

Water & Sanitation



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The Challenge

Unclean water and a lack of basic sanitation are undermining efforts to end extreme poverty and disease in the world's poorest countries. Sub-Saharan Africa faces some of the biggest challenges: only 68% of individuals living in the region have access to an improved water source and only 30% of individuals have access to improved sanitation services; nearly half of all people using unimproved sources live in sub-Saharan Africa (while one-fifth live in South Asia).

Together, unclean water and poor sanitation are a leading cause of child mortality. An estimated 1,000 children die every day from diarrhoea, spread through poor sanitation and hygiene. Women are more than twice as likely as men to be responsible for water collection. On average,

women and girls in developing countries walk six kilometres each day to collect water – time which could be spent in school or at work. Additionally, more than half of girls who drop out of primary school in sub-Saharan Africa do so because of a lack of separate toilets and easy access to safe water.

As part of the Millennium Development Goals, developing countries and donor governments committed to halving the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015. In 2012, the WHO and UNICEF reported that, as of 2010, the MDG target for safe drinking water had been met. While this is great news, it masks regional disparities; nearly 663 million people across the globe still do not have access to safe drinking water and 2.4 billion do not have access to adequate sanitation.

The Opportunity

The links between a lack of water and sanitation access and development goals are clear, and the solutions to the problem are known and cost-effective. It is estimated that every \$1 spent on water and sanitation generates \$4 in increased economic opportunity. Universal access to water and sanitation would result in an estimated \$32 billion in economic benefits per year globally from reductions in health care costs and increased productivity from reduced illness.

In Africa alone, universal access to water and sanitation would bring an estimated annual economic benefit of \$22 billion, and African women would particularly benefit from such increased access. Today, women and girls in sub-Saharan Africa spend up to 4 hours per day fetching water; without this burden, women could increase their agricultural farm yields by 20-30%. Reducing the distance to a water source has also been identified as a way to empower women, especially regarding girls' school attendance. Studies have shown that with clean water and accessible toilet facilities, girl school enrolment rates increase by over 15%.

Since 1990, the proportion of the global population using an improved drinking water source has increased from 76% to 91%, and the

proportion of the global rural population without access to improved sanitation has declined by nearly a quarter; open defecation rates in rural areas, furthermore, have fallen from 38% to 25% in 2015. But with hundreds of millions of people still without safe drinking water and progress towards sanitation goals still off-track, scale-up of efforts are needed to ensure safe water and sanitation for all. Specific areas that need to be addressed include urban-rural disparities, poverty-related inequity, and the burden on women and girls. Calling for the universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all, the newly ratified Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets for water and sanitation provide a powerful platform to bring this mission to fruition.