

Turning slums around: The case for water and sanitation



Written by Timeyin Uwejamomere, Policy Officer – Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Services, WaterAid

Supported by Henry Northover, Head of Policy, WaterAid

Turning slums around:

The case for water and sanitation

Summary

There is an unacceptably weak global policy response to the water and sanitation crisis in the rapidly expanding slum areas of the developing world. Without a serious commitment to redress the low political and financing priority given to sanitation and water in housing and urban development, and slum upgrading, the growing challenge of urbanisation risks setting off an unmanageable health, education and economic crisis.

WaterAid argues that:

- Getting water and sanitation services delivered to urban areas is critical to providing ‘harmonious cities’
- In a rapidly urbanising world, we risk facing unmanageable future health, economic and environmental crises unless policy makers seriously address the challenges of providing affordable water and sanitation services to the cities’ poor
- Although urban population is currently only a third of the total population in Africa and South Asia, in about two decades, current large scale rural-to-urban migration flows will result in the majority of the population living in urban centres
- Sanitation and water are vital to urban health and slum upgrading yet are given a low priority by both donors and aid recipient governments

- It is not just the governments of most cities in developing countries that need to urgently change their approaches. Donor investments in urban areas are funding large-scale water and sanitation schemes that largely miss reaching the urban poor – only 1% of housing and urban development aid budgets get to urban slums

The impoverishment of cities and the proliferation of slums is neither necessary nor inevitable. Drawing on the lessons from some East Asian developmental states, WaterAid shows that sanitation and water improvements have always been at the forefront of progressive city authorities and national health, environmental and economic gains. East Asian developmental states pursued an urban reform programme that made significant public health gains over and above traditional investments in healthcare.

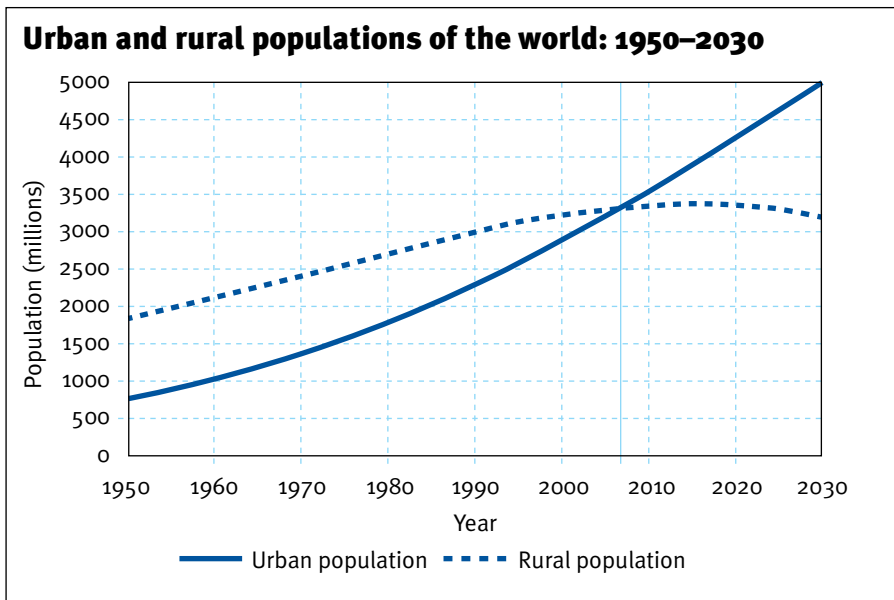
WaterAid calls on city authorities and national governments to urgently tackle this crisis by:

- 1** Putting water and sanitation service provision at the centre of all urban reform efforts and developing credible action plans – with ambitious targets, timelines and financing sources. To urgently develop a city framework for action on sanitation and water, with an explicit focus on urban slums and small towns
- 2** Ensuring that there is a high level coordinating mechanism that is open to a wide group of stakeholders – including representative officials, sector professionals, representatives of the urban poor and slum dwellers – responsible for the design, implementation and monitoring of plans
- 3** Building all urban reform efforts around accelerating water connections to poorer households and communities and ensuring sanitation services are targeted at reaching all of the urban poor – including subsidising household connections and removing the requirement of land tenure as a condition for service provision

The problem

Rapid urban growth

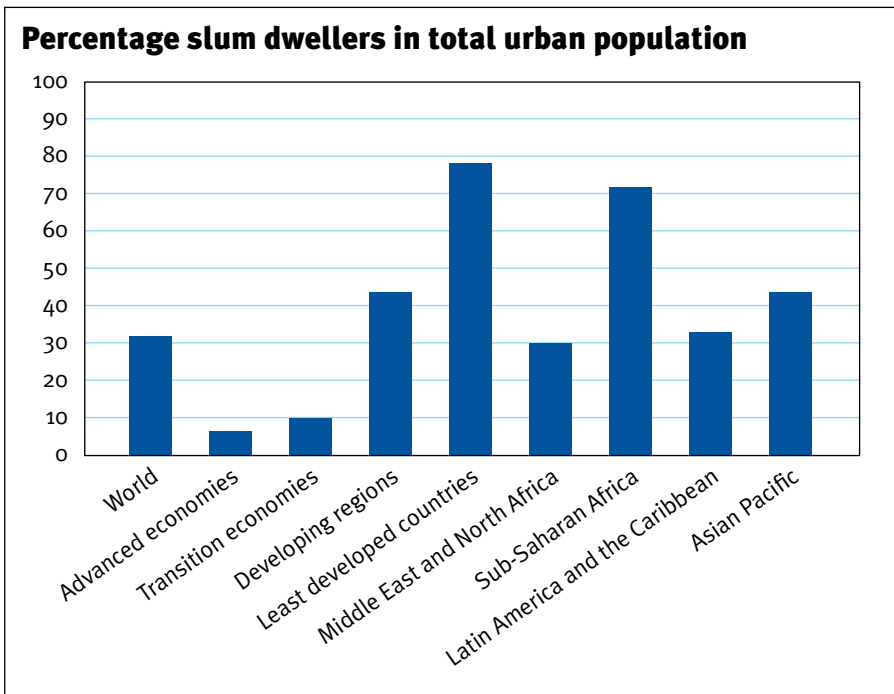
Globally, more people now live in urban centres than in rural areas and this trend is expected to continue. Within the next 30 years, developing countries are predicted to triple their population size and account for 80% of the world's urban population. In Asia the rural population is expected to decrease in the next 25 years. Projections for this urbanisation look bleak, with slums to see 60% of all urban population growth and increased poverty. Without a fundamental change, our urbanising world will, in reality, become a vast sprawl of inhuman slums and informal settlements.¹



‘Developing countries are predicted to account for 80% of the world’s population within the next 30 years.’ (UN)

Global population increases are taking place in urban slums

- There are currently over one billion people living in slums. At expected growth rates the world slum population will increase to 1.4 billion by 2020
- At least 25 million people become slum dwellers every year and with 19 out of every 20 slum dwellers living in developing countries it is the poorest countries that will bear the burden
- Half of the world's slum population (581 million people) live in Asia



- Africa has the highest annual slum growth rate (4.53% per year), more than twice the global average, and is expected to have the largest number of slums by 2020
- Already, in the poorer countries of Africa, 80% of the urban population live in slums

Urbanisation is undermining the goal of ‘harmonious cities’

Water and sanitation poverty is growing in cities across the developing world. Since 1990, urban coverage for water and sanitation has failed to keep pace with population growth. While the world’s urban population increased by 956 million between 1990 and 2006, the number of new urban users of improved water rose by 926 million and of improved sanitation by 779 million.²

Urbanisation is undermining the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in urban areas. According to the UN, ‘despite an increase of almost 40% in the number of people served with improved sanitation over 1990–2004 the deficit of urban unserved is growing ... urban sanitation coverage has increased by only one percentage point during 1990–2004.’³

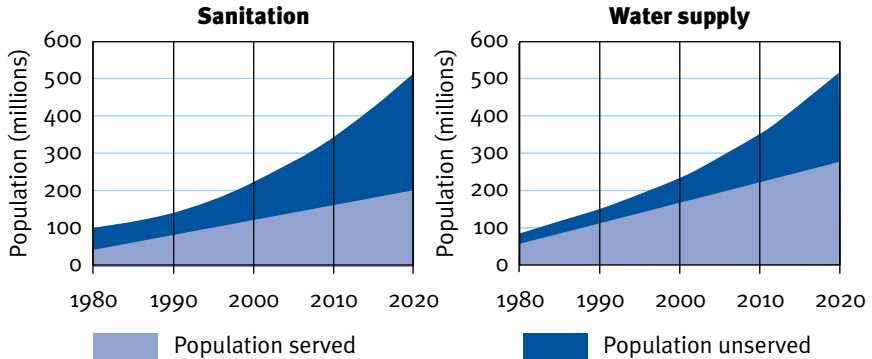
Countries where urban drinking water coverage from improved sources is declining

	Urban drinking water coverage in 1990 (%)	Urban drinking water coverage in 2000 (%)	Percentage point decline 1990 – 2006 (%)
Nigeria	80	65	15
Liberia	85	72	13
Burundi	97	84	13
Mozambique	83	71	12
Democratic Republic of the Congo	90	82	8
Sudan	85	78	7
Kenya	91	85	6
Myanmar	86	80	6
Madagascar	80	76	4
Indonesia	92	89	3
Bangladesh	88	85	3
Nepal	97	94	3
Zimbabwe	100	98	2

About 10% of all countries saw their urban drinking water coverage decline by two percentage points or more since 1990, probably because of huge growth in the urban population.

Source: adapted from WHO/UNICEF (2008) *Joint Monitoring Report*

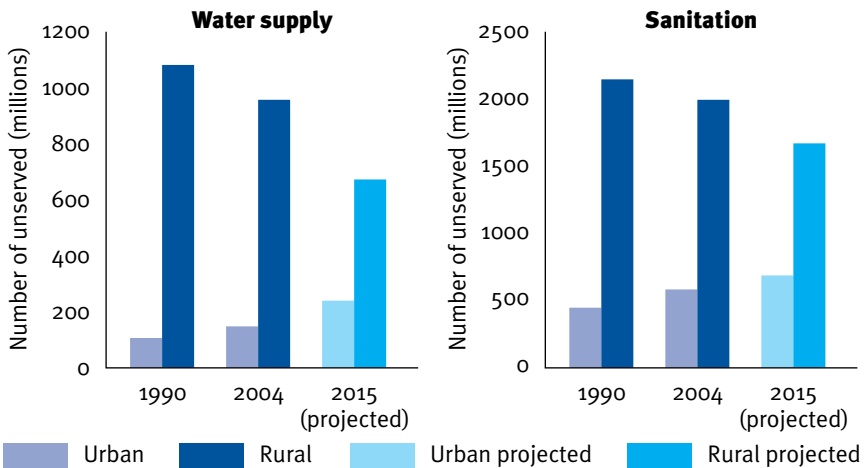
Projections for water and sanitation coverage in Africa



Source: <http://web.mit.edu/urbanupgrading/upgrading/case-examples/overview-africa/regional-overview.html#Anchor-47857>

'Sanitation is the single most cost-effective major public health intervention to reduce child mortality.' World Bank

Global population without access to improved water supply and sanitation in urban and rural areas (projected based on 1990-2004 trends)



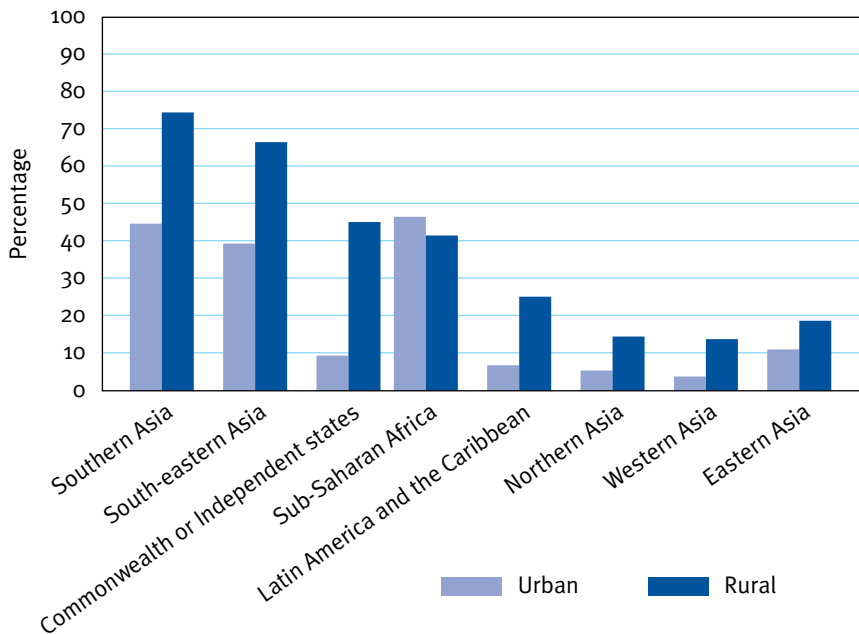
Source: WHO/UNICEF (2006) *Meeting the MDG drinking water and sanitation target: the urban and rural challenge of the decade*

Most developing countries are off-track to meet the water supply and sanitation MDGs in urban areas. Progress in achieving the water supply and sanitation MDGs (target 7c) in urban areas could reinforce the achievement of the slum improvement MDGs (target 7d).

Although rural water and sanitation MDG gaps are declining, the urban MDG gaps for water and sanitation are increasing. The projections for Africa show that the number of unserved urban dwellers will double within the next decade to about 300 million people for sanitation and 200 million for water.

It is projected that urban centres will account for two thirds of the water and sanitation MDG coverage gaps within the next two decades. Currently, they account for 30% of the gaps. The shortfalls in availability will largely occur in slums and informal settlements while the planned areas of towns and cities will have

Coverage of off-grid improved sources of drinking water, urban and rural, by region in 2006



Source: WHO/UNICEF (2008) *Joint Monitoring Report*

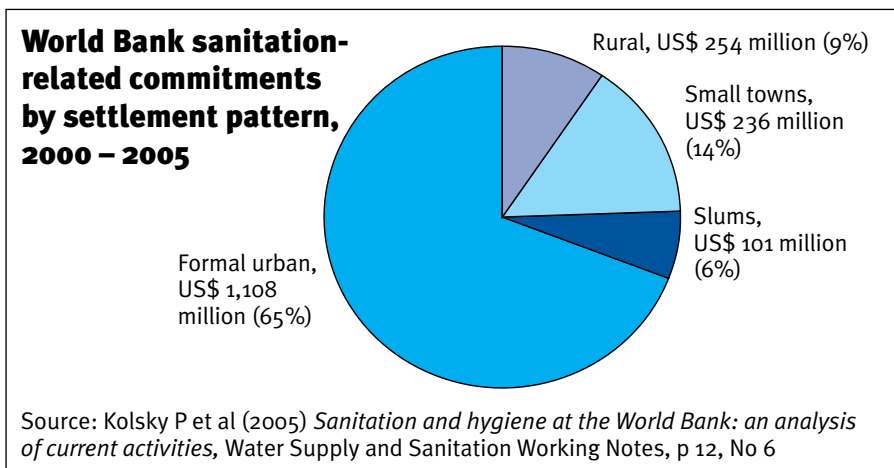
all or most of the piped water supplies and improved sanitation. In other words, any subsidy regimes or renewal and rehabilitation investments tend to benefit those already ‘served’ or ‘connected’. The result is that, in the absence of a pro-poor slum improvement focus, investments tend to benefit wealthier people.

For sanitation, the outcomes are increased inequality and a higher public health risk. In urban areas of sub-Saharan Africa, every third person uses a shared toilet. These are all too often poorly maintained and ill-equipped for purpose.

Sanitation – the overlooked crisis

Sanitation and water are vital to urban health and slum upgrading yet are given a low priority by both donors and aid recipient governments.

Aid spending in the water and sanitation sector is not going to the poorest regions or countries. Since the mid-1990s, aid spending going to health and education has doubled. Over that same period, the share of aid going to water and sanitation has contracted. Even within the aid spending that is going to the housing and urban development sector, it is estimated that only 1% of aid budgets get to slums.



The cost of improving the lives of 670 million current and potential slum dwellers through sustained self-help slum upgrading and new housing programmes is equivalent to just 8% of current annual OECD assistance for the next 16 years.⁴

The exclusion of poor urban slums does not end there. Donor aid is largely targeting large-scale water and sanitation schemes⁵ in urban areas, usually missing out the urban poor, and only upgrading existing connections.

An analysis of the World Bank sanitation-related commitment by region⁶ showed that between 2000 and 2005, East Africa, the Pacific, the Middle East and North Africa received most of the money committed to waste water treatment, representing 26% of the World Bank's lending in sanitation-related activities. When analysed by settlement pattern, the figures show formal urban areas received 65% of funds while slums received only 6% of sanitation-related investments.

Why is sanitation important?

According to more recent research,⁷ the combined impact of inadequate sanitation as a driver of diseases – typically malnutrition, diarrhoea, endemic cholera and respiratory infections – may make inadequate sanitation the biggest killer of children under five, leading to the deaths of approximately 2.4 million children each year. This amounts to it being a largely ignored health crisis. Sanitation is the single most cost-effective major public health intervention to reduce child mortality.⁸

'For every \$1 invested in sanitation, at least \$9 is returned.' (UN)

The evidence from developing and developed countries alike is that when it comes to sanitation, there is no single development intervention that brings greater public health returns. For every \$1 invested in sanitation, it is estimated that at least \$9 is returned to national economies in increased productivity and a reduced burden of healthcare.⁹

The health of the urban poor is further compromised by unsatisfactory man-made conditions of the living environment in high density urban areas – poor housing, overcrowding, pollution and increased exposure to infectious diseases which are reinforced by social and psychological problems including instability and insecurity.¹⁰ The average under-five child mortality rate across eight informal settlements of Nairobi, Kenya, is 35% higher than the national figure. In some of the slums, child mortality rates are more than twice the rural figure.¹¹

What does experience tell us?

Evidence from WaterAid research indicates that in national urban reform planning processes, the most successful East Asian developmental states led their urban reform programmes with investments in sanitation and in housing with functioning sanitation systems. These investments had huge public health returns – particularly in reducing under-five mortality rates – and these gains, in saving thousands of children’s lives, were made over and above traditional investments in healthcare.

What needs to happen?

The housing and urban development and the water supply and sanitation sectors need to draw lessons and share experiences from East Asia and other successful programmes. Close attention should be paid to the critical strategic partnerships and delivery mechanisms which urgently prioritise water and sanitation and ensure sustainable and equitable services to slum dwellers irrespective of land tenure issues. Further actions must include:

- Water and sanitation services are recognised and acted upon as the single development intervention that brings the greatest public health returns and environmental benefits in urban development. They must be given the highest priority in all new urban development and urban renewal schemes. This must include a substantial increase in investments in infrastructure, in household connections and in slum targeting

- Building decision making processes that include representatives from poor communities and wider stakeholders to broker pro-poor investments and scale up urban water supply and sanitation programmes in slums
- Processes for developing and sustaining incentives for utilities to serve the poor and developing the necessary funding mechanisms for infrastructure expansion
- Urban development and water and sanitation specialists must identify and adopt the political, institutional and policy changes that bring about pro-poor field practices and accelerated slum improvements

WaterAid's calls

A rapidly urbanising world and the proliferation of slums and urban poor settlements is the central challenge for urban policy-makers. None of these challenges are insurmountable. The reward for providing water and sanitation services to the urban poor is healthier and more prosperous environments for cities and settlements in the future.

WaterAid calls on city authorities and national governments to urgently tackle this crisis by:

- 1** Putting water and sanitation service provision at the centre of all urban reform efforts and developing credible action plans – with ambitious targets, timelines and financing sources. To urgently develop a city framework for action on sanitation and water, with an explicit focus on urban slums and small towns
- 2** Establishing one high level coordinating mechanism that is open to a wide group of stakeholders – including representative officials and sector professionals alongside representatives of the urban poor and slum dwellers. This body would be responsible for:
 - The design, implementation and monitoring of plans
 - Identification of systemic problems in the delivery of services

- Coordination of all relevant agencies and would be held to account for its performance in delivering services to all city-dwellers
- 3** Building all urban reform efforts around accelerating water connections to poorer households and communities and ensuring sanitation services are targeted at reaching all of the urban poor – including subsidising household connections, and removing the requirement of land tenure as a condition for service provision. A serious commitment to pro-poor service provision must include:
 - Development of incentives for utilities to serve the urban poor
 - Funding mechanisms for infrastructure expansion that reach poorer areas
 - Ensuring specific attention for sanitation – hygiene education, latrine development, sludge emptying, solid waste management and adequate drainage

The historical evidence from across the world – developed and developing countries alike – is that the creation of harmonious and liveable cities is not possible without putting water and sanitation at the centre of urban reforms.

References

- 1 This paper takes the broader view that slum conditions also affect other groups of urban poor without access to public facilities – small vendors in market places, pavement dwellers/street children and the relatively invisible small town residents etc –, so the term slum is not restricted to those living in the slums.
- 2 WHO/UNICEF (2008) *Progress on drinking water and sanitation*, http://www.wssinfo.org/en/40_MDG2008.html, p 10
- 3 WHO/UNICEF (2006) *Meeting the drinking water and sanitation target: the urban and rural challenge of the decade*, http://www.wssinfo.org/pdf/JMP_o6.pdf, pp 12, 14 and 21
- 4 UN Millennium Project Task Force on Improving the Lives of Slum Dwellers *A Home in the City – Achieving the Millennium Development Goals*, <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/documents/Slumdwellers-complete.pdf>, p 119
- 5 OECD DAC Country Reporting System (CRS) database, accessible at <http://stats.oecd.org>
- 6 Kolsky P, Perez E, Vandersypen W and Jensen LO (2005) *Sanitation and hygiene at the World Bank: an analysis of current activities*, Water Supply and Sanitation Working Notes, No 6
- 7 WaterAid (2008) *Tackling the silent killer: The case for sanitation*, http://www.wateraid.org/documents/plugin_documents/tackling_the_silent_killer_the_case_for_sanitation_1.pdf
- 8 World Bank (2006) *Disease control priorities in developing countries* (Second edition)
- 9 Hutton et al, UNDP (2006) *Economic and health effects of increasing coverage of low cost sanitation interventions*, Human Development Report Office occasional paper
- 10 Kausar F, Griffiths P and Matthews Z (1999) *Poverty and maternal health care utilization in Maharashtra: Associated influence on infant mortality and morbidity*, Opportunity and Choices Working Paper No 20
- 11 UN HABITAT (2003) *Water and sanitation in the world cities*, p 75



WaterAid's mission is to overcome poverty by enabling the world's poorest people to gain access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene education.

For more information, please contact:

WaterAid, 47-49 Durham Street, London SE11 5JD

Telephone: 020 7793 4500

Email: wateraid@wateraid.org

Registered charity numbers 288701 (England and Wales)
and SC039479 (Scotland)

www.wateraid.org

October 2008