

WASH

WATER SUPPLY, SANITATION AND HYGIENE

Human rights that are crucial to health and development

JMP



unicef



Photo: Katherine Anderson/WSSCC.

SOME COUNTRIES LOSE AS MUCH AS 7% of GDP BECAUSE OF INADEQUATE SANITATION

“Water holds the key to sustainable development.”

United Nations
Secretary-General,
Ban Ki-moon, March 2013

Why WASH?

Water, sanitation and hygiene – WASH – are among the most basic human needs.

WASH is essential to **good health** – the leading medical journal, The Lancet, cites access to sanitation as one of the key social determinants of health, and one that should be part of any post-2015 agenda.

Improvements to WASH represent a **good economic investment**. Some countries lose as much as 7% of GDP because of inadequate sanitation.

Improving WASH is a key way to **reduce inequalities** – data from the World Health Organization and UNICEF, among others, indicate that it is the poorest, the young and the elderly, excluded groups and women and girls who suffer most from poor WASH services.

Better WASH means **higher levels of school achievement** and **greater productivity**. Children learn more when they are not missing school because of diarrhoeal disease and workers are more productive when they are not sick, or kept home caring for others who are.

WASH is also closely linked with **dignity**, and in 2010 the UN General Assembly recognized WASH as a **basic human right**, a decision echoed by the Human Rights Council later that year.

Unmet targets

Yet millions of people lack access to these basic services.

Worldwide, 2.5 billion people lack sanitation. Around 1 billion people practice open defecation. The world is far from achieving the MDG target – to halve by 2015, the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation.

In 2012, the Joint Monitoring Programme of the World Health Organization and UNICEF (JMP) declared that the MDG target to reduce, by half, the number of people without access to safe drinking water had been reached, but sounded a note of caution because of the limitations of monitoring water quality, and noted that around 800 million people worldwide still lacked access to an improved drinking water source.

The MDG targets remain valid. In 2011, the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon called for a doubling of efforts to achieve the target on sanitation. In particular, he called for an end to open defecation.

However, the MDG targets have not been completely met, and at best only aimed to reduce by half the population without access, leaving large numbers of people unserved.

In response to both these considerations, technical experts have considered what targets should be set for WASH under the post-2015 global development agenda.

What should we aim for?

A two-year consultative process, involving over 200 individuals and over 100 leading organizations in the sector, has resulted in the development of four proposed targets which are ambitious yet considered by leaders in the field to be achievable.

- **No one** practices open defecation
- **Everyone** has safe water, sanitation and hygiene at home
- **All schools and health centres** have water, sanitation and hygiene
- Water, sanitation and hygiene are **sustainable** and **inequalities have been progressively eliminated**.

“Access to water and sanitation can lead to a life in dignity for all.”

Jan Eliasson,
United Nations Deputy
Secretary-General,
March 2013

2.5
billion
PEOPLE LACK
SANITATION

Photo: Katherine Anderson/WSSCC.

How will we measure success?

The technical consultation that proposed these targets has also yielded a set of detailed targets and indicators against which progress could be monitored. Each indicator has been judged by experts in the field to be both valid and measurable.

Suggested indicators include:

- The percentage of population using adequate sanitation
- The percentage of households with soap and water at a handwashing facility
- The percentage of primary and secondary schools with safe drinking water, separate toilets for boys and girls, and provisions for menstrual hygiene management and washing hands with water and soap
- The progressive reduction of inequalities between disadvantaged groups and the general population.

More detail on the proposed targets and indicators, and the consultative process that produced them can be found at www.wssinfo.org

Ambitious targets are achievable

While much remains to be done, there are many factors in place that indicate that WASH for everyone can be a reality. First among these is the extent to which individuals and communities can and are improving their own situation. Community-led approaches, where whole villages or schools decide to end the practice of open defecation, have proved effective in changing behaviour in a way that simply building toilets never was.

Governments in the countries where WASH needs are greatest are making solid commitments, at events such as the Sanitation and Water for All High Level Meetings, and are directing resources to WASH. The United Nations has recognized the human rights to water and sanitation, and both the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, and Deputy Secretary-General, Jan Eliasson, have called for sanitation to be placed at the heart of the development discourse.

WASH in the post-2015 development agenda

No matter what shape the post-2015 development agenda takes, drinking water, sanitation and hygiene must be a high priority. A focus on WASH is consistent with a human rights approach, with efforts to reduce inequality and with poverty reduction. Lack of access to WASH affects disadvantaged populations in all countries, rich and poor, and is an indicator of inequality in middle-income countries. Through a focus on WASH, improvements in health, education and nutrition are accelerated and their sustainability reinforced. When considering broader water issues, including wastewater treatment and water resources management, improvements to WASH are a natural addition.

The WASH sector has developed targets and indicators that build on existing indicators and mechanisms, in order to ensure continuity in global monitoring. They are a resource to be used by anyone involved in defining the post-2015 development agenda. Irrespective of the framework adopted, these ambitious yet realistic targets have the capacity to guide the way towards better water, sanitation and hygiene for all people, and in doing so will help reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development.

