



WORLD BANK

Water and Sanitation in Africa

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Introduction and Summary of the Problem

Access to clean drinking water is a privilege mainly held by citizens of developed nations. The rest of the developing world is limited to scarce, often polluted water supplies. Clean water is an absolute necessity for basic human existence; therefore, any efforts to aid developing nations must first address the clean water supply issue. The United Nations has recognized the need to improve global water supplies, in part due to its efforts to achieve its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. In accordance with the Millennium Development Goals, the World Bank has invested in regions struggling to meet the 2015 deadline. The World Bank has recently dedicated many of its resources to improving water and sanitation conditions in Africa, but there is still much to complete in the next five years.

Focus of the Debate

Controversy Over World Bank Methods in Africa

Recently, the World Bank has favored the construction of dams as a possible solution to the clean water shortage in Africa. Supporters of the project assert that the dams are the best solution because the local inhabitants gain the benefit of easier access to clean water along with other needed improvements. For example, the projects have the potential to increase employment and improve the infrastructure of the area. Alternately, critics argue that the long-term effects of the dams far outweigh any initial benefits. They claim that the dams are ultimately inefficient because they lead to the displacement of the local inhabitants.

Definition of "Improved"

Further debate centers on the actual definition of "improved" water sources. While the quality of the water is important to consider, some members of the United Nations argue that stronger emphasis should be placed on individuals' ability to access clean water. Increasing the importance of the location of clean water sources has a twofold effect: more sites will be built to improve access, however, building more sites will both increase the cost of the project and result in construction delays.

Recent Developments

Despite the World Bank's increased efforts to improve conditions in Africa, attainment of the Millennium Development Goals is unrealistic in the next five years. Although there have been some improvements in general access to clean water, sanitation still remains a major challenge. The obvious resolution to the problem is an increase in funding, but this solution is highly unlikely given recent developments. The global financial crisis has drastically decreased philanthropic efforts in the region. According to a study released by the World Bank, "the crisis is having serious cumulative impacts on poverty, with 64 million more people expected to be living in extreme poverty by the end of 2010 than would have been the case without the crisis." The significant decrease in funding for the area will only further delay Africa's attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

Questions a Resolution Should Address

Indeed, given the current economic climate, the obvious question to be addressed is that of funding. The World Bank, along with other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) must either increase funding in the region or readjust their expectations. The current timeline is unrealistic; however, goals can still be achieved through cooperation and increased funding.

Beyond the obvious need for funding, long-term solutions must be considered as well. Resolutions that encourage the building up of infrastructure offer a practical alternative to simply pouring money into the region. Furthermore, encouraging the development of education programs that deal with the importance of hygiene and sanitation could greatly reduce the spread of infectious disease.

Conclusion

The World Bank's involvement in Africa is necessary to the United Nations' global attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. Continued and increased funding in the region is required over the next five years; however, the emphasis should be placed on designing programs that contribute to the long-term development of the region.

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