

Forum: Human Rights Committee

Issue: Providing access to potable water and sanitation in Sub-Saharan Africa

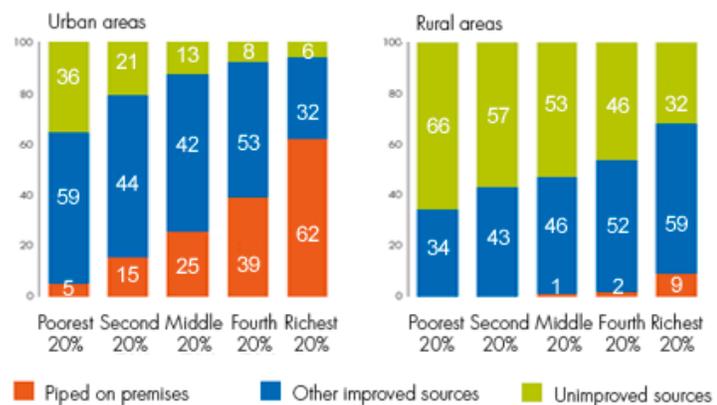
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Introduction

Access to potable water and sanitation in Sub-Saharan Africa has been a major issue tackled by the United Nations for decades. The United Nations has commenced various programs with the support of the NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) and has steadily developed the situation in Sub-Saharan Africa within the past 15 years. However, what has been done so far is not enough to put an end to this issue and to ensure the access to potable water and sanitation in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Sub-Saharan Africa covers a major part of the continent of Africa and there is a huge gap in access to sanitary water among different countries of Africa, as it can be seen from the table that illustrates the average drinking water coverage distribution of the 35 countries taken from Millennium Development Goals Report 2012 (“Picture 1: Tables of average potable water coverage in 35 countries”). Despite the progress of



Picture 1: Tables of average potable water coverage in 35 countries

dealing with this issue, more than 40% of the world’s population is affected by scarcity of potable water and sanitation, most severely affected region being Sub-Saharan. According to the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program (JMP) 2015 Report approximately 319,000,000 (319 million) people in the Sub-Saharan region do not have access to drinkable water. According to the same report, similar to the numbers in access to drinkable water, people who lack access to sanitation live primarily in Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America. Among these regions, Sub-Saharan Africa has the second highest number of people who do not have access to sanitation with 695,000,000 (695 million) people lacking access to sanitation.

In spite of the measures taken by the Member States and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), the ongoing presence of this issue illustrates the need for careful consideration and elaborate action-taking

planning. In order to provide access to potable water and sanitation in Sub-Saharan Africa the various aspects of the issue should be realized and solutions covering the broad aspects of this issue should be created.

Definition of Key Terms

Sanitation: According to the World Health Organization (WHO), sanitation generally refers to the provision of facilities and services for the safe disposal of human urine and feces. Inadequate sanitation is a major cause of disease world-wide and improving sanitation is known to have a significant beneficial impact on health both in households and across communities. The word 'sanitation' also refers to the maintenance of hygienic conditions, through services such as garbage collection and wastewater disposal.

Potable water: In World Health Organization's (WHO) report on "Safely Managed Drinking Water," potable water is the water used for drinking, cooking, food preparation and personal hygiene that is free from pathogens and elevated levels of toxic chemicals at all times.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): The United Nations Millennium Development goals were set in 2000 at the United Nations by the United Nations Millennium Declaration. There are 8 Millennium Development Goals that the world leaders agreed upon to achieve by the end of 2015. MDGs were aimed to fight against illiteracy, poverty and hunger, gender inequality, child mortality, diseases; and to improve maternal health, develop a global partnership for development, and ensure environmental sustainability. Not all MDGs were met in 2015 and MDGs are succeeded by Sustainable Development Goals which are set for 2030.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The Sustainable Development Goals were set in 2015, right after the MDGs. SDGs are set for 2030 and consist of 17 goals. The SDGs are a confident commitment made by the member states to put an end to the challenges the world faces today. 17 Goals are closely connected to each other; therefore, success in one affects the others positively. Some of the SDGs include: tackling the threat of climate change, achieving gender equality, eradicating poverty, and building a more sustainable environment. Goal 6 is important for the issue of this chair report because it is the goal that mentions providing access to clean water and sanitation. Sustainable Development Goal 6 is to "ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all" (Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform).

General Overview

Providing access to potable water and sanitation is an issue that consists of two parts that are closely related to each other: clean water and sanitation. Without clean water the presence of sanitation is not even a matter of discussion, and without sanitation it is difficult to talk about the presence of potable water sources. This issue revolves around a vicious cycle, tackling only one aspect is not enough by itself. There were two MDGs that focused on clean water and sanitation: the aim to halve the population who lack access to clean water sources was halved, whereas the goal for ensuring access to sanitation was simply not met. This illustrates that the two aspects are crucial and Member States should not focus on dealing with only one of them but with both.

There are two ways people obtain water through: surface water and groundwater. Surface water sources are located above the earth's surface, such as lakes, rivers, and creeks. They can be easily accessed; however, they are likely to be contaminated by either rainwater runoff or high concentrations of human excrement which makes them unhealthy and unclean sources of water. In contrast, groundwater sources are naturally preserved from contaminating factors since they are located below the earth's surface. Because they are not contaminated, they are considered the best source of potable and clean water. Boreholes and basic wells are necessary to access groundwater. However, this is one of the biggest issues in Sub-Saharan Africa because the construction and installation of such systems are costly, and Sub-Saharan people cannot afford to conduct these constructions. Lack of infrastructure and funding are some of the causes of lack of access to potable water and sanitation. (The World Bank)

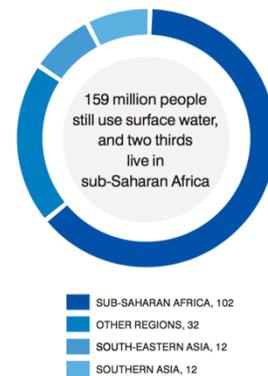


Fig.15 Population using surface water in 2015, by region

Picture 2: A graph showing the population using surface water.

Causes of lack of access to potable water and sanitation

1. Lack of education

Lack of education is the primary source of most of the issues around the world. Educating the public, especially the people of Sub-Saharan Africa is essential to deal with this issue. Most of the people and the adults in the society do not have proper education. The children also lack education since they spend most of their time working in agricultural fields to earn money or spend hours collecting water from rivers, which are most likely contaminated. This severely affects the Sub-Saharan people in terms of health issues.

Sub-Saharan people do not know the dangers of utilizing dirty water in their daily lives and the necessity of sanitation. As a result of lack of information on clean water and sanitation, these people do not pay careful attention to this problem. The use of contaminated water causes diseases that could have consequences that vary from discomfort to death. Some of the diseases these people face are: diarrhea, cholera, typhoid, HIV/AIDS, malaria, arsenicosis, fluorosis, intestinal worms. Moreover, due to lack of clean water 20% of babies die within their 1 month after delivery. Such diseases have become so common that the people consider them as a part of their daily lives and most of these people are not aware of the existence of sanitation. Lack of education not only affects the life of Sub-Saharan people in terms of health issues but also infrastructural issues. (The Water Project)

2. Lack of infrastructure

Due to lack of education, the Sub-Saharan people are not perfectly capable of dealing with infrastructural issues. These people do not possess enough technical, technological and infrastructural knowledge to construct buildings or well systems. As mentioned earlier, groundwater is the best source of clean water, and boreholes and wells are needed to access it. In the Sub-Saharan Africa, the infrastructures to ensure access to clean water are not enough. Most of the regions do not have boreholes or wells to access clean water and use it. As a result of lack of such systems, people cannot reach groundwater and they use surface water sources such as rivers or attempt to dig holes with their bare hands. Eliminating the lack of infrastructure is significant to provide access to potable water because it might lead people to use uncontaminated water in their daily lives.

3. Lack of access to clean water

Although access to clean water is a part of the issue of this committee and an enormous issue even only by itself, providing access to clean water is prominent to provide access to sanitation. Sanitation can exist with clean water. Clean water is necessary for sanitation and the human life. Most of the population in the Sub-Saharan region utilizes dirty and contaminated water in their lives. Using this water to cook, drink, prepare food already harms them enough but they also use contaminated water for sanitation without knowing. Although using contaminated water obtained from surface water sources is used for sanitation with good intentions, it does more harm than good. For this reason, access to clean water is essential to ensure access to sanitation.

4. Lack of health care facilities and sanitation facilities

Sub-Saharan people do not have education about their health and unintentionally they harm themselves. Unfortunately, there are not sufficient number of facilities and experts to teach them the right way. As a result of this, the Sub-Saharan people never know the real cause of their diseases and keep assuming that being sick is a part of their daily lives. They do not realize the dangers of using contaminated water

and keep on using it. The lack of sanitation facilities is also a cause of this issue because without such facilities Sub-Saharan people do not get to learn the correct ways for sanitation or even the existence of a concept named “sanitation.” The lack of sanitation facilities lead Sub-Saharan people to live in an unhealthy and contaminated environment and utilizing contaminated substances in their lives which aggravate this situation. Since people in the region do not know how to safely dispose of human urine and feces, the lack of sanitation facilities lead Sub-Saharan people into contaminating the environment in which they live and contaminating the surface water sources which people obtain water through and use in their lives.

5. Lack of coordination among involved parties and lack of multilateral coordination

The coordination between involved parties, organizations, and Member States is prominent to provide access to drinkable water and sanitation in Sub-Saharan Africa. Currently, there are numerous projects active in the region. There are projects of the Member States, Sub-Saharan African countries, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), and organizations independent from the United Nations. They all are working separately in different regions. The actions taken by such initiatives contributed to the solution process of this issue; however, working separately and not collaborating with each other makes this process harder for each organization in terms of efficiency. Cooperating with other states and organizations is important to facilitate this process and to establish resilient and long-term solutions. The multilateral coordination is also essential to help others and to manage the support received. The funding received for borehole installations and the water attained from groundwater sources should be carefully managed by the involved parties, and the process should be supervised by an objective agency, perhaps the United Nations.



Source: United Nations
Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, April 2010

Picture 3: A map of the Sub-Saharan region and countries located in the area.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Sub-Saharan Africa: Sub-Saharan Africa, geographically, involves the countries in the continent Africa that lie below the Sahara Desert (see the map on the right). Sub-Saharan Africa is the region that suffers from the lack of access to potable water and sanitation the most. 40% of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa does not have access to drinkable water and sanitation. (“Picture 3: A map of the Sub-Saharan region and countries located in the area”)

The World Bank: The World Bank provides financial and technical assistance to developing countries around the world. It describes itself as “not a bank in the ordinary sense but a unique partnership to reduce poverty and support development” and plays an essential role in funding projects that work towards providing access to clean water and sanitation, such as The Water and Sanitation Program. The World Bank also establishes partnerships with NGOs and governments to address different aspects of the issue and provide reports.

World Health Organization (WHO): The World Health Organization works together with governments and other related NGOs to ensure the highest attainable level of health for humans. Its goal is “to build a better, healthier future for people all over the world” (The World Health Organization). The World Health Organization strives to combat diseases, assess the safety and the quality of the air people breathe, the food they consume, the water they drink and use in their lives, and provide people with the necessary medicines.

Timeline of Events

January 1992	Dublin Conference took place on the issue of “Water and Sustainable Development.”
September 2000	Millennium Development Goals were set.
2 September 2003	UN Water was established.
22 March 2005	International Decade for Action “Water for Life” was launched.
28 July 2010	The United Nations General Assembly recognized the right to water and sanitation.
25 September 2015	The 17 Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by the UNDP.

UN Involvement

United Nations Environment Program (UNEP): The United Nations Environment Program is a non-governmental organization that is the global environmental authority. UNEP monitors and works on the environmental policies of countries, sets their agenda items as well as assessing global, national, and regional environmental conditions. After the assessments, UNEP prepares extensive reports, including policy suggestions, and informs governments and institutions about the healthy management of the environment. Moreover, UNEP is known to financially contribute to and implement environmental projects. (United Nations Environment Program)

United Nations Development Program (UNDP): The United Nations Development Program is a non-governmental organization that collaborates with countries in order to develop policies and institutional capabilities to attain sustainable development. Currently, UNDP works to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals include tackling sanitation, poverty, and lack of infrastructure. UNDP also makes analysis and prepares reports for countries to assist them and provide them with an expert advice. (United Nations Development Program)

UN Water: UN Water is a non-governmental organization that functions to take measures against all water related issues, particularly sanitation. The goal of UN Water is to contribute to the existing projects and thereby maximize the collaboration and coherence among the countries and involved organizations. One of the biggest projects UN Water conducted is “Water for Life” which took place between 2005-2015. During those 10 years UN Water focused on action-oriented solutions, policies on long-term sustainable management of water resources, and improving sanitation. (UN Water)

The United Nations, African Countries and relevant NGOs have been working on this issue for a long time. There are numerous NGOs active in Sub-Saharan Africa, deploying even more NGOs would be controversial. The United Nations has taken serious steps to solve the issue. New goals have been set to be reached, there are annual conventions and meetings, and various initiatives tackling this issue. Suggesting similar conventions, establishments or goals would be redundant in the resolutions, since they have been done or are being done by the United Nations and NGOs.

Relevant UN Documents

Human rights and access to safe drinking water and sanitation – Resolution of the Human Rights Council- this resolution focuses on the monitoring of water resources, assessing their safety, and preparing reports. (28 March 2008, 7/22)

The Human Right to Water and Sanitation – Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly- this resolution acknowledges the fundamental human right of access to water and sanitation. (28 July 2010, A/RES/64/292)

Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly – this resolution acknowledges and sets “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all” as the sixth goal of the Sustainable Development Goals. (25 September 2015, A/RES/70)

The Human Right to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation – Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly- this resolution asks for the review of existing policies and strengthening the collaboration between countries and organizations while recommending to implement new solutions for monitoring water resources. (28 September 2011, A/HRC/RES/18/1)

Treaties and Events

The protocols adopted at The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) and the UNECE-WHO/Europe Protocol on Water and Health are ratified and accepted by the majority of the member states. Ratifying these protocols is important to have a guideline for providing access to potable water and sanitation not only in Sub-Saharan Africa but also in every member state. (The UNECE-WHO/Europe Protocol on Water and Health)

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The United Nations, African countries and NGOs have been working very closely to tackle this issue. African countries have shown considerable commitment to the initiative to ensure access to drinkable water and sanitation. They have undergone policy changes, implemented new frameworks, and took the reports published by the NGOs seriously to improve the situation. Many initiatives have been established such as Water and Sanitation Trust Fund (WSTF), UN-Habitat programs, Water and Sanitation Program (WSP). Despite the fact that there are lots of projects going on in Africa, they were not enough to eradicate this problem. The cooperation and realistic goals are essential to succeed.

Another important solution attempt was the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). One of the goals of the MDGs' was to halve the proportion of people who lack access to potable water and sanitation. They have been successful with the potable water aspect: in 2000, 18% of the world's population did not have access to safe drinking water, and as of 2015, this percentage has been decreased to 9%. However, the sanitation aspect has not been as successful as the clean water aspect: figures were 40% in 2000, and 32% in 2015. After the MDGs, Sustainable Development Goals have been set for 2030. It is crucial to address the necessity of long-term solutions for this issue, as SDGs mainly focus on short-term solutions.

Short-term solutions might fail to deal with the issue. For instance, the initiative that commenced the installations of hand-pumps in sub-Saharan Africa proved not to be very beneficial in the long term, seeing that the percentage of non-functional ones now vary from 25% to 30%.

Possible Solutions

In order to provide access to potable water and sanitation in Sub-Saharan Africa, the main causes of this problem should be identified: lack of infrastructure to carry and access potable water, the education of public and primarily children, and lack of sanitation facilities. Although there are lots of NGOs and organizations working in the same regions of Africa, they do not cooperate. Coordination between the governments and the organizations in the region need to be established by a framework. The Sub-Saharan African countries should be willing to make compromises, collaborate, and make policy changes. Delegates should bear in mind that access to clean water is a major problem and is essential for sanitation. Another important aspect of this issue is education about sanitation. African people need to be informed about sanitation. Member States should also focus on building sanitation and hygiene institutions so people can get help and ask questions when they need to. Delegates should keep in mind that these services should be accessible for everyone.

Notes from the Chair

The delegates should realize that this issue revolves around a vicious cycle. The causes of lack of access to potable water and sanitation might also be the results of this issue. Whilst writing resolutions, delegates should bear this fact in mind and try to come up with solutions that are original and that would break this cycle.

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