

Reducing Water Pollution and Ensuring Access to Clean Water

Topic Background

Water scarcity has implications on the health and wellbeing of all citizens around the globe, even those who do not live in water-scarce nations. Around 1.1 billion people around the world have limited access to clean, purified water, whereas 2.4 billion people do not have access to any water sanitation facility.¹ Water is poorly managed, wasted and polluted, and the uneven distribution of this basic necessity proves to be a big problem in the international community. The Food and Agricultural Organization has estimated that by 2025, 800 million people will be living in countries or regions with absolute water scarcity, and two-thirds of the world population could be under stress conditions.² In order to provide clean, fresh water, it is necessary for water resources to be easily affordable and available. If water is not adequately purified and distributed, individuals will be prone to diseases and illnesses.

The African region has experienced many difficulties in attaining the goal of water sanitation, due to poor coordination, lack of resources, and misappropriated funding. Nigeria is one of the nations considered by WHO and UNICEF as “off-track” with respect to the UN Millennium Development Goal 7, which calls for environmental sustainability, with one of its parts relating to making water safe and accessible. With over 110 projects currently in place, it is imperative for the international community to ensure these plans are carried out successfully to eradicate the poor sanitation of water.³

India is one nation which requires more time to improve its water quality, and the pollution of water is evident due to contamination by sewage and agricultural runoff.⁴ Disease is prevalent, due to the lack of attention toward the distribution of clean water. UNICEF is supporting India by researching water testing technology as well as other solutions to fixing contamination in order to promote better water purification methods.

Meanwhile, in Brazil, efforts to purify and distribute water evenly are progressing quickly. Between 1990 and 2012, the access to water improved from 68 to 79 percent⁵, however, the slum areas in Brazil continue to live daily without an adequate distribution of clean water. Due to poor sanitation in these areas, disease spreads rapidly, however Brazil is working towards improving

¹ “Water supply, sanitation and hygiene development.” World Health Organization. http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/hygiene/en/

² “Hot issues: water scarcity.” Food and Agricultural Organization. <http://www.fao.org/nr/water/issues/scarcity.html>

³ Ukuedojor, Magdalene. “Nigeria: Adequate Drinking Water Still a Tall Dream in Nigeria.” allAfrica. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201301070680.html>

⁴ “India.” Water.org. <http://water.org/country/india/>

⁵ “WHO / UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for Water Supply and Sanitation.” WHO-UNICEF. <http://www.wssinfo.org/about-the-jmp/introduction/>

water quality by providing both short-term solutions such as water filters, as well as long-term solutions such as improving pipelines and investing in rainwater collection.

Past International Action

The UN Millennium Development Goal 7 calls for ensuring environmental sustainability by the year 2015, by responding to climate change, protecting endangered species, developing clean energy, and increasing sanitation.⁶ The United Nations predicts the number of people with access to purified drinking water was 6.1 billion in 2010, up by 2 billion since 1990.⁷ Millennium Development Goal 7 is in progress by the UN and supporting organizations, which are working toward building wells, improving pipes and access to water, and funding technology to purify water. Many developing nations are not on track with respect to this goal, and must gain support from the international community in order to obtain and use the proper resources.

UN Water is a United Nations body that addresses water-related movements to contribute to the achievement of the UN Millennium Development goals.⁸ UN Water is responsible for collecting information about water sanitation measures in various regions, compiling reports to inform others on measures that can be taken to preserve and purify water, maintaining ad hoc task forces, and planning World Day for Water to raise awareness regarding water sanitation.

Charity Water is a non-governmental organization (NGO) dedicated to ensuring clean, safe drinking water to individuals in developing countries by collecting and allocating funds to build wells, as well as distributing water purification technologies to sanitize water before it is used. By expanding upon partnerships and donors, Charity Water has raised enough money to develop many solutions to poor water sanitation and collection. By funding rainwater catchments, filters, and wells, this organization has furthered progress with MDG 7.

Possible Solutions

One of the UN's biggest responsibilities is to take care of environmental matters and natural resources. In this case, it must come up with effective water policies and strategies in order to achieve universal access to water and all that comes with it. Since water is essential to all life, the topic at hand is not at all contentious. No one disagrees that cooperation will be necessary in order for everyone to benefit from water. Therefore it is just a matter of different countries sharing their ideas with the committee.

The most important question to consider when brainstorming solutions is whether countries have the means to implement necessary improvements and invest in new sources of water supply. Of course, developing countries have limited ability, and they are the ones who suffer most from lack of access to water. This means the biggest obstacle to overcome in ensuring access to water will be figuring out new ways to access enough funding to start projects and allow them to

⁶ "Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability." United Nations Millennium Development Goals. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/enviro.html>

⁷ Wijesekera, Sanjay. "MDG drinking water target being met is cause for celebration." The Guardian. March 6, 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters/2012/mar/06/mdg-drinking-water-target-met>

⁸ "Terms of Reference." UN Water. <http://www.unwater.org/downloads/UNW-terms-of-reference.pdf>

continue. This means also that the body must contemplate ways to encourage developed countries to participate in international agreements and offer their assistance. Beyond funding, the UN has a role in helping countries establish internal policies to regulate water use and enable sustainable management of water resources. Thus the committee should consider ways to strengthen institutions and laws for managing water at the national level. For such efforts to work, it will be important to assist the local level (the level at which water is actually used) especially.

Another major challenge the committee must address is how to integrate efforts. This will require the UN to find a way to involve all stakeholders in the process of making water decisions, so that negotiations can be open and transparent in order to build trust and enhance cooperation. Also, the UN should help smaller, less experienced countries increase their negotiation skills because it will help prevent conflict. On the same note, the committee should consider how to establish a database with relevant data as mentioned in the background section. This would also lead to significant improvement in negotiations and trust because it would allow countries to make decisions based on the same knowledge of the situation.

Finally, it is very important for the committee to consider community initiatives and cooperation with local governments. Community initiatives created in cooperation with local governments are important because small, isolated projects are largely unsuccessful in starting and maintaining national progress. Often, the energy and innovation of community-led actions can increase the government's ability to provide the needed change.

As we have seen, water is a highly important resource. It keeps us healthy and nourished, and has the power to create either conflict or peace. As such, it is quite literally a matter of life and death. This is why it is so important for the UN to figure out ways to cooperate so that all people everywhere can live in health and peace. Without more cooperation, millions of people will continue to die, and wars will continue to break out, disrupting not only countries' stability and citizens' lives but disrupting efforts to develop as well.

Further Research

Guiding Questions

1. What measures has your nation taken to improve water access?
2. What are the primary methods that citizens of your nation use to purify water?
3. How can developing nations with limited resources provide their citizens with clean water?

Research Sources

- [Food and Agricultural Organization on Water Scarcity](#)
- [World Water Council: How do we Ensure Clean Drinking Water for All?](#)
- [World Health Organization on Water Sanitation and Health](#)
- [UN Water](#)
- [UN Water Terms of Reference](#)
- [Charity Water](#)
- [Sanitation and Water for All](#)

Questions:

1. About how many people do not have access to clean drinking water? How many people do not have access to water sanitation facilities?
2. What event does UN Water organize to raise awareness about water sanitation?
3. By 2025, how many people will be living in countries or regions with absolute water scarcity?
4. From 1990 to 2010, how many more people have gained access to clean drinking water?
5. Which is one NGO which has helped to improve access to clean drinking water around the world?

Answers:

1. 1.1 billion; 2.4 billion
2. World Day for Water
3. 800 million
4. 2 billion
5. Charity Water