

MEETING THE MDG DRINKING
WATER AND SANITATION TARGET
THE URBAN AND RURAL CHALLENGE OF THE DECADE



World Health
Organization

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The world is still on track for reaching the MDG drinking water target, but the trend appears to be deteriorating. On current trends, the world will miss the sanitation target by more than half a billion people.

- Every year, unsafe water, coupled with a lack of basic sanitation, kills at least 1.6 million children under the age of five years
 - more than eight times the number of people who died in the Asian tsunami of 2004.
- At the beginning of the Water for Life decade, 1.1 billion people did not have access to an improved source of drinking water.
- 84% of the population without access to an improved source of drinking water live in rural areas.
- 2.6 billion people, more than 40% of the world population, do not use a toilet, but defecate in the open or in unsanitary places.

In 2004, more than three out of every five rural people, over 2 billion, did not have access to a basic sanitation facility.

- If the current trend persists, nearly 1.7 billion rural dwellers will still not have access to improved sanitation by 2015.
- In 2004, urban sanitation coverage was more than double the rural sanitation coverage.
- Although 73% of rural dwellers have access to an improved source of drinking water, only 30% have access to piped water in the home.

Keeping up with the population increase is a major challenge for urban areas; maintaining current coverage levels till 2015 requires serving 700 million urban dwellers over the coming decade.

- Migration from rural to urban areas poses a major challenge for city planners; extending basic drinking water and sanitation services to periurban and slum areas to reach the poorest people is of the utmost importance to prevent outbreaks of cholera and other water-related diseases in these often overcrowded places.
- Urban drinking water coverage has remained at 95% since 1990. Urban sanitation coverage has increased by only one percentage point, from 79% to 80%.
- About 770 million and 700 million urban people gained access to improved drinking water and sanitation, respectively, during 1990–2004.



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FOREWORD

Safe drinking water, sanitation and good hygiene are fundamental to health, survival, growth and development. However, these basic necessities are still a luxury for many of the world's poor people. Over 1.1 billion of our fellow citizens do not use drinking water from improved sources, while 2.6 billion lack basic sanitation. Safe drinking water and basic sanitation are so obviously essential to health that they risk being taken for granted. Efforts to prevent death from diarrhoea or to reduce the burden of such diseases as ascariasis, dracunculiasis, hookworm, schistosomiasis and trachoma are doomed to failure unless people have access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. Lack of basic sanitation indirectly inhibits the learning abilities of millions of school-aged children who are infested with intestinal worms transmitted through inadequate sanitation facilities and poor hygiene.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have set us on a common course to push back poverty, inequality, hunger and illness. The world has pledged to reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. Entering the International Decade for Action, *Water for Life*, 2005–2015, this report looks at the challenge of meeting the MDG target for drinking water and sanitation. Achieving the MDG drinking water and sanitation target poses two major challenges: a rapid pace of urbanization, which requires a major effort even to keep up the current coverage levels; a huge backlog of rural people unserved with basic sanitation and safe drinking water, which calls for an intensive mobilization of resources to reduce the vast coverage gap between urban and rural populations.

Sub-Saharan Africa remains the area of greatest concern. It is a region of the world where, over the period 1990–2004, the number of people without access to drinking water increased by 23% and the number of people without sanitation increased by over 30%. More intensive, effective and concerted action by all stakeholders is needed if the MDG drinking water and sanitation target is to be met in this region.

We call on all countries to set realistic targets, develop achievable action plans, and allocate the financial and human resources needed to bring safe drinking water and basic sanitation to their populations, in a sustainable manner, while protecting the basic needs of poor and vulnerable people. This effort must be made, not only for humanitarian reasons, but also because it is highly cost-effective, reduces health costs enormously, and is directly related to health, equity and economic growth, which are prerequisites for poverty alleviation.





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