

Unpacking Definitions – The MDG Target on Sanitation

By

Roberto Lenton and Albert Wright
Co-Coordinator of Millennium
Development Task Force on Water and
Sanitation

Questions to be Addressed in Presentation

1. What is the target?
2. What is its baseline year?
3. What are its origin and purpose?
4. How should access be defined?
5. Should we focus only on some large countries and neglect the rest?
6. If not, what should be the priority countries for the international community?
7. How should national targets be set – based on the global targets or on national capacities?

What the Target says

- *To halve, by 2015, the proportion of people who do not have access to Basic Sanitation*
- No Baseline Year was given for this Target
- However, the UN Statistics Division and UNICEF have used 1990 as the baseline year for their reports on the MDGs
- Second, the UN Secretary General's report on the MDGs will use 1990 as the baseline year
- Hence, the Water and Sanitation Task Force recommends **1990** as the baseline year for the water and sanitation targets

Origin and Purpose of Target

- Defined in September 2002 at WSSD as part of the MDG Target on access to safe water
- Overall Goals of MDGs are Poverty Alleviation, Sustained Development, Environmental Sustainability, and Peace
- They are designed to address development challenges facing poorest countries – barriers of disease, lack of core infrastructure, geographical isolation, lack of access to rich-country markets, and bad debts inherited from past
- They are seen as prerequisites for escaping from “poverty traps” in which disadvantaged countries find themselves

What is the Location of Poor or the Targets of the MDGs

- Small countries
- Land-locked countries
- Disease-ridden countries
- Countries with inadequate access to core infrastructure
- Urban slums
- Rural areas, etc.

Defining Access to Sanitation: The JMP Definition

- Existing coverage data are provided by the JMP which uses the terminology of “improved sanitation” instead of “basic sanitation” used at the WSSD
- In the JMP, improved sanitation is defined as “a sanitation system in which excreta are disposed of in such a way that they reduce the risk of fecal-oral transmission to its users and the environment”
- This is comprehensive enough, but it does not cater for diseases like malaria, bilharzia, and filariasis

Defining Access to Sanitation: WSSD Definition

- WSSD uses terminology of **Basic Sanitation**, rather than Improved Sanitation

They define Basic Sanitation in terms of the following:

- Development and implementation of Household sanitation systems
- Improvement of sanitation in public institutions, especially in schools
- Promotion of safe hygiene practices
- Promotion of education and outreach focused on children, as agents of behavioral change

Defining Access to Basic Sanitation: WSSD Definition

- Promotion of affordable and socially and culturally acceptable technologies and practices
- Development of innovative financing and partnership mechanisms
- Integration of sanitation into water resources management strategies in a manner which does not negatively impact on the environment (includes protection of water resources from biological or fecal contamination)

Access to Basic Sanitation: Definition Proposed by Task Force

Having regard to the implications of the WSSD definition and the goals of the MDGs, in general, the Water and Sanitation Task Force proposes the following definition of access to basic sanitation for consideration of the JMP:

- *Access to, and use of, excreta and wastewater facilities and services that provide privacy while at the same time ensuring a clean and healthful living environment both at home and in the immediate neighborhood of users*

Features of proposed Definition

- It introduces the following new elements:
- Wastewater management in addition to excreta disposal services
- It takes access beyond the living environment at the household level to the neighborhood living environment
- It implies solid waste management as well, especially in the neighborhood environment
- It leads to neighborhood-centered sanitation systems, rather than household-centered sanitation systems

Where to focus: only on some large countries to the neglect of the rest?

- Given the goals of the MDGs, the choice of focus should be driven by the need to help to alleviate poverty and promote sustainable development in disadvantaged countries and populations that find themselves in “poverty traps”, wherever they should be
- These cannot necessarily be in the larger countries alone
- As stated earlier, they are mostly smaller countries; but they may be pockets of poor populations in large or small countries
- So the answer to the question is “No”

Should national strategies be based on global targets or national capacities?

- So far, it has been deemed more realistic to base national strategies on national economic and financial capacities
- Given the goals of the MDGs, however, this point of view is deemed by the Millennium Development Project to be too limited
- Countries in the poverty trap are too poor to apply the necessary investments at sufficient scale to get themselves out of this trap. Lower levels of investments in such countries may be a waste of resources because they run the risk of being ineffective to getting them out of the trap

Basis for National Strategies

- It is felt that the poorest countries should be helped out of their poverty traps through donor assistance at sufficient scale so that they can achieve the MDGs
- Such donor assistance should be subject to credible arrangements for reforms to ensure effective use of resources and sustainability of investments

Conclusions

- The sanitation target is an integral part of the overall set of MDGs
- The goals of the MDGs are poverty alleviation and sustainable development
- The sanitation target and the other goals and target are intended to achieve the minimum threshold to help disadvantaged countries to break out of their poverty traps
- As a minimum, all countries should prepare, soonest, a coherent strategy for achieving, not only the sanitation target, but also the other MDGs and incorporate them in their PRSPs

Conclusions

- For countries that now have PRSPs, the strategies for the MDGs could become the revisions of their PRSPs
- For those that do not prepare PRSPs, the new strategies should become the basis for achieving their MDGs