



ASIA WATER WATCH 2015

Are Countries in Asia on Track to Meet Target 10 of the Millennium Development Goals?

A Summary of the Joint Report by ADB, UNESCAP, UNDP, and WHO

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) reflect the global community's commitment to reduce poverty over the next decade, a period designated by the United Nations as the Decade of Water for Life.

One of the targets for Goal 7—Target 10—identifies access to adequate and safe water and improved sanitation as fundamental to poverty reduction. Target 10 calls for halving, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), and World Health Organization (WHO) assessed the progress toward Target 10 in the Asia and Pacific region in a report dubbed "Asia Water Watch 2015."

Progress in Asia and the Pacific

Great progress has been made in many countries in Asia and the Pacific but much still remains to be done if the MDG target is to be met.

In 2002, around 3.16 billion people—82% of the population—in the Asia and Pacific region had access to improved water supplies, up from 74% in 1990. The most dramatic improvement was in urban water supply coverage, where 368 million people had gained access to improved drinking water, an increase of 35% of the total urban population of the region since 1990.

Formidable challenges remain in Asia and the Pacific. In 2002, approximately 669 million people in the region were still without access to safe drinking water. Aggregate figures also mask dramatic

disparities between the subregions, between nations within subregions, and even between different parts of individual countries.

The story for sanitation is less satisfactory. Coverage for improved sanitation in the region lags behind the rate needed to attain the MDG target. As of 2002, less than half the population of the region had access to improved sanitation facilities. Of the 2.6 billion people in the world without access to improved sanitation facilities, 2 billion are in the Asia and Pacific region.

Prospects to 2015

Important insights on where to focus efforts in the water sector can be gleaned from existing trends.

The "big two," People's Republic of China (PRC) and India, are both making tremendous progress.

India is in an enviable position of likely meeting Target 10 for both water supply and sanitation indicators in both urban and rural areas, according to data reporting and trends analysis.

In PRC, the urban and rural water supply target and the rural sanitation target, on the other hand, will likely be achieved if present growth rates are maintained. On the other hand, PRC is facing greater challenges and is less likely to meet the urban sanitation indicator.

A number of other countries, including Micronesia and Tuvalu, are also expected to meet the water supply indicator ahead of schedule. Several other countries, including Maldives, some Pacific nations, and the Philippines, are struggling to meet the water supply target unless significant improvements are made to existing trends.



How Much Will it Cost?

Just what would be the cost of meeting the MDG target for water supply and sanitation in the Asia and Pacific region?

The new publication suggests that achieving Target 10 would cost around US\$8 billion annually in the region. Although a significant sum, this is far less than corresponding figures quoted elsewhere. The key message from this is clear: for Asia and the Pacific as a whole, achieving Target 10 is affordable. The key is how to stimulate investments from as wide a range of sources as possible, including consumers themselves and the private sector, governments, and the international community.

Defining the Challenges: Where Change is Needed

In defining the trajectory of and priorities for change, decision makers need to address a range of issues in four core areas:

- **Policy, legal, and regulatory reform.** Reforms should ensure a supportive environment for sustained efforts in the sector and

should clearly define the roles, rights, and responsibilities of all stakeholders.

- **Planning and technology choices.** The range of technology and management choices must be broadened to include innovative, low-cost technical choices that can be implemented by poor communities.
- **Financing mechanisms.** Investment environments (especially ones that encourage small private sector investments) and effective cost-recovery mechanisms should be made accessible.
- **Institutional reform.** Reforms should include capacity building, introduction of more appropriate management systems, and more effective institutional coordination between, in particular, government agencies. There is also the need to build better links between government, the private sector, and civil society, including community-level organizations.

Conclusion

Water is crucial to life and all forms of social, economic, and environmental development. Safe water and sanitation is a prerequisite for achieving the MDGs and sustaining good health and quality of life. The recent report of the UN Task Force on Water and Sanitation summarizes the multiple character of the relationship between water and the MDGs as a whole:

“Improving water resources management and development is also a critical factor for meeting the broader set of goals—eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combating major diseases; and improving environmental sustainability.”

This leads to one crucial conclusion. Countries should strive to achieve Target 10 early—and substantially by 2010—to attain many of the other MDG targets.

For a full version of the report in portable document format (PDF), visit www.adb.org/water. To order hard copies, e-mail water@adb.org.

