



Access to Drinking Water and Sanitation in Africa

(based on the *African Economic Outlook 2007**)

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- ◆ Africa is unlikely to reach the drinking water and sanitation Millennium Development Goals.
- ◆ Disparities among countries are large, and the deficit in sanitation is greater than that for drinking water.
- ◆ Serious reforms in institutions, legal frameworks, and policies are needed in order to ensure the sustainability of expanding access to drinking water and sanitation while preserving environment.
- ◆ Financial sustainability of the drinking water and sanitation sector remains an issue for all stakeholders: the providers, the users, government agencies and donors.

Ten million people annually have gained access to improved drinking water over 1990-2004 in sub-Saharan Africa. However, the population has grown even faster with the result that the absolute number of unserved people has increased by about 60 million over the same period. Consequently, the number of additional people obtaining access to drinking water annually would need to triple to reach the water MDG by 2015.

The situation is even worse for sanitation, both in the low level of access and the limited progress made since 1990. For the region to reach the MDG, 35 million more people annually need access to improved sanitation, compared with the current rate of 7 million.

Even then, some 234 million people would still lack access to safe drinking water by 2015 and 317 million to improved sanitation.

Northern Africa is very different. The level of access to drinking water is, with Latin America, the highest in the developing world (91 per cent of the population). Progress in sanitation has also been greater: coverage has increased by 12 percentage points between 1990 and 2004 to reach 75 per cent and broadly on track to reach the 83 per cent target by 2015. Some outstanding examples of good performance can nonetheless be identified in Sub-Saharan Africa. Mauritius and South Africa are close to universal access to water; from 1990 to 2006,

the percentage of people with access to drinking water tripled in Uganda (from 21 to 61 per cent) while in Tanzania some form of sanitation is available to 90 per cent of population.

Limited access to water and sanitation in Africa is not mainly a resource issue. Though a third of countries experience some pressure on their internal water resources, they are overall considered abundant. The problem is one of poor management, pollution and wastage, as well as lack of facilities – except in Northern and South Africa. In most African cities over 50 per cent of the water supply is wasted or unaccounted for.

The experience of the good performers shows the value of reforms in institutions, legal frameworks, and policies changing the structure of incentives. A comprehensive and integrated approach can ensure the sustainability of expanding access to drinking water and sanitation while facilitating economic growth and meeting ecosystem needs. It requires:

- Demand-side management programmes to control water use, rationalise demand through pricing, and devise incentives and campaigns to encourage the use of water-saving devices and conservation. The municipality of Windhoek in Namibia has been showing the way since 1994.

- All stakeholders, from communities to regional partners, should participate in the management of water resources to improve efficiency and avoid conflict. Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM), championed by the Global Water Partnership, embodies this principle among others.
- Defining the organisation of the sector and harmonisation of the actions of different stakeholders, as in Uganda through a Sector Wide Approach to Planning (SWAP).
- Strengthening capacity on the ground, notably locally where water management is most often undertaken, as has been done in South Africa through a public-public partnership between the Government Agency TCTA and the water provider, Umgeni Water.
- Mechanisms to monitor progress, set guidelines and design incentives to extend the provision of services and protect consumers, such as Zambia's National Water Supply and Sanitation Council (NWASCO) implemented more than a decade ago.
- Greater efforts to promote sanitation and wastewater treatment, especially in densely populated settlements, to avoid reversing progress in health, worsening environmental sustainability and obstacles to further progress in expanding water coverage. The Senegal case illustrates rising awareness.

Government budgets and development assistance have been insufficient to cover the scale of investments needed, while national water providers have usually failed to achieve financial viability; and private participation has often proved disappointing in filling the resource gap.

Water providers need help to establish financial independence by covering most of the cost of operations and routine maintenance through user charges. Such schemes should

account for the differences in affordability through cross-subsidisation between wealthier and poorer users, as well as subsidisation across water and sanitation, and clear identification of polluting industries that should bear the costs of pollution abatement. Cost-recovery objectives can be facilitated by strengthening the utilities themselves through, for instance, the UNSGAB-supported Water Operators Partnership initiative. More flexible local small-scale providers also have a role to play.

In most countries, government subsidies will remain necessary to provide for the poor, especially in rural areas and for sanitation, but need to be implemented under certain conditions¹. Along with increased financial contributions by donors, new instruments can help catalyse funding, such as Output-Based Aid², and the sub-sovereign borrowing facilities and pooling mechanisms currently developed by the international community in response to the calls of the Camdessus³ and the Gurría⁴ panels to help bring the basic right of clean water and improved sanitation to the people of Africa.

1. See Development Centre *Policy Insight* No. 42, "Pro-poor Design of Subsidies for Drinking Water and Sanitation Services in Africa".
2. OBA uses explicit performance-based subsidies to support the delivery of services where public funding is needed to complement user-fees.
3. Winpenny (2003), "Financing Water for All: Report of the World Panel on Financing Water Infrastructure", chaired by Michel Camdessus: http://www.gwpforum.org/gwp/library/FinPanRep_MainRep.pdf
4. World Water Council (2006), "Enhancing access to finance for local governments. Financing water for agriculture" Task force on Financing water for all chaired by Angel Gurría.

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