



## WORLD BANK

### Water and Sanitation in Africa

By Rachel Wilson

#### Introduction

A typical Malawian farmer begins his day with retrieving water. Without running water in his house, the farmer would likely have to go to a pit latrine, which is essentially a whole in the ground, in order to obtain water. This inadequate method of retrieving water contributes to **fecal-oral disease** transmission and it is all too common in the developing world.

In 2000, the United Nations had a vision for what the world should look like in 2015. This vision developed into the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were adopted in 2001. These eight goals for the world included objectives such as reducing child mortality rates and ensuring environmental sustainability. The World Bank has joined in the effort to meet these goals by 2015. Unfortunately, many regions of the world are not on track to meet these goals. One of the main reasons for the problem is that these regions are in need of more investment. Created to help the developing world, the World Bank specializes in loans to and investments in developing nations. One project the World Bank is involved in is improving sanitation and access to water in Africa; however, even with the help of other organizations and governments, this assistance is not enough to meet the MDGs by 2015. In order to meet the goals, the World Bank must reevaluate their policy towards water and sanitation in Africa and scale up their investments.

**fecal-oral disease**—a disease that is transmitted by the ingestion of fecal particles. Some examples include typhoid fever and cholera

#### Explanation of the Problem

##### *Millennium Development Goal 7*

According to the World Bank website, “more than 1.1 billion people lack access to safe water, and 2.6 billion lack access to basic sanitation.” This means that lack of safe water and proper sanitation is a huge barrier to global development and sustainability. Ensuring environmental sustainability, Millennium Development Goal 7, calls upon the world to “halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation”. In order to qualify as “sustainable access,” the proper proportion of the population must have access to improved drinking water sources and improved sanitation facilities.

Meeting this MDG is also the key to achieving many of the other goals. For example, access to clean water and sanitation are essential to

good health and disease prevention. In fact, lack of clean water and sanitation are barriers to solving many of the world's problems, such as poverty and death from disease. According to the World Bank, unsafe water and poor sanitation and hygiene cause about 1.7 million deaths a year. Of this number, 90 percent are children, which mean that "access to sanitation, the practice of good **hygiene**, and a safe water supply could save 1.5 million children a year." An *Africa News* article from March 23, 2009 explains the significance of increasing access to water and sanitation, "Throughout the 54 countries in Africa, an overwhelming lack of access to clean water and sanitation significantly undermines the chances of achieving any of the eight MDGs since they are all, in some way, tied to water."

**hygiene**—*conditions or practices (as of cleanliness) conducive to health*

## Categories of Water Quality

In their 2008 report on "Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation," the World Health Organization (WHO) broke down the categories of drinking water sources. This "drinking water ladder" begins at the worst category, which is unimproved drinking water. These include sources such as unprotected wells and springs and surface water (rivers, lakes, streams). The next category is improved drinking water sources (other than piped water), which includes protected wells and springs, public taps, and collected rainwater. The best source of drinking water is water piped into a dwelling, plot, or yard.

### *The Sanitation Ladder*

The WHO also laid out a "sanitation ladder," which details the different levels of sanitation practices and facilities. The lowest rung on the ladder is "practicing open defecation," which is a highly dangerous practice to all nearby. "Using an unimproved sanitation facility" is the second rung, and a facility qualifies as unimproved if it "does not ensure hygienic separation of human excreta from human contact." Next on the ladder is use of "a shared sanitation facility," which is an otherwise acceptable sanitation facility used by more than two households.

## Recent Developments

### *Africa's Progress*

Much of the world is on track to meet the MDGs, but Africa is a region that has been lagging behind. Though the continent's need of water and sanitation is gaining world attention and focus, this does not mean that necessary action is being taken to meet the MDGs. An *Africa News* article reported that the leaders at the fifth annual World Water Forum in March of 2009, **African Development Bank (AFDB)** Vice

**African Development Bank (AFDB)**—*established in 1964 for the purpose of creating social and economic development in Africa*

President Mandla S.V. and Deputy Chair of the African Union Commission Erastus Mwencha, “emphasized the dire need to turn good intentions into tangible actions.” In addition to asking for more help, the leaders thanked the countries, institutions, and organizations that have given their support and help so far, including the World Bank.

The African leaders’ pleas for more assistance are understandable because as *Africa News* reported on March 23, 2009, “in Africa, more than 300 million people do not have access to clean water and more than 500 million do not have access to basic sanitation.” The article continues, explaining that this causes “millions of deaths - mostly of young children - from water-related diseases each year.” These numbers highlight the fact that “Africa lags behind the rest of the world in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).”

#### *Recent Developments with Water*

Though Africa has made some progress in increasing access to improved drinking water sources, it is not yet on track to achieving the MDG. The 2008 WHO Report said that access to improved drinking water “has increased from 49 per cent in 1990 to 58 per cent in 2006, which means that an additional 207 million Africans are now using safe drinking water.” However, the report also explained, “improved drinking water coverage in sub-Saharan Africa is still considerably lower than in other regions” because it “is making the slowest progress.” In fact, sub-Saharan Africa is “home to more than a third of those using unimproved drinking water sources.”

#### *Recent Developments with Sanitation*

In an article from *Africa News* on July 22, 2008 the UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman stated that if something did not change soon, the MDG sanitation goal is set to miss its target by more than 700 million people. The outlook for Africa is even more dire than for the rest of the world because the WHO report explained that though there has been some progress in the world, improved sanitation increased from 26 per cent in 1990 to 31 per cent in 2006, one of the slowest rates. This amount of progress is not enough to meet the MDG; therefore, the WHO has deemed sub-Saharan Africa as “not on track.” The WHO reported, “22 percent of the 2.5 billion people without access to improved sanitation, more than half a billion people, live in sub-Saharan Africa.”

## Focus of the Debate

### *Controversy Over World Bank Methods*

There have been some who have voiced concern over the World Bank's methods of providing water sources. An article from *The Weekender*, a South African paper, detailed the consequences of building dams in Africa. The article explained that dams cause **silt** build-up, which causes the dams to be useless in the long term. Also, dams have displaced substantial numbers of people because they reduce the number of fisheries downstream, and "estuaries are habitats for 80% of the world's fish catch." Thayer Scudder, a leading dam expert on the World Commission on Dams, said, "There is nothing sustainable about large dams at all. Millions in Africa depend on the rivers for sustenance - they are the losers when rivers are dammed up. The World Bank ignores impacts; they want to stay in the game." As members of the World Bank you need to be careful that the solution you devise does not have unintended consequences.

**silt**—a deposit of sediment (as by a river)

### *Definition of "Improved"*

Another issue surrounding drinking water sources is the location of the source. According to the WHO report in 2008, if it takes a person between three and thirty minutes to collect their daily water, then their water intake is considered constant. However, if it takes longer than thirty minutes round trip to collect the water, "people tend to collect less water, thus compromising their basic drinking water needs." The MDG categories do not include a measure for time taken to collect water. This has caused some to argue that "the time needed to collect water should be considered when determining whether a source is 'improved' or not" because the distance from the source affects whether sufficient water is being collected. According to the WHO report, 35 recent household surveys show that 18 percent of the population in sub-Saharan Africa relies on an improved drinking water source that is more than 30 minutes away. This is evidence that more may actually need to be done than previously thought to increase the proportion of the population with proper access to safe water.

## NGO Perspectives

### *Greenpeace*

A non-governmental organization dedicated to the protection and conservation of the environment, Greenpeace warns of the effects of **global warming**. The organization predicts that the current water problems will only get worse in the future. In fact, they predict, "Disappearing glaciers, increasing droughts and salt-water intrusion will

**global warming**—an increase in the earth's average atmospheric temperature that causes corresponding changes in climate and that may result from the greenhouse effect

greatly worsen our world's current fresh water shortage.” This is unfortunate news for Africa if it turns out to be true because access to water, much less safe water, is such a major issue.

### *Amnesty International*

Amnesty International (AI) is a non-governmental organization that is well known for its work on human rights advocacy. Amnesty believes that access to safe and clean water is a human right. In its “Demand Dignity” campaign Amnesty fought hard for “The Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights” and one of the rights in this document is the right to clean water. The purpose of the document was to, “establish an international mechanism for individuals whose economic, social and cultural rights are violated and who are denied a domestic remedy to seek justice at the international level.” Amnesty International is currently advocating for all member states of the UN to sign the Optional Protocol.

## **Possible Solutions**

### *Funding*

At the 2009 World Water Forum in Istanbul, Turkey it was realized that if the global community wants to meet the MDG target for water and sanitation than Africa will require up to \$94 billion dollars. This is significantly more than is invested currently. This means that the World Bank and others must substantially increase their investments in order to attempt to meet the MDGs by 2015. At the World Water Forum, Jamal Saghir, Director of Energy, Transport and Water at the World Bank, recognized the fact that the global economic downturn is making investment in water and sanitation difficult. However, he also added, “We can do more with the same or even less.” Although it is a daunting amount, it can be done if the money is invested wisely.

### *Infrastructure*

Lack of **infrastructure** is a hindrance to not only people being able to access water sources and sanitary facilities, but it is also a hindrance to those trying to improve facilities and bring in new technology. According to the WHO report, the majority of people without improved sanitation and drinking water live in rural areas. The report stated, “Sanitation coverage is significantly higher in urban areas,” and “rural access to improved drinking water sources remains low.” Without proper infrastructure, it is difficult to solve this problem. The World Bank could invest in infrastructure because it could not only potentially help with the issue of lack of access to drinking water sources and sani-

**infrastructure**—*the system of public works of a country, state, or region*

tation facilities, but it could also help with many of Africa's other issues.

### *Education*

The World Bank could invest in educational programs because this is an effective way to increase awareness about hygiene and sanitation. Education about the risks of unhygienic practices could help reduce the spread of fatal diseases that kill millions annually. There are many programs that currently have educational programs; however, there are not enough spread throughout Africa. There could also be more of an emphasis placed on engineering education in Africa. Allowing for Africans to learn how to construct and design suitable water systems allows for a long-term solution to the problem.

### *Private Investment*

Another potential solution would be investing in private companies. Oftentimes, these types of companies are better able to come up with solutions because they have more freedom and are not tied down by rules and regulations of governmental organizations or international institutions. Private companies are able to invest in research and development and come up with new technology for cleaner water and more sanitary lifestyles.

## **Questions for Policymakers**

When trying to solve this issue, policymakers should not only look to the future, but should also look to the past to learn. You should ask yourself questions such as: Should the World Bank continue its current investments in water and sanitation programs? What programs and types of projects should the World Bank invest in? How much money should they invest? What is necessary to meet the Millennium Development Goals? Who should the World Bank work with? How significant is the issue?

## **Conclusion**

The seventh Millennium Development Goal is the key to many other MDGs. Increasing the number of people with access to improved drinking water sources and improved sanitation can help substantially alleviate many other problems, including disease and poverty. Millions in Africa are without the basic daily necessities of safe drinking water and sufficient sanitation facilities. In order to reach the MDGs by 2015, the World Bank must take the lead and take action. Without more assistance, Africa will fall short of the MDGs of halving the proportion of

the population without access to improved drinking water sources and improved sanitation facilities. However, the assistance must be used wisely in order to effectively solve this issue.

## Guide to Further Research

A good place to begin research is the World Bank website ([www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)). Another good website to explore is the WHO website (<http://www.who.int/en/>). I would suggest researching what types of programs are effective, what is the new technology, and what programs would be the best investments. Get creative and see if you can find a unique solution. Below are a few helpful links:

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTWAT/0,,menuPK:4602384~pagePK:149018~piPK:149093~theSitePK:4602123,00.html>  
[http://www.who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/monitoring/jmp2008.pdf](http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/monitoring/jmp2008.pdf)  
[http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Static/Products/Progress2008/MDG\\_Report\\_2008\\_Progress\\_Chart\\_En.pdf](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Static/Products/Progress2008/MDG_Report_2008_Progress_Chart_En.pdf)  
[http://esa.un.org/iys/docs/IYS\\_flagship\\_web\\_small.pdf](http://esa.un.org/iys/docs/IYS_flagship_web_small.pdf)  
[http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Static/Products/Progress2008/MDG\\_Report\\_2008\\_En.pdf#page=42](http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Static/Products/Progress2008/MDG_Report_2008_En.pdf#page=42)

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