanitation have a direct impact on labour productivity. In 1991, when Peru suffered a cholera epidemic, apart from the thousands of deaths, it was estimated that the Peru GDP lost about \$232 million in just one year.

If the international community hopes to meet the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 7, which includes the target of halving the number of people without access to clean water and adequate sanitation by 2015, then the world is going to have to confront the problems of the urban poor. In fact,





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in a rapidly urbanizing world, successfully meeting this goal is closely linked to the commitment to improve the living condition of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020.

We have entered the urban millennium when already half of humanity lives in urban areas. Of this, one-third of the urban population, an estimated one billion people, live without adequate sanitation and basic services. Although, there is no question that cities and towns are centres of opportunity, without clean water, decent sanitation and basic services, urban areas are amongst the most life threatening environments to human beings.

Despite the increasing urbanization of poverty, many international donor agencies avoid supporting programmes targeted at urban populations on the assumption that the poor in cities are privileged over those in rural areas. Of those agencies that do publish disaggregated figures, the proportion of their funding that goes to urban projects tends to be in the region of only 2-12 %.

This proportion must increase if the international community is going to achieve the MDGs. There are indications that more money will be made available for investment in water and sanitation for the urban poor. A case in point is the commitment of the Asian Development Bank and the Government of the Netherlands to fund UN-HABITAT's Water for Asian Cities Programme. More importantly, ADB has also agreed to make available \$500 million fast track credit line for pro-poor investment in the urban water and sanitation sector.

If increased investment is critical, even more critical is the urgent need to find more successful mechanisms for providing the poor with water and sanitation. It is interesting to note that in the 1980s, corruption and poor governance were the major reasons cited by most aid agencies and development banks for withdrawing from large-scale capital projects in urban areas in the developing world.

At the same time, multinational companies and bankers tend to look for large-scale investments with values of US\$ 100 million or more that will service more than a million residents. This means they consider smaller projects aimed at servicing specific neighbourhoods and communities of the urban poor as unbankable. Another reason why provision of water and sanitation is so inadequate for much of the urban population of Africa, Asia and Latin America is that investments in water and sanitation were made in cities with political systems that had no interest in improving conditions for low income groups. Where they turned to privatization, it proved difficult to reconcile large private companies' interests and priorities with the slow, difficult and often expensive investments needed to ensure adequate provision for low income groups.

Many local authorities still underestimate the importance of inclusive practices of good governance in prioritising the delivery of services to the urban poor. However, UN-HABITAT's experience shows that successful water demand management at the level of the local authority can reap benefits for the whole community.

UN-HABITAT's programme Water for African Cities is a direct follow up to the 1997 Cape Town Declaration adopted by African Ministers to address the urgent need for managing water in African cities. It is the first initiative of its kind to support municipalities in managing the growing water demand while protecting their fresh water sources from increasing wastage and pollution.





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Though agriculture accounts for more than 75% of all water usage, in many African cities, up to 50% of the urban water supply is either being wasted through leakages or is otherwise unaccounted for. The programme is therefore working with the municipalities of Abidjan, Accra, Addis Ababa, Dakar, Dar es Salaam, Johannesburg, Lusaka and Nairobi to establish an effective demand management strategy to encourage efficient water use by domestic users, industry and public institutions. Some cities already show reduced water consumption by 35%.

At the same time, there are many well documented case studies that show, if local governments allow community based organisations, especially those representing the urban poor, a greater role in determining policies and projects, it is quite possible to improve the living conditions of the urban poor. In this regard, the world famous Orangi Project (Pakistan) was an important pioneer. It showed how it was quite feasible for over 90,000 households to provide themselves with low-cost flush latrines. In Luanda (Zambia), in the area known as Sambizanga, a process of partnership between the local authority, the private sector and the community ensured that the poor could receive clean water at a reasonable cost. In all cases, the key to success has been public-private partnerships that include the poor themselves.

UN-HABITAT's report **Water and Sanitation in the World's Cities** documents many of these case studies. It argues that public-private partnerships that prioritise small scale community level investments are a cost effective way to solve the immediate problems of the urban poor. At the same time, effective demand management strategies can provide considerable water savings while increasing the income of the local authority. This enables municipalities to use various pricing policies and regulatory measures to meet the urgent needs of the urban poor.

To ensure the success of local action for global goals, we must all prioritise the needs of the poor. We must wake up to the realities of the urban age, which condemns almost one billion poor slum dwellers to suffer from the dangers and indignities associated with the lack of clean water and adequate sanitation. The international community has set the targets, but if we are to meet this challenge then we must be prepared to look at everything anew. We must reassess our statistics; we must look at our policies again and ask why we have failed in the past; we must innovate new strategies of good urban governance; we must invest more funds in urban infrastructure.

Most of all, in this urban millennium, we must wake up to the fact that one of the greatest challenges of this century is the urbanisation of poverty.

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