

Forum: G77

Issue: The accessibility of water in LEDCs

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Introduction

Over one billion people lack access to a basic water supply. 39% of the world's population is living without improved sanitation facilities. Over 780 million people still use unsafe drinking water sources. 2.3 billion people each year suffer from diseases linked to water. A child dies every 15 seconds from a lack of clean water. One in four children who die before age of five worldwide, die of a water related disease.

Water is crucial for the development of a nation. Food, health, hygiene, habitat, education, employability, productivity are all dependent upon access to clean water. Without it, none of these is possible and poverty is inevitable.

Definition of Key Terms

Accessibility - water being within safe physical reach, affordable and accessible in law.

Safe water: Water which is free from micro-organisms, chemical substances and radiological hazards that constitute a threat to a person's health.

Economic scarcity: Economic water scarcity exists when a population does not have the necessary monetary means to utilize an adequate source of water.

Physical scarcity: When the demand outstrips the lands ability to provide the needed water. Dry parts of the world or arid regions are most often associated with physical scarcity. However, there are an increasing number of regions in the world where physical scarcity is a man-made condition. The Colorado River basin in the United States is an excellent example of a seemingly abundant source of water being overused and over managed, leading to very serious physical water scarcity downstream.

Improved drinking-water source: drinking-water source which, by nature of its construction or through active intervention, is protected from outside contamination, in particular from contamination with fecal matter.

Sanitation: WHO (World Health Organization) states that: "Sanitation generally refers to the provision of facilities and services for the safe disposal of human urine and feces. Inadequate sanitation is a major cause of disease world-wide and improving sanitation is known to have a significant beneficial impact on health both in households and across communities. The word 'sanitation' also refers to the maintenance of hygienic conditions, through services such as garbage collection and wastewater disposal. "

Improved sanitation facility: A sanitation facility which hygienically separates human excreta from human contact.

Open defecation: It is a practice whereby an individual and or a group of people in a community go to ease themselves in an open environment.

Background information

Physical Access

In some regions, even though there is a presence of water, there are physical limitations to getting it. In regions, in particular the sub-Saharan Africa, a journey, often made by little children, of half an hour must be done for the collection water for the family. In Egypt; women and girls are overwhelmingly tasked to fetch and collect water. Not only is this very time consuming, but these women and girls are subjected to sexual threats on their route to water.

Furthermore, a common problem seems to be that; there is an inequitable water distribution within a town or city, even where infrastructure is in place. Inequity in access to water is the direct result of growing differences in income between the impoverished majority and affluent minority within countries.

Discrimination

Evidence suggests that minority groups, women, and marginalized groups often experience obstacles to accessing water and sanitation at disproportionate rates. As an example, the Romani in Slovenia are subject to this inequality. Many Romani communities struggle to collect even small amounts of water for drinking, washing and cooking. This group is prevented from utilizing water from the public water works by other more dominant groups in the country due to discrimination. In order to survive, some of these people have to use water from dirty streams, which ultimately can cause heavy cases of diarrhea.

Amnesty International has reported that in Slovenia in 2010, “20 to 30 per cent of Roma settlements in the southeastern region did not have access to public or other water supply.”

Moreover; Minority Rights Group International has reported in a study on Iraq that “71 per cent of minorities said they suffer from the absence of sufficient water in their area.”

Surveys from 45 developing countries show that women and children bear the primary responsibility for water collection in the majority of households. This is time not spent working at an income-generating job, caring for family members, or attending school.

Quality

However some regions are affected worse as their only water is contaminated with;

- i) **Microbial contamination (faecal)** resulting from untreated sewage which seeps into the water supply,
- ii) **Heavy metal** emanating from contaminated inadequately treated waste water and solid waste of industrial activities,
- iii) **High salinity** due to seawater intrusion,
- iv) **Agricultural run offs and sewage** contaminating water with dangerous chemicals such as pesticides, surfactants and endocrine disrupting substances. Moreover it also contributes to the salinity of the water,
- v) **Arsenic, fluoride, and nitrate in sediments** in the surroundings enter groundwater.

The contamination of water not only limits drinking water, but sanitation as well. Many people have no option but to drink from this polluted water, which ultimately results in

severe diseases such as diarrhea. Due to these unsafe sources, at any one moment half of the world's hospital beds are filled with people suffering from a water related disease.

Agriculture

Lack of water in agriculture will lead to food insecurity, posing a risk of starvation and malnutrition on population in the area.

For example; the East Africa region is one of the most food insecure areas of the world, despite having significant land and water resources. Over 70% of the people in this region depend on rain-fed agriculture for their livelihoods. As the climate change renders rainfall more unpredictable and variable, such reliance on rain water is becoming a problem.

Current situation

Today,

- 2.6 billion people do not have access to basic sanitation.
- 780 million people do not have access to safe water.
- Women spend 200 million hours a day collecting water.
- 18% of the population in sub-Saharan Africa relies on a source of drinking water that is more than a 30 minutes water collection roundtrip away.
- Every 20 seconds, a child dies from a water-related illness
- In 38 countries in Africa sanitation coverage is less than 50%.
- In 9 countries in Africa access to improved drinking water sources is less than 50%.
- Urban sanitation coverage in Africa is 53% whereas rural sanitation coverage is 29%.
- Urban drinking water coverage in Africa is 85% whereas rural drinking water coverage is 51 %.
- In Tajikistan nearly a third of the population takes water from canals and irrigation ditches, with risks of exposure to polluted agricultural run-off.
- People living in the slums of Jakarta, Manila and Nairobi pay 5 to 10 times more for water than those living in high-income areas in those same cities and more than consumers in London or New York.
- A survey of 5 000 schools in Senegal showed that over half had no water supply and almost half had no sanitation facilities.

The rise of new changes:

Millennium Development Goals

In the past 13 years, The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG) have contributed significantly towards resolving this issue. One of the targets which they set to achieve by 2015 was; 'Halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.'

The work done towards achieving this target has helped substantially in solving this issue of water. Their largest impact was on Eastern Asia, where the most progress was made towards achieving their target. Access to drinking water in this region improved by almost 30% over the period 1990-2008. Coverage expanded in sub-Saharan Africa by 22% however, this number is still very low, with only 60 per cent of the population served.

Major Countries and Organisations involved

WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program (JMP) for Water Supply and Sanitation
The official United Nations mechanism tasked with monitoring progress towards the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) relating to drinking-water and sanitation.

UN Water

UN-Water is a branch of the United Nations, founded in 2003 as a next step of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. Its purpose is to support states in their water-related efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals. UN-Water strengthens connection between the different UN agencies which work on aspects of freshwater and sanitation and aims to improve cooperation between governing bodies and development organizations.

Some issues which concern UN Water are; surface and groundwater resources and water-related disasters.

World Water Council

The World Water Council was established in 1996 in response to increasing concern from the global community about world water issues. Its mission is to promote awareness, build political commitment and trigger action on critical water issues at all levels, including the highest decision-making level, to facilitate the efficient management and use of water in all its dimensions and on an environmentally sustainable basis.

International Water Management Institute

The International Water Management Institute (IWMI) is a non-profit research organisation with headquarters in Colombo, Sri Lanka, founded in 1985. Research at the Institute focuses on improving how water and land resources are managed, with the aim of underpinning food security and reducing poverty while safeguarding vital environmental processes.

Timeline of Events

1979: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

This is the first time the right to water and sanitation is explicitly mentioned in an international legally binding convention.

1985: International Water Management Institute was founded.

1992: World Water Day was first formally proposed in Agenda 21 of the 1992 United

Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

1997: First World Water Forum with the theme 'Vision for Water, Life and Environment' was held in Marrakech, Morocco.

1999: Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and Lakes.

8 September 2000: following a three day Millennium Summit of world leaders at the headquarters of the United Nations, the General Assembly adopted the Millennium Declaration (The Millennium Development Goals) which includes the Target 7.C: 'Halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.'

March 2008: Human Rights Council Resolution on Human Rights and access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

28 July 2010: through Resolution 64/292, the United Nations General Assembly explicitly recognized the human right to water and sanitation and acknowledged that clean drinking water and sanitation are essential to the realisation of all human rights.

Relevant UN treaties and Events

The United Nations Millennium Development Goal on Water

Established in 2000 after the Millennium Summit of the United Nations, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight international development goals that were officially following the United Nations Millennium Declaration. All United Nations member states and at least 23 international organizations have agreed to achieve these goals by the year 2015.

The Millennium Development Goal relating to drinking-water and sanitation (MDG 7, Target 7c), is to: "Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking-water and basic sanitation".

Recognition of Water as a Human Right

In November 2002, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted General Comment No. 15 on the right to water. For example, in this document Comment No. 15 defined the right to water as the right of everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable and physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses.

On 28 July 2010, through Resolution 64/292, the United Nations General Assembly recognized the human right to water and sanitation and acknowledged that clean drinking water and sanitation are essential to the realisation of all human rights. The Resolution calls upon States and international organisations to provide financial resources, help capacity-building and technology transfer to help countries, in particular developing countries, to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all.

Water for Life Decade

The United Nations General Assembly, in December 2003, proclaimed the years 2005-2015 as the International Decade for Action 'Water for Life'.

Its primary goal is to promote efforts to achieve international water-related goals at all levels and on the implementation of programmes and projects by 2015.

The Water Decade encourages countries build on their efforts to protect, use and manage freshwater resources in a sustainable way

The first UN Decade on Water from 1981–1990 is seen as a success as, more than a billion people gained access to safe drinking water.

World Summit in Johannesburg

The World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002 took place in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 26 August to 4 September 2002.

It was held place to discuss sustainable development by the United Nations.

Many leaders from business and non-governmental organizations, attended this conference.

At the World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002, two other goals were adopted: to aim to develop integrated water resource management and water efficiency plans by 2005

and to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people who do not have access to basic sanitation.

Human Rights Council Resolution on the issue of Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation

On 28 September 2011, the UN Human Rights Council passed a new resolution which focuses on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation.

The resolution puts emphasis on practical solutions and calls on States to ensure enough financing for delivery of water and sanitation services.

World Water Forum

Every three years since 1997 the World Water Council organizes a World Water Forum. The World Water Forum is the largest international event in the area of water. Over 30,000 participants from more than 190 countries attended the last one in Istanbul, Turkey.

World Water Forum aims to raise awareness with decision makers and the public at large on water issues and, to create action to solve the issues. It contributes towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals and provides an opportunity to develop and share ideas on challenging water issues and helps develop new partnerships. Moreover this forum encourages greater media attention for water issues and solutions.

Previous Attempts to solve the issue

Referring to the previous sections, the Millennium Development Goals, so far, have been the most decisive and effective form of attempts at solving the issue. The goal is being worked upon and progress has been made, indicating that by 2015, the situation of access to water will be much less stressing and worrying.

Although access to water is still a pressing issue, the work and joint collaboration of the NGOs stated in this research report and other organizations have rendered this issue to become a relatively smaller than it was originally.

Possible solutions

Quality

Rapid, reliable and cost-effective ways of measuring water quality locally and reporting findings at the global level will need to be identified.

Legislatures on controlling water pollution should be adopted by the States. Industrial plants which are located next to a water source must be restrained from throwing their waste material in to the water source. If broken, this set of legislature must have harsh sanctions.

Appropriate education on the protection of water resources and methods to minimize its waste should be given out.

Water from any source must go through a basic purification facility before it is to be consumed.

Physical Access

NGOs are needed to help in providing and installing the necessary infrastructure such as sanitation facilities, a water purifying system for the region, a network of pipes to pump water to homes for easy access, where the national governments cannot do that on their own.

States should refrain from engaging in any activity that denies or limits access to water or interferes with existing arrangements. (For example unlawful excessive abstraction of water by the state.)

Nations can adopt strategies and programmes to ensure that there is sufficient and safe water for present and future generations.

Ensure that water facilities or services provide sufficient, safe and regular water. Moreover, these facilities must have a sufficient number of water outlets to avoid excessive waiting times and they must be at a reasonable distance from the household.

States should guarantee fair distribution of all available water facilities and services in the country.

States can install water taps in streets in strategic locations enabling millions of people to access clean water.

Discrimination

Nations need to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure that they benefit water supply and sanitation.

Those who suffer a disadvantage or social exclusion should have access to water just like the rest of the population.

Law

All States should recognize water as a human right and incorporate it in their Constitution so as to ensure that the nation does everything possible in its power to give its population access to a clean water supply and sanitation.

All States must recognize water as a human right.

Economic

Nations can adopt effective legislations concerning the maximum price for clean water which the concerning third parties implements in order to prevent over-pricing and ensure equal access to clean water.

Furthermore to ensure that water is affordable, States should use a range of low-cost techniques and technologies and, appropriate pricing policies such as free or low-cost water.

Nations can adopt relatively low-cost water programmes to protect vulnerable and marginalized groups of the population.

Appropriate devices must be installed to collect rainwater for use in agriculture.

War

During armed conflicts and natural disasters, water sources must be protected and the whole population should still have a right to water.

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