



No 4. Water and Sanitation Governance



Photo: Camilla Wrieseen/ PeePoople

The Water and Sanitation Crisis

Almost 1 billion people lack clean drinking water. Another 2.4 billion people have no access to hygienic sanitation facilities; 1.2 billion lack any sanitation facilities at all. Each day, 5,000 children die from preventable water and sanitation related diseases. Through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the international community committed to halve the proportion of people without access to clean water and basic sanitation by 2015. While the world is on track to meet the water supply MDG, there are still major gaps in many regions and countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. But the sanitation target could be missed by a staggering 700 million people. Meeting the MDG water and sanitation targets is more than a health and dignity issue. The evidence is compelling that achieving the water and sanitation goals would trigger a major leap forward in human development

The neglect of sanitation

Sanitation is often seen as an 'unglamorous' or a taboo subject. As a result politicians, professionals and community leaders frequently neglect the sector, and practitioners can be stigmatised. This neglect costs communities lives, money, and dignity. Unhygienic sanitation increases child mortality; jeopardises maternal health; prevents children from going to

school; and worsens gender inequities, poverty, hunger, and water pollution. Clean water, sanitation and hygiene is a proven cost-effective investment that will reduce health budget spending and increases economic productivity and education levels. Investment in sanitation yields an average economic return of USD 9.1 to USD 1, and some countries are losing more than 7 percent of their annual GDP due to poor sanitation (World Bank 2008).

Why good water governance is essential

Availability of water is certainly a concern for some countries. But the global water and sanitation crisis is mainly rooted in poverty, power and inequality, not in physical availability. It is, first and foremost, a crisis of governance and thus governance reform must be a key pillar of any strategic approach to solving the problem.

Challenges in water and sanitation governance

Water governance is a complex issue that involves a wide range of skills, institutions and actors. Responsibilities are often unclear, with several different government agencies responsible for water supply. And in many countries there is no government agency with any responsibility for sanitation, leading to the woeful neglect of the sector.



Photo: Håkan Tropp, SIWI

Many countries have embarked upon institutional reforms, decentralising and tasking local authorities with services provision. Other countries have turned to privatisation in attempt to use the skills and resources of contractors. However ill-planned reforms can result in services being handed to organisations without the resources to implement them, where responsibility is devolved but not funding. Local capacity is often weak and regulating the private sector to ensure that services reach vulnerable sectors of the community remains a challenge. When responsibilities for water and sanitation are unclear, it is difficult to track the flow of resources into the sector and measure results. Progress monitoring remains weak and makes the sector vulnerable to corruption. Ineffective regulation, pollution and inadequate or poorly designed sanitation can lead to the destruction of valuable drinking water resources.

Areas of intervention

Instead of investing in large physical infrastructure works (requiring substantial resources that do not necessarily improve progress towards the MDGs), UNDP's Water Governance Facility at SIWI targets key strategic investments that address the root cause of water and sanitation problems. WGF's recent initiatives include:

- Measuring progress towards the MDG targets on water and sanitation, highlighting gaps and ensuring resources are found to meet identified needs;
- A Human Rights Based Approach to water, holding providers responsible for delivering services to all members of the community, including women, ethnic minorities, the elderly and disabled;
- Strengthening consumer voice associations, enabling them to campaign for better services;
- Institutional reforms, to clarify responsibilities for water and sanitation provision and channel funding into the sector;
- Decentralisation, assisting nations to establish suitable decision-making processes;
- Capacity building, to ensure sustainability and continued water and sanitation services;

- Supporting anti-corruption initiatives (such as the Water Integrity Network) to improve accountability;
- Climate change adaptation to safeguard future water supplies.

Getting to good governance

The UNDP Water Governance Facility at SIWI supports effective water governance to promote sustainable development of water supply and sanitation services. This is partly done through WGF providing UNDP country offices and other partners with technical assistance and access to good practice on expanding access to water and sanitation services, including community-government and private-public partnerships. For example, WGF contributed to the UN Joint Programme in Water and Sanitation in Mongolia, defining and supporting the UNDP Country Office's key coordinating role.

Governance, Advocacy and Leadership in Water Sanitation and Hygiene (GoAL WaSH)

GoAL WaSH is an innovative new UNDP program that aims to accelerate achievement of the water and sanitation MDGs through strategically targeted interventions that strengthen water and sanitation governance at appropriate levels. Specifically, GoAL WaSH focuses on:

- Countries with low water and sanitation coverage projected not to achieve the water, sanitation or both MDGs;
- Identifying gaps, needs, constraints and opportunities in national water and sanitation plans, strategies and capacities;
- Governance reform, leadership and policy advocacy
- Incorporation of water and sanitation into national MDG and related poverty reduction strategies;
- Close coordination with governments and key development partners active in water and sanitation at country level

Learn More:

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www.undp.org/water/priorityareas/goal-wash.html