



UN-HABITAT

2nd African Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development

28 – 30 July 2008, Abuja, Nigeria



Water and Sanitation Services in African Cities

A landmark report by the MDG Africa Steering Group, *Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Africa* launched 1 July 2008 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, at the African Union Summit, outlined practical steps, strategies and programmes needed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Africa.

The UN Millennium Goal of halving the number of people without adequate water and sanitation by 2020 and reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation can still meet a major review of urban sanitation. Climate change is already undermining the achievement of the MDGs, particularly, in the poorest countries and in those at greatest risk from its effects.

“Half the world’s population - 3 billion people -- lives in urban areas,” says Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, Executive Director of UN-HABITAT. “Among them, almost one billion are desperately poor and live in slums without even the most basic services like sustainable sanitation. However, the development community continues to focus on sanitation needs as though only rural areas are in need of them.” The lion’s share of development aid for sanitation goes to rural areas, while developing world cities are home to the majority of poor sanitation-related death and disease.”

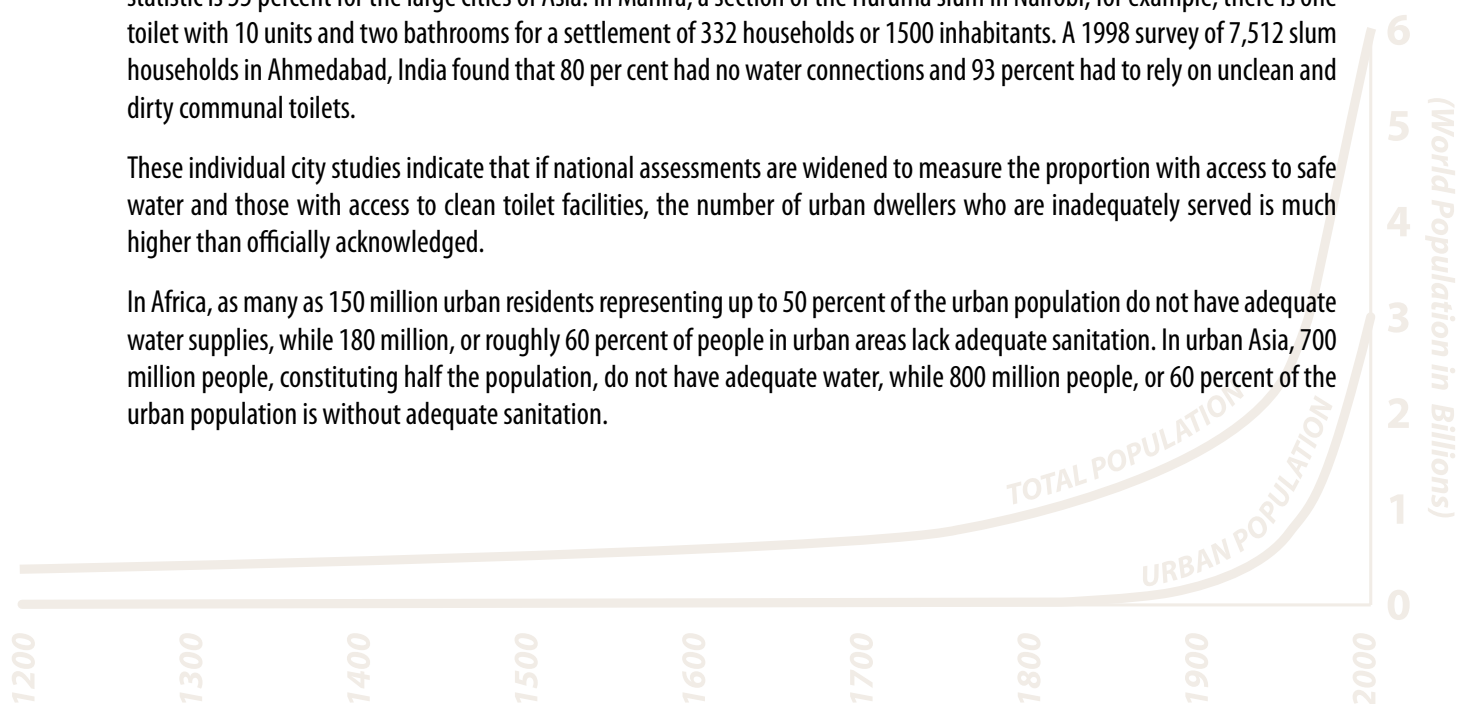
In 1950, only 29.8 percent of people lived in urban areas, but by 2010, 51.5 percent will live in cities. The trend towards urban living is particularly acute in developing countries. The urban population in Africa will jump from 14.7 percent in 1950 to 42.7 percent by 2010. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the urban population will increase from 41.9 per cent to 79 percent during the same time period.

Official national statistics often disguise the real problem of the poor in cities and towns. Most existing surveys assume that the urban poor are better served than the rural poor with “improved” provision of water and sanitation. Using such general criteria, the statistics report that 94 per cent of all urban populations have improved water provision, and 84 percent have improved sanitation.

However, city level data for 43 African cities shows that 83 percent of the population lacks toilets connected to sewers. This statistic is 55 percent for the large cities of Asia. In Mahira, a section of the Huruma slum in Nairobi, for example, there is one toilet with 10 units and two bathrooms for a settlement of 332 households or 1500 inhabitants. A 1998 survey of 7,512 slum households in Ahmedabad, India found that 80 per cent had no water connections and 93 percent had to rely on unclean and dirty communal toilets.

These individual city studies indicate that if national assessments are 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.

In Africa, as many as 150 million urban residents representing up to 50 percent of the urban population do not have adequate water supplies, while 180 million, or roughly 60 percent 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 percent of the urban population is without adequate sanitation.



Good Urban Governance Essential for Provision of Water & Sanitation

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 in the 1980s. Many local authorities still underestimate the importance of good governance practices in the delivery of services at the local government level.

All cities grow besides, on or on top of a convenient water resource. However, the larger a city and its industrial base, the more complex water management becomes. It involves not only ensuring a regular supply of good quality water for all households and businesses and the convenient removal of wastewater, but also giving attention to pollution control, the sustainable use of water resources and wastewater management.

But better governance for water and sanitation means that all citizens' water needs must be considered and that the institutions responsible for water and wastewater management are accountable to them whether they are public private or community institutions.

The shift from good government to good governance is not easy. It means that government institutions must allow community based organisations, especially those representing the urban poor, a greater role in determining policies and projects.

A Public Health and Economic Tragedy

Each year, more than 2.2 million people die from water and sanitation related diseases, many of whom are children. However, a disproportionate number of people are affected by these diseases in cities than in rural areas due to the high population concentration and accompanying concentration of human and other waste. In fact, child mortality rates in cities without proper sanitation are 10 to 20 times higher than those in cities with adequate sanitation.

The five illnesses that cause more than half of the deaths amongst children are pneumonia, diarrhoea, malaria, measles and HIV/AIDS. Studies indicate that the prevalence of these killer diseases in urban slums is due to bad living conditions rather than income levels. For instance, municipal supplies of safe drinking water rarely penetrate slums. It is common for pit latrines to be shared by thousands of people. Children from slums have higher rates of diarrhoea than children of the poorest rural families because they are exposed to contaminated water and food.

The lack of sanitation and access to water in developing cities and towns is far from the only problem. Affordable water is also a major problem. More than half of the urban poor in some countries denied access to municipal water supplies are dependent on private vendors. These people can pay up to 20 times more for water than their neighbours. In extreme cases, some communities living on less than US \$1 per day pay as much as five to seven times the price paid by an average U.S. citizen for a bottle of water.

The lack of clean water and sanitation has a direct impact on labour productivity. In 1991 when Peru suffered a cholera epidemic, apart from thousands of deaths, there was a devastating economic impact. The Peruvian economy lost US \$28 million from cancelled exports and US \$147 million from loss of tourist earnings, not to mention the additional costs of patient care and the loss of income to those employed in the informal sector. The net loss to the Peruvian economy was around US \$2332 million in just one year.

A Historical Failure

Despite these dramatic figures in developing world cities and the extraordinarily poor condition of sanitation services there, only between two and 12 percent of sanitation-related foreign aid is spent on urban sanitation.

"It is one thing for a government to say it provides improved or adequate water to a household in a rural area because there is a communal water standpipe and toilet within 100 meters of each home and quite another to use the same criteria for urban residents," says Mrs. Tibaijuka. "In rural areas only a handful of people compete for access, whereas in a crowded city hundreds use the same water source and toilet."

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 1 million residents. This means they consider smaller projects aimed at servicing specific neighbourhoods and communities of the urban poor as unbankable.

The Way Forward: Local Action for Global Goals

Many local authorities still underestimate the importance of inclusive practices of good governance in prioritizing 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. For example, in many African cities, where up to 50 percent of the urban water supply is either being wasted through leakages or is otherwise unaccounted for, UN-HABITAT's programme Water for African Cities is establishing 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 percent. The programme included improving the capacity of city authorities to manage the delivery of water. A critical component of the campaign was educating the public about simple ways of conserving water.

The severe water shortages in Nairobi just over a year ago are still fresh in the minds of most city residents. In common with other cities in Africa, Nairobi and several of the larger cities, like Johannesburg, Gaborone and Dakar have outgrown the capacity of local sources to meet demand and now have to move water from between 200 and 600 kilometres away. What is worse is that up to 50% of the water supply in these cities is wasted or unaccounted for.

At the same time, there are many well documented case studies that show, if local governments allow community based organizations, especially those representing the urban poor, a greater role in determining policies and projects, the living conditions of the urban poor can be improved. The report documents many of these case studies. It argues that public-private partnerships that prioritize 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.

With emphasis on information, advocacy and education, the new demand - side focus of the programme complements the ongoing supply expansion efforts of city utilities, governments and external support agencies. Its ground-level action approach has generated wide political support, resulting in the establishment of a network of African policy makers, city utility managers and water sector professionals with a common interest in addressing urban water issues on the continent. As the manufacturing sector is a large user of the city's water resources, it has a vested interest in securing long-term sustainability of supplies to the city. Many companies have expressed interest in active participation in the public awareness campaign.

The UN-HABITAT/Nairobi City Council public awareness campaign was based on a consumer attitude survey. It used media such as television and radio, complemented by posters, brochures, banners and other promotional tools.

"We must wake up to the realities of the urban age. 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," says Mrs. Tibaijuka. "We must reassess our statistics. We must look at our policies again and ask why we have failed in the past. We must try to innovate new strategies of meeting global goals through local action; 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 urbanization of poverty".