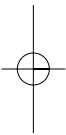


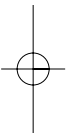


WATER, SANITATION AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Roberto Lenton, Kristen Lewis and Albert M. Wright



I ncreasing access to domestic water supply and sanitation services, while at the same time improving water resources management and development, are catalytic entry points for efforts to fight poverty and hunger, safeguard human health, reduce child mortality, promote gender equality and manage and protect natural resources. They are, therefore, a critical component to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)—the integrated set of eight goals and eighteen goal-specific, time-bound targets. The MDGs were adopted at the United Nations Millennium Summit with the objective to make real progress in tackling the most pressing issues facing developing countries.¹ The seventh Millennium Development Goal focuses on environmental sustainability, and one of the three specific targets within this goal is Target 10: to cut in half, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.²



This article summarizes the work of the United Nations (UN) Millennium Project Task Force on Water and Sanitation—one of the ten task forces of the UN Millennium Project—and their three-year effort to identify the best strategies for meeting the MDGs established by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in 2002.³ The task force focused primarily on how the world can join together to meet MDG Target 10 and to optimize the role of water management and development in meeting the MDGs as a whole. This article also provides some insights and reflections on developments since the work of the Task Force on Water and Sanitation completed in 2005. Section one summarizes and highlights the important task force findings, including a focus on Target 10 of the MDGs, issues related to water as a resource for achieving the entire set of MDGs and the role of global support mechanisms. This section also presents the critical importance of sanitation and the role of institutions in water and sanitation. Section two outlines the task force's recommendations and highlights key events and policies that have transpired since the publication of the original report.

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I. TASK FORCE REPORT: SUMMARY AND HIGHLIGHTS

Meeting Target 10: Identifying and Addressing the Key Obstacles

Some 2.6 billion of the world's 6.5 billion people lack access to even basic sanitation facilities, and about 1.1 billion people lack access to safe drinking water.⁴ Halving the proportion of the population without safe drinking water and basic sanitation between the baseline year of 1990 and the target year of 2015, as called for by Target 10, presents formidable challenges, particularly for sanitation.

While global targets are important, what matters most is reaching the MDGs country-by-country through massive expansions of service into unserved remote rural areas and densely populated urban slums. In order to fulfill the dream of universal access to improved water supply and sanitation, the focus must be on sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. Within these areas, priority must be given to the ranks of the poor, therefore setting resource allocation parameters within countries.

What's Holding Us Back?

To develop effective strategies to meet the water and sanitation goals, it is best to start by discussing some of the political, institutional, financial and technical obstacles that have constrained progress to date.⁵

Political Constraints

Perhaps the most important political constraint curtailing progress in many countries is the lack of political leadership and government commitment to allocating sufficient national resources to meet the needs of the poor. The reasons for this lack of political will vary from case to case, but can include the capture of institutional processes by powerful political interests and the failure of specialists to make a compelling case about the benefits of water and sanitation. Furthermore, the kinds of changes needed to improve services to poor households can threaten the substantial benefits currently conferred on politically influential groups.

Furthermore, political leaders sometimes do not adequately grasp the different ways that poor water supply and sanitation services thwart development goals. In this case, information dissemination and awareness creation through concrete data can help in overcoming political resistance and providing the ammunition needed to make a case for prioritizing the sector. Reducing political interference in the day-to-day operations of water and sanitation agencies often requires broad policy and institutional reform.

Institutional Constraints