

# WHO Africa

Committee Background Guide

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## About this Committee

The World Health Organization (WHO) is the authority on international health within the United Nations system. Established April 7, 1948, WHO is responsible for producing health guidelines, promoting health research and helping countries address public health issues.

Along with its Member States, the agency works for the “attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health.” The organization defines health as not just the absence of physical illness, but also a state of physical, mental and social well-being.

WHO is governed by the World Health Assembly (WHA). Composed of 193 member states and two associate members, WHA meets at the WHO headquarters Geneva, Switzerland each year to set policies, programs and the annual budget for the Organization.

To overcome **global health** concerns, WHO and its Member States work with many partners around the world, including other UN agencies, donors, **non-governmental organisations (NGOs)**, WHO collaborating centres and the private sector. It also employs thousands of public health experts around the world, including doctors, epidemiologists, scientists, managers, administrators and other professionals.

## Issue Information

Although water covers 71% of the Earth's surface, only 3% of that is freshwater, of which 69% is "trapped" as ice, mainly at the North and South poles. The remaining freshwater in rivers, lakes and aquifers that humans, plants and animal species can use and consume must be carefully managed and protected to avoid irreparable depletion of the resource.

Paradoxically, although water is subject to waste and pollution, it has also long been recognised as a precious resource, and water scarcity has caused conflict since the beginning of history. Deteriorating water quality threatens the gains that have been made in improving access to drinking-water.

Access to drinking-water and to basic sanitation is measured by the MDG indicators:

- Proportion of population using an improved drinking-water source;
- Proportion of population using an improved sanitation facility.

At the current rate of progress, the world is expected to exceed the MDG target of halving the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking-water. Even so, 672 million people will still lack access to improved drinking-water sources in 2015. For monitoring purposes, the use of improved drinking-water sources has been equated to access to safe drinking-water, but not all improved sources in actual fact provide drinking-water that is safe

Although 1.3 billion people have gained access to improved sanitation since 1990, the world is likely to miss the MDG sanitation target by a billion people. At the current rate of progress, the world will miss the MDG target by 13 percentage points. Unless huge efforts are made, the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation will not be halved by 2015. Even if we meet the MDG target, there will still be 1.7 billion people without access to basic sanitation. If the trend remains as currently projected, an additional billion people who should have benefited from MDG progress will miss out, and by 2015 there will be 2.7 billion people without access to basic sanitation

The differences in the use of improved facilities, for drinking-water as well as for sanitation, between rural and urban areas remain stark around the world. In urban areas the use of **improved source of drinking-water** has been maintained at 96% since 2000, with over 1 billion more people now using such a source than in 1990. However, this increase is barely keeping up with urban population growth.

The number of people living in rural areas who do not use an improved source of drinking-water is over five times the number living in urban areas. With only 45% of the rural population using **improved sanitation**, rural areas lag far behind urban areas where the rate is 76%.

Seven out of ten people without improved sanitation live in rural areas, but the number of people in urban areas without improved sanitation is increasing because of rapid growth in urban populations.

## Water and Health

Every year, over 1.8 million people die of diarrhoeal diseases (including cholera) and 1.3 million succumb to malaria (2004 figures). Of all the deaths attributable to diarrhoeal diseases in developing countries, 90% are of children under 5 years old, vs. only 9% in developed countries.

In addition, the lack of adequate drinking-water and/or sanitation facilities, coupled with poor hygiene, imposes an extremely high disease burden on millions of children and adults through schistosomiasis, intestinal worms, hepatitis, typhoid and other diseases (see box). In turn, this severely compromises well-being and productivity and it aggravates poverty.

Sufficient and better quality drinking-water and basic sanitation, combined with good hygiene practices, can cut this toll dramatically, and simple, low-cost household water treatment has the potential to save additional lives.

If people do not have a steady supply of good-quality water that is sufficient to meet their daily needs, this can lead to disease through two principal transmission routes:

**Waterborne** disease transmission occurs by drinking contaminated water. Often, faeces are the source of contamination that causes diseases such as diarrhoea, cholera, typhoid and hepatitis.

**Water-washed** disease occurs when there is insufficient water for washing and personal hygiene. The simple act of washing hands with soap and water can reduce *Shigella* and other types of diarrhoea by up to 35%. Yet the lack of water means that people can't keep their hands, bodies and domestic environments clean: skin and eye infections then spread easily.

In addition, chemical contamination is an increasing concern in both developing countries and developed countries worldwide.

## What can be done?

Preventing disease helps to break the cycle of poverty by enhancing well-being and social and economic productivity. The world's poorest are also the most afflicted by disease, due to inadequate housing conditions, poor access to basic infrastructure and health services, and poor access to education. They are among the 884 million people without access to improved water sources and the 2.5 billion without basic sanitation (including 1.2 million with no facilities at all).

Giving these people access to improved services would go a long way towards improving their health and alleviating their poverty.

Safe water, adequate sanitation, and hygiene education are basic human rights that protect and **improve health**, and improve economic and social productivity.

Water-related leisure activities, such as sports and spas, also contribute to healthy lifestyles and longevity

Many countries' policies and programmes under- emphasise adequate financing and human resource development to sustain the existing infrastructure and to expand access to sanitation, drinking-water and hygiene services.

Financing is insufficient and the institutional capacity to absorb what is available is limited. (The GLAAS 2012 report)

The danger of slippage against the MDG target is real

## Key messages

All countries have made some form of political or financial commitment to sanitation and drinking-water since 2010, with the vast majority having established transparent WASH service provision targets.

Despite impressive global gains, most countries are falling short on meeting their own national WASH commitments, with 83% and 70% of countries reportedly falling significantly behind the trends required to meet their defined national access targets for sanitation and drinking-water, respectively.

Investments in sanitation and drinking-water are increasingly being scrutinised; while transparency is improving, accountability for results achieved remains weak.

## Africa

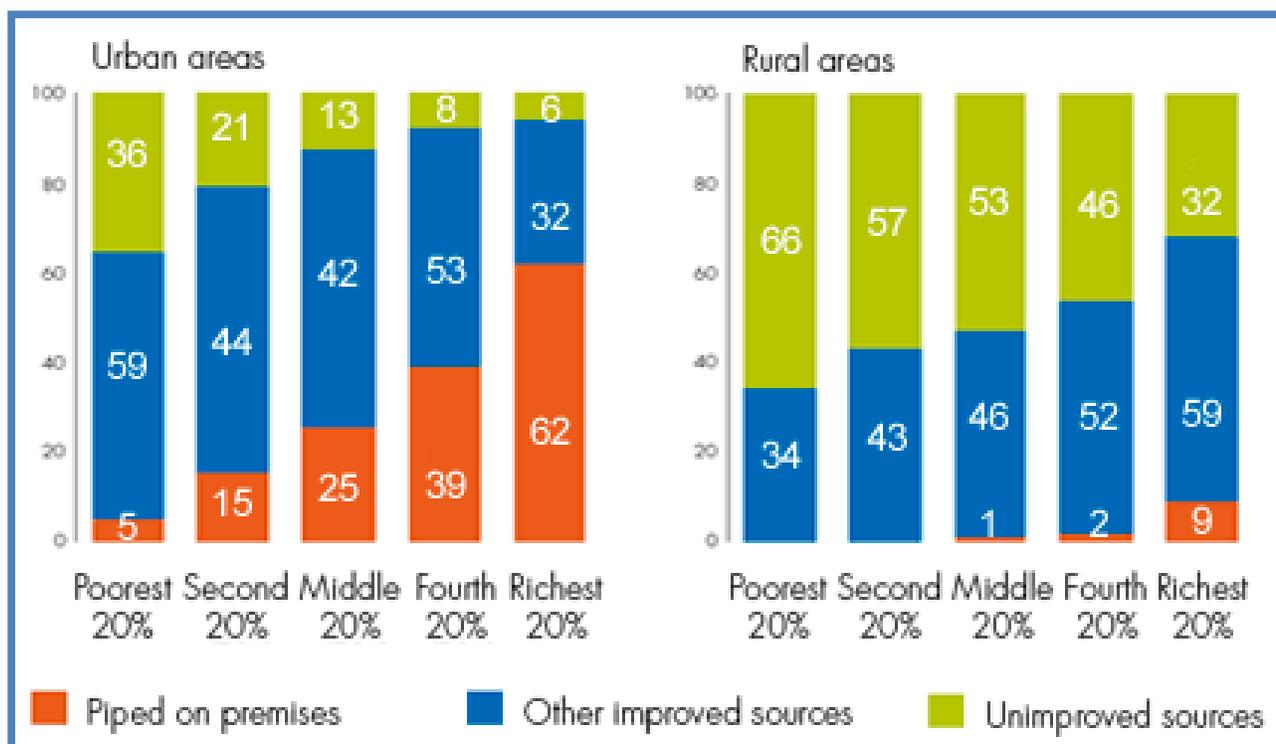
Water's crucial role in accomplishing the continent's development goals is widely recognized. Africa faces endemic poverty, food insecurity and pervasive underdevelopment, with almost all countries lacking the human, economic and institutional capacities to effectively develop and manage their water resources sustainably. Thus, a large number of countries on the continent still face huge challenges in attempting to achieve the United Nations water-related Millennium Development Goals

### Access to water

Northern Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa even though in one continent, have made different levels of progress towards the Millennium Development Goal on water. North Africa has 92% coverage and is on track to meet its 94% target before 2015. However, Sub-Saharan Africa experiences a contrasting case with 40% of the 783 million people without access to an improved source of drinking water from the region. Sub-Saharan Africa is off track from meeting the MDG on water with just 61% water coverage and with the current pace cannot reach the 75% target set for the region.

An analysis of data from 35 countries in sub-Saharan Africa (representing 84% of the region's population) shows significant differences between the poorest and richest fifths of the population in both rural and urban areas. Over 90% of the richest quintile in urban areas use improved water sources, and over 60% have piped water on premises. In rural areas, piped-in water is non-existent in the poorest 40% of households, and less than half of the population use any form of improved source of water.

Drinking water coverage by wealth quintiles, urban and rural residence, sub-Saharan Africa, based on population-weight averages from 35 countries (percentage).

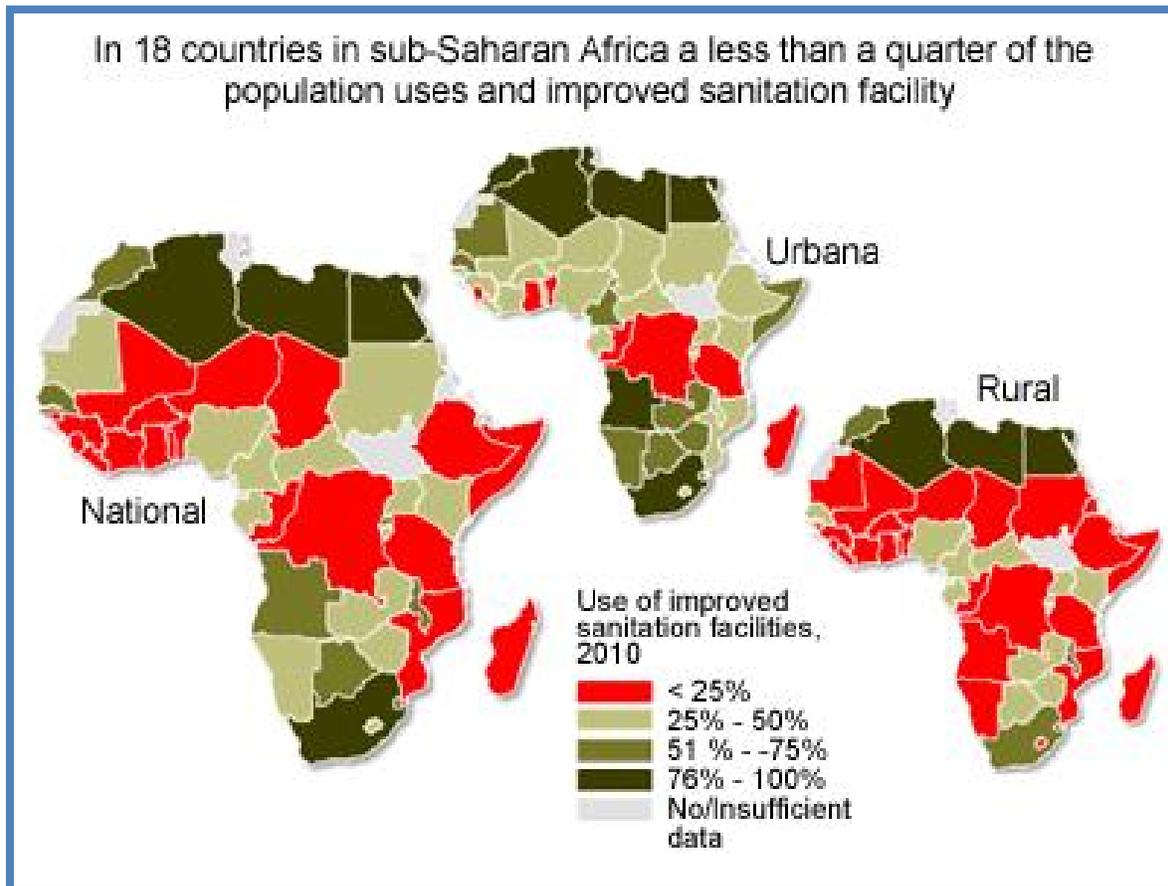


Source: [Millennium Development Goals Report 2012](#). UN, July 2012.

### Access to sanitation

Africa is one of the two major regions with the least improvement in accomplishing the MDG on sanitation by 2015. Despite the fact that **North Africa has 90% coverage**, **Sub-Saharan Africa has a startling 30% coverage** with only a 4% increase from 1990. This is a serious concern because of the associated massive health burden as many people who lack basic sanitation engage in unsanitary activities like open defecation, solid waste disposal and wastewater disposal. The practice of open defecation is the primary cause of faecal oral transmission of disease with children being the most vulnerable.

In 18 countries in sub-Saharan Africa a less than a quarter of the population uses an improved sanitation facility



Source: [A snapshot of Drinking Water and Sanitation in Africa-2012 Update](#). AMCOW, WHO/UNICEF JMP, 2012.

Africa as a whole, especially Sub-Saharan Africa despite efforts and approaches to extend and sustain water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) systems and services has led to different health complications leading to death within the region. The water and sanitation position in West/Central Africa is of particular urgency, as the region has the highest under-five mortality rate of all developing regions: 191 child deaths per 1,000 live births. Recurrent outbreaks of cholera in both urban and rural areas underline the poor state of this region's basic living conditions.

### Driving forces and pressures [read more](#)

- Population growth and rural-urban migration
- Economic development and poverty
- Challenges, risks and uncertainties
- Finance and water management
- Lack of coordination
- Varied climate and natural hazards

### Progress so far

In 2010, the share of the urban population with access to an improved water source ranged from 52% (Mauritania) to 100% (Egypt, Mauritius, Niger and Seychelles). The number of countries with at least 80% access to an improved water source in urban areas climbed from 26% in 1990 to 38% in 2010. In 2010, no country had a coverage rate of less than 50%, an improvement from four countries with less than 50% coverage in 1990. Coverage varied widely in 2010, from 7% in Somalia to 99% in Mauritius. The number of countries for which rural access was 80% or more rose from 5% in 1990 to 10% in 2010. Other good news was that the number of countries with less than 50% coverage fell from 27% to 16%.

Proportion of population using an improved sanitation facility is generally low – just 40% in 2010 and an increase of only 5 percentage points from 1990. As with improved drinking water supply, access to sanitation facilities shows a sharp contrast in urban and rural areas – in 2010, 54% and only 31%, respectively. However – again as with improved drinking water supply – urban areas actually recorded a decline in coverage from 1990's 57%, and again this can be attributed to the high proportion of slum dwellers in a fast expanding urban population. Rural areas saw slight progress, up from 25% in 1990.

In 2011, African countries reported substantive political commitments to WASH, increasing funding allocations, and leadership and coordination among implementing agencies. The majorities of countries have established transparent WASH service provision targets and have put in place supporting policies, and many monitor against these targets. Countries also confirm that the rights to water and sanitation are increasingly adopted in laws or policies.

Several countries have also committed to meeting their commitments made under other initiatives; for instance, Ethiopia has developed a plan to meet its sanitation commitment in line with the [eThekwinini Declaration](#). The [Africa Water Vision 2025](#) has been adopted by African governments, the New Partnership for Africa's Development and the African Union. This is evidence of a new focus on water and, potentially, better-targeted investment and more efficient water management.

## Did you know?

- Africa is the world's second-driest continent after Australia.
- About **66% of Africa is arid or semi-arid** and more than 300 of the 800 million people in sub-Saharan Africa live in a water-scarce environment – meaning that they have less than 1,000 m<sup>3</sup> per capita per year.
- **115 people in Africa die every hour** from diseases linked to poor sanitation, poor hygiene and contaminated water.
- **35%** of Water and Sanitation aid commitment on MDG goes to Africa with Sub-Saharan having 27% of the financial allocation.
- In Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, more than **a quarter of the population** spends more than half an hour per round trip to collect water.
- Africa's rising population is driving demand for water and accelerating the degradation of water resources. By mid-2011, Africa's **population** (excluding the northern-most states) was around 838 million and its average natural rate of increase was 2.6% per year, compared to the world average of 1.2%. By one estimate its population will grow to **1,245 million by 2025** and to **2,069 million by 2050**.
- The **urban slum** population in sub-Saharan African countries is expected to double to **400 million by 2020** if governments do not take immediate and radical action.

## UN initiatives which are helping to raise the issue...

- [Human values in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Education Programme \(HVWSHE\)](#)
- [UN-Habitat](#)
- [Lake Victoria Region Water and Sanitation Initiative](#)
- [Water and Sanitation Trust Fund \(WSTF\)](#)
- [Water for African Cities](#)
- [Water and Sanitation Program \(WSP\): Economic Sanitation Initiative-Africa](#)

## Country Profiles

- [http://www.wssinfo.org/documents-links/documents/?tx\\_displaycontroller\[type\]=country\\_files](http://www.wssinfo.org/documents-links/documents/?tx_displaycontroller[type]=country_files)
- [http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2008/9789241596435\\_eng.pdf](http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2008/9789241596435_eng.pdf)
- <http://www.wssinfo.org/>

### Questions for Research:

1. What are the key water issues for your country and region?
2. What are the key health issues for your country and region?
3. Do all people have access to safe and reliable water supplies?
4. What actions has your country taken to ensure the quantity and quality of available water supplies?
5. How is health impacted by water in your country?
6. How is an increasing population, urbanisation or migration impacting upon your country and its water supply?
7. How is your country tackling rural poverty, population pressures and dwindling water supplies?
8. How has your country implemented legislation that protects water supplies and ensures equitable access?
9. What action has your country taken to ensure the right to reliable water access on a national and international level?
10. Is the right to sanitation fully recognised in policy or law?
11. Which international agreements is your country a signatory to?
12. Will you meet the MDG targets by 2015?

## Research Links

<http://www.who.int/en/>

### Country specific research database:

[http://www.unwater.org/statistics\\_KWIP.html](http://www.unwater.org/statistics_KWIP.html)  
<http://www.who.int/gho/countries/en/index.html>  
[http://www.unwater.org/statistics\\_res.html](http://www.unwater.org/statistics_res.html)

### Africa policy documents from the UN:

<http://www.unwater.org/policyafrica.html>

### UN Organs:

<http://www.unwater.org/>  
<http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/water/>  
<http://www.unfpa.org/public/publications/pid/2400>  
<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/envIRON.shtml>  
<http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/sanitation.shtml>  
<http://www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus/mdgs/>

### Key issues:

<http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/africa.shtml>  
[Access to sanitation](#)  
[Financing water](#)  
[Gender and water](#)  
[Human right to water](#)  
[Integrated Water Resources Management](#)  
[Transboundary waters](#)  
[Water and cities](#)  
[Water and food security](#)  
[Water and the Green Economy](#)  
[Water cooperation](#)  
[Water quality](#)  
[Water scarcity](#)

### Member States Reports:

All UN documents and agreements <http://www.unwater.org/documents.html>

[CSD meeting in Johannesburg.](#)

[MDG progress report,](#)

[GLAAS report](#)

[JMP report](#)

[UN World Water Development Report.](#)

[2012 MDG Report](#)

UNDESA report [Status of Implementation of CSD-13 Policy Actions on Water and Sanitation](#)

The WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme ([JMP](#))

UN-Water Global Annual Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water ([GLAAS](#))

The [AQUASTAT](#) global information system at

The UN Water World Water Development Report ([WWDR](#))

This [water country briefs](#) offer a selection of data to better visualise the critical importance of “investments in water” for human and economic development.

### Multimedia

[Gender Mainstreaming in Water and Sanitation in African Cities](#)  
[Action for Access: Catapulting the sanitation and water sector to meet the MDGs](#)  
[Unheard Voices of Poor Urban Women \(Water and Sanitation\)](#)

