

Where Does the Asia and Pacific Region Stand in Achieving Water-Related Millennium Development Goals?

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I'm very pleased to be back here again today, and I do commend ADB for its strong commitment to the achievements of the MDGs in the region. Just two weeks ago I was here to support a joint study of ADB, the World Bank and JBIC on infrastructure for poverty reduction, and the fact is, my very first visit abroad as the MDGs Ambassador last September was to meet the ADB working group on MDGs here. It is most encouraging that these working sessions of the Water Week put the sense of urgency to an important MDG target: to halve the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation.

We all know that the MDGs emerged from the 2000 Millennium Summit Declaration calling for a fully inclusive, people-centred and rights-based approach to development, which was adopted by 189 UN Member States. My role as UN Ambassador is to help bring the MDGs at the centre of the regional and national development agenda and to galvanise action from all stakeholders to realize them. It is valuable to take a regional perspective, because despite the inherent diversity, there is a great number of common issues which connect countries in this region. A regional perspective also offers suggestions on how countries across the region can cooperate and learn from each other.

It is common knowledge that water is essential to all life. Yet, one in three Asians lacks access to safe drinking water, and half the people living in Asia and the Pacific do not have access to adequate sanitation. Among the existing regional characteristics that impact on this situation is the dynamic growth that is partially driven by industry. Therefore, besides the fact that there is growth in industrial water use, there is also more competition between sectors for water, as well as growth of industry-based pollutants. Consequently, pollutants are increasingly likely to be more toxic. Although rapid industrial development in the region has brought many benefits, it has also put the environment under increasing strain. As a result, living conditions in some parts of the region are becoming increasingly hazardous.

Another regional characteristic is the expanding economies: Asia and the Pacific has the highest economic growth of any region and therefore all the above industrialisation impacts are intensified here. Economic growth, while achieving significant reductions in poverty, has been accompanied by an increase in inequality within and among nations in the region. Population is growing (3 out of the 4 most populous countries are in Asia Pacific) and migrating to where the work is: urban cities, resulting in urbanisation and increasing the affluent middle-class. Again, this causes an increase in consumption of water. Then there is the phenomenon of the multiplying mega cities. The water table gets lower because of the overuse of ground water. Urbanisation and increasing concreting of cities means that ground water in many places cannot recharge.

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The general trend of climate change in Asia and the Pacific is more frequent El Nino's, more floods, and changing monsoons patterns. The changes of rainfall patterns continue to affect irrigation, food and income poverty amongst other things. The more direct impacts of climate change on fresh water sources are still poorly understood. Fundamental altering of the water cycle's ecology would have a devastating impact on freshwater sources. Water-related problems could be the most serious climate change issue in Asia.

Water as an MDG Target

The Millennium Development Goals stand apart from other international targets because of their synergy and interdependence. Progress on one of the Goals brings us closer to progress on others. The water and sanitation targets are so inextricably linked with other facets of human development that prioritising them automatically induces progress on a range of other fronts. As an illustration of this fact it would be useful to consider these linkages:

The target on water and sanitation officially resides in Goal 7 (Environment) for ensuring environmental sustainability. Water is also essential for sustaining the biodiversity of all the world's ecosystems. The key to the sustainable provision of water for life is the maintenance and protection of the ecological integrity of all ecosystems, and rehabilitation of degraded ecosystems. As women are most affected by water insecurity, they should play a central role in the management of water resources. Further, sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation for the urban poor should always be integrated to all urban slums upgrading programs, besides ensuring secure tenure for slum dwellers.

One-fifth of the world's population live in extreme poverty while 800 million people are chronically hungry, which is the primary concern of the MDG Goal 1 (Poverty). Again, women disproportionately suffer the burden of poverty. Sufficient clean drinking water and adequate water for other household, agriculture and economic activities can be instrumental in eradicating poverty and hunger. Urban and rural poor are buying more expensive water than the affluent people. Provision and pricing of water, therefore, need to give greater weight to increasing access instead of fiscal gain. Water is a basic human right, not a commercial commodity.

Lack of water and sanitation services discourages qualified teachers from working in poor villages. Queues for water almost always consist of women or girls. These time-taking activities prevent women from engaging in productive work and keep girls from attending schools. Expanding access to water and sanitation is fundamental to female empowerment and parity in education. Two goals, Goal 2 (Education), and Goal 3 (Gender) express the MDGs determination and interlinked efforts in overcoming them. Goal 3 also aim to measure progress towards ensuring that more women become literate, have more voice and representation in public policy and decision making, and have improved job prospects.

More than 3 million deaths are caused each year by water-borne diseases and inadequate sanitation. Diseases such as diarrhoea and dengue fever are among the leading killers of children under five. Carrying heavy loads of water and improper sanitation also hurts poor women's health: they become less fit to bear children and face greater risk of pregnancy complications. Realising Goals 4, 5 and 6 (reduce infant & maternal mortalities,

and combat diseases) critically depends on increased access to clean water and proper sanitation.

If poor countries are to have any chance of realising these first seven Goals, rich countries must deliver - well in advance of 2015 - on their commitments as expressed in Goal 8 (Global Partnership for Development). In this goal, developed countries commit to increase the quantity of and improve quality of aid, deliver more meaningful debt relief and expand access to trade and technology for developing countries, who pledged to strengthen governance, institutions and policies, as their shared role to eradicate poverty worldwide.

Where Does the Asia and Pacific Region Stand in Achieving Water-Related MDGs?

UNDP-ESCAP collaborated last year to prepare the first ever Regional MDG Report in Asia and the Pacific. It provides a valuable Asia Pacific regional perspective on MDGs and basis for further action, especially to assist the countries to cooperate and learn from each other. It shares the region's "success story" on swiftly reducing mass poverty: 244 million people out of poverty during the 1990s. It also shows disturbingly slow progress in others.

Looking at the region as a whole reveals considerable differences in achievements among different countries. This is not surprising across such a diverse region. Each of these countries is following its own distinctive human development path, and each has its own opportunities and challenges. Nations in Asia Pacific range from highly developed, to middle-income or approaching middle income, as well as 13 LDCs. A few nations in this region will meet goals and surpass them. A few will not. However, the majority are in between: they will meet some goals and not others.

The target by 2015, which is to halve the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water from the year 2000, is described by the UNDP-ESCAP Report so far as "Modest", and the likelihood of achieving the target as "Unlikely", basing on current projections. If progress does not accelerate or decelerate, when will the AP region reach the Water target? According the Report, to current estimates, the World as a whole will achieve it between 2000-15, South Asia between 2000-15, and in E Asia & Pacific between 2015-2020.

In 1990, the percentage of population in South Asia with sustainable access to improved water source was 66% in rural areas and 90% in urban areas. In 2000, this was improved to 81% in rural areas and 95% in urban areas. It can be said that there is a significant improvement in both access and reducing inequality between rural and urban areas. For East Asia and the Pacific, there is no data available as to the situation in 1990, but in 2000, the percentage of population with sustainable access to improved water source was 67% in rural areas and 90% in urban areas. Obviously there remains a significant inequality between rural and urban areas.

Irrigation uses vast quantities of water: the great majority of water use is for irrigation, rather than industrial or domestic consumption. This is even more so in AP because of the dependence on rice, which has a very water-intensive cultivation process. The technology used for irrigation is a major issue in Asia: dams & mega-dams continuously raise social and environmental issues. More sustainable irrigation technologies and more integrated water

resources management, are still not gaining the sufficient political and financial support needed to address these problems.

Between 1990 and 2000 about 900 million people worldwide had obtained access to improved water sources. These gains were just sufficient to keep pace with the population growth. More people have access to safe water compared to 10 years ago, but in 2000 1.2 billion people still lack access to an improved water source. 40 percent of these people are in East Asia and Pacific. Meeting the MDGs will require providing about 1.5 billion people with access to safe water and 2 billion with access to basic sanitation facilities between 2000 and 2015.

Many people in AP suffer immediate health hazards from unclean water, which is polluted by industry, agriculture or human waste. The most severe problems are in the rural areas, where millions of people lack water from protected sources. For Asia as a whole, the urban water supply coverage is 93 per cent but rural coverage is only 75 per cent. Some of the worst problems are in the rural areas of Afghanistan, Mongolia, Cambodia, the Laos People's Democratic Republic and in some Pacific islands. It should be noted that there has been some progress: in India rural coverage went up between 1990 and 2000 from 61 to 79 per cent, and in Nepal over the same period it went from 64 to 87 per cent. But overall it seems likely, based on present trends, that the region will miss the target.

In achieving the water target in the Pacific, in addition to pollution problems, many parts of the region also lack adequate water supplies. Coverage of clean water is only 25 per cent in the rural areas of Kiribati and 43 per cent in urban areas of Fiji. There are also many environmental problems. Most countries have problems of urban waste disposal. Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands face widespread deforestation. Extensive cultivation has led to soil erosion in Fiji. Virtually all of Nauru has been excavated for phosphate mining. One of the greatest environmental threats comes from outside the region in the form of global warming, with rising sea levels in a number of these States including the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Samoa and Tuvalu. In North and Central Asia, environmental degradation is also an issue of great concern in these countries: the shrinking of the Aral Sea is one of the most dramatic examples, but industrial development generally has taken a heavy environmental toll.

As a final note in the context of achieving the MDGs, the peace and security aspect cannot be overlooked: relationship between conflict & water scarcity can be cyclical. Hardships, especially when accompanied by sharp inequalities, can breed violence and the distribution of scarce water resources is itself regarded as a potential cause of war. Conflicts often directly and indirectly weaken achievement of the water target, as well as the whole MDGs in general. Conflict undermines economies, destabilises governments, provokes mass movements of people, and destroys infrastructure. Many countries in the Asia Pacific region are experiencing or recovering from violent conflict. Those determined to achieve the MDGs for water and sanitation should align our efforts with those working for peaceful conflict resolution throughout the world.

Constraints faced in promoting the MDGs

The *Millennium Declaration's* promise to ensure that “globalization becomes a positive force for all the world’s people” remains unfulfilled. Take the stark disparity of water use. People in rich nations on average consume 400 to 500 litres a day compared to 20 liters in poor countries. Over the years global demand for water will grow, more lives will be lost, more diseases will spread and the development of poor countries will continue to stagger. Inequalities and powerlessness result when water is controlled by a few to the exclusion of many.

The water and sanitation targets are indeed a critical entry point for the development community to accelerate progress on the all MDGs, but ironically domestic and international funding for water and sanitation has fallen in recent years. At current trajectory, if we carry on in a “business as usual” mode, the goals will not be achieved even by 2015, which many of us even thought was still too far away.

The mere fact that poverty, health, education, gender and environment became the millennium goals are usually caused by lack of political and resource commitments to achieve them as a whole. In many countries the policy framework is not yet aligned with the MDGs and the fundamental objective of reducing human poverty. Poverty reduction is still seen as an automatic by-product of economic growth and macroeconomic stability. Governments and their partners still find it difficult to translate the concept of ‘pro-poor policies’ into specific and practical policy measures. Equity continues to be the big absentee in most anti-poverty strategies.

While macroeconomic stability improved and many economic distortions were removed, no strong evidence emerged as to whether the poor saw their income increase and their job opportunities improve. It proved difficult to come up with practical policies to achieve not just growth, but equitable growth. Concrete measures were usually missing to transmit the benefits of policy reforms to the poor. Yet, pro-poor growth is quite possible, as has been shown by the case of the Republic of Korea. Initial conditions of equity – through successful land reform and a deliberate education policy – do matter a great deal for reducing poverty in a sustainable manner.

“No Excuses”, the Millennium Campaign

What is keeping the world from achieving the Goals is not the lack of finances or technical capability, it is the political obstacles or the lack of political will. This is not news. What is news is that there is now an explicit recognition of this fact in the UN System at the highest levels and this is symbolised in the conception of the Millennium Campaign. The explicit object of the Campaign is to encourage and facilitate “we, the people..” at the national and international level to hold their governments and other key actors to account for their promises in the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Goals.

So national level campaigning on the Millennium Goals is starting to form the backbone of the international campaigning. The nationalised approach also allows for the Goals’ targets - and the strategies to be used to achieve the Goals - to be defined and adapted to the local context. Many countries like Vietnam have decided to set their national Millennium Goals’ targets much higher than the global ones. Latin American countries have set themselves the Goal of universal secondary education, rather than the global Goal 2 of

universal primary education. The first sparks of national-level Campaigning are visible in Italy, El Salvador, Philippines, Kenya, Albania and Cambodia, to name a few countries.

In developing countries, the focus is on the rights of poor people to realize the Goals: are the appropriate policies in place; are institutions responsive to the legitimate aspirations of women, the poor and marginalized people; is there adequate public accountability and transparency in budgeting processes? But for the Millennium Campaign it was clear from the outset that the credibility of the global Campaign hinges on creating pressure on the achievement of Goal 8 in rich countries, in the first instance. Initial focus has been on Europe. The Campaign has tried to make Goal 8, which had been left delightfully vague, much more specific on aid, trade, debt and technology transfer. National MDG performance monitoring reports need to be published not only in the South, but also in rich countries, albeit currently on a voluntary basis. What is interesting is that in all cases, it's existing Campaigns and Campaigners who are using the Millennium Goals to power their own advocacy and campaigning work on different yet very relevant causes.

The way forward

Reducing income poverty is not just dependent on a better investment climate and more vibrant markets, it also depends on the availability of a healthy and well-educated workforce, and open information flows supporting creativity and entrepreneurship. Improvements to health are as dependent on better housing and environmental conditions and a better-educated population as they are on improved medical and clinical services. Countries have to ensure that women as well as men are empowered to take advantage of the opportunities offered by development.

Alignment of PRSP and MDGs in many countries are on the right track. But by itself, participation does not guarantee pro-poor outcomes. Even though MDGs do not expressly refer to civic participation in decision-making or the role of civil and political freedoms, but these are important elements of the Millennium Declaration. The Campaign advocates a rights-based approach, with inclusive decision-making, involving women, the poor and the marginalized. The path to achieve the goals has to be paved: by access to information; access to participation in planning, monitoring and evaluating; and access to means of making governments accountable. That is to say, participation is more than voicing hardships. Genuine participation is a political process of representation and negotiation.

All stakeholders need to support national policy and regulatory frameworks for integrated water resource management to improve water service delivery mechanisms through a more participatory approach at all levels of society. And though sustainable water governance that encourages capacity development, sound policy frameworks and a strong focus on community-based activities is essential, it is also critical to significantly increase financing to water and sanitation services. Spending on water infrastructure in developing countries will definitely have to increase from current levels. This is where Goal 8 on global partnership for development, which commits rich countries to deliver additional and more effective aid is very important. The sooner we see a major increase in aid, the better chance there is for all countries to achieve the MDGs, especially in aiming to reach the water target.

Having said that, I also need to share my own believe, that foreign aid should not be the only or even the main source for developing countries in achieving our own Development Goals. The bulk of extra investments in basic services, and the funding of anti-poverty programs will have to come from domestic resources. Better governance and reallocation of our budgets should enable us to meet the MDGs, which some even called the Minimum Development Goals. Even if financial resources are reallocated equitably, participatory mechanisms are needed for more effective implementation so that public services are managed with a sense of accountability and belonging to communities. Decentralisation and locally elected representation can be made more accountable, and implementing the subsidiarity principle will make the local achievements of MDGs more effective. The MDGs campaign can promote good governance through locally driven processes and ownerships.

Conclusion

Water is everybody's business. All of us, participants of this conference have an important role to play. All stakeholders have programs, information policies and all kinds of resources to contribute. The key is to continue to work together, to build synergy in facing this huge challenge of achieving the MDGs targets, especially the accessibility of safe drinking water and basic sanitation. But it's not impossible to meet this challenge.

Today's world has the resources, technology and knowledge to provide more equitable access to safe water and sanitation. It's about wiser government budget spending and better governance in public management of water and sanitation services. It's also about everybody's participation in sustainable water resource management and global solidarity in restoration of degraded eco-systems.

We have no excuses.

Jakarta, January 23, 2004