



The ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY Millennium Development Goal

What water, sanitation and hygiene can do in Kenya

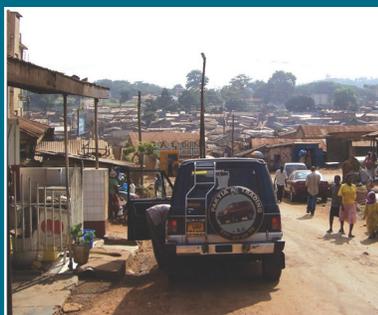
The Millennium Development Goals

In September 2000, the United Nations Millennium Summit agreed a set of time-bound and measurable goals aimed at combating poverty, hunger, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women.

The seventh Millennium Development Goal (MDG) is to ensure environmental sustainability. Target 11 is to achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

Water and sanitation

The seventh Millennium Development Goal (MDG) deals with ensuring environmental sustainability. One of its targets is to halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water (1.1 billion) and basic sanitation (2.4 billion).



Headline facts

The MDGs are strongly interdependent and programme interventions must reflect this. Water, sanitation and hygiene deliver outcomes across the MDGs.

- *Child health*
Children are the most vulnerable to the effects of unhygienic environments, including disasters and conflicts over resources such as water.
- *Environment.*
Indiscriminate disposal of solid and liquid waste, particularly faecal matter, leads to environmental contamination including water pollution and blocking of waterways, creating pools of water conducive to the proliferation of insect vectors among others. This reduces the capacity of the environment to support life with its natural resources such as water.
- *Gender*
Mainstreaming gender and development issues in all water and sanitation sector activities, and empowering women to improve water and sanitation management ensures sustainability of the ecosystem.
- *Poverty*
Using appropriate technology to promote agricultural production, as a means to address poverty among the majority of poor in Kenya who depend on subsistence farming for their livelihoods, is essential in ensuring environmental sustainability.



Child Health

The Facts

- Access to safe water and sanitation is the foundation of a healthy childhood, central to survival, development and prosperity of children.
- Appropriate environmental management through improved sanitation is critical in the prevention and control of major child killer diseases in Kenya such as malaria.
- Young children are at the highest risk of dying from water and sanitation related illnesses, including diarrhoea resulting from unhygienic disposal of faeces and pollution of water sources.
- In slum areas of Kenya morbidity and mortality stemming from environmental conditions are significantly higher than in other areas in the city mainly due to poor sanitation and lack of safe water.
- Unsanitary conditions and practices at the household level, such as absence of sanitary latrines, unsafe waste disposal and unhygienic behaviour in childcare and food preparation, predispose children to an unsafe environment with consequent serious health hazards/risks.
- Water scarcity makes it difficult to maintain domestic and personal hygiene, which results in water washed diseases such as scabies and trachoma, which have debilitating effects especially in children.
- Indiscriminate disposal of plastics waste and use of 'flying toilets' for human waste disposal is both a health risk and results in unsightliness.

Why water, sanitation and hygiene?

- Lack of access to water forces communities living in informal settlements to invest heavily in water leading to household poverty and consequently child malnutrition.
- Improved access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene in Kenya reduces susceptibility of children under five years to water washed diseases including scabies and trachoma, which are associated with lack of adequate water supply for washing and hygiene promotion. The children's vulnerability stems from their immature immune systems and intensive interaction with unsafe environments.
- Appropriate sanitation reduces the transmission of faecal-oral diseases and parasitic infections by preventing faecal contamination of water and soil.
- Increased access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene among the poor population in Kenya can help them reduce vulnerability to environmental degradation and similarly improve their limited capacity and resilience to cope with the impacts of poor environments.
- Improved access to water, sanitation and hygiene among informal settlements, such as in Kibera, empowers the residents to invest productively in environmental conservation efforts.
- Provision of water and sanitation especially for the poor is a potential entry point to improving environmental standards and sustainability.

Environmental

The facts

- Many households living around rural ecosystems in Kenya lack appropriate technologies to practice environmentally sound economic activities. They use technologies that are not suited to the ecological conditions.
- Kenya is characterized by a limited natural resource base, especially water, which is often exploited using inappropriate technology. This leads to over exploitation/depletion, creating an imbalance in the ecosystems.
- The most important source of water contamination in informal settlements in Kenya is human faeces due to lack of adequate sanitation facilities.
- Improved water management, including pollution control and sustainable levels of water abstraction, are key factors in maintaining the integrity of ecosystems.
- Improved water management activities reduce mosquito breeding sites and consequently malaria incidence.
- Improper and indiscriminate waste disposal creates an unsightly view, unpleasant smells and also hazardous environmental conditions to those living nearby.

Why water, sanitation and hygiene?

- In Kenya access to adequate and safe drinking water, sanitary excreta disposal and environmental hygiene is a major primary health care component, primarily aimed at addressing common childhood illnesses including control and prevention of diarrhoea and environmentally transmitted intestinal worm infestations.

- Improved water, sanitation and hygiene are essential in mitigating the effects of natural resource degradation and contribute to the enhancement of people's livelihoods and health. This is critical in promoting sustainable economic growth.
- Improved solid and liquid waste management prevents putrefying of solid waste that results in a foul smell, attracts flies and rats and creates pools of polluted water that are breeding grounds for mosquitoes.
- Provision of water to the pastoralist communities in rural Arid and Semi Arid regions in Kenya can reduce pressure on limited water points and movement of animals in search of grass and water from one locality to another, which contributes to environmental degradation – particularly loss of vegetation cover and subsequent soil erosion.
- Sanitation improvement through waste collection and management in informal settlements in Kenya can be used as an entry point to promote the cleaner cities initiative.
- Appropriate solid and liquid waste management, particularly in urban and peri urban areas of Kenya, allows reuse of resources through recycling. This results in revenue generation for the community/groups concerned and reduces pressure on the natural resource base leading to sustainable livelihoods.



Gender

The facts

- Women bear the biggest burden of fetching water and face the worst problems when water security is low.
- Gender mainstreaming in interventions aimed at promoting environmental sustainability is a key dimension of pro-poor water, sanitation and hygiene governance actions.
- Environmental sustainability development requires and can only succeed with the participation of the whole society and women have a vital role to play in environmental management and development.
- Women have an essential role to play in the development of sustainable and ecologically sound consumption and production patterns and approaches to natural resource management.
- Environmental degradation impacts on the most socio-economically disadvantaged members of the community and women are disproportionately more financially disadvantaged than men for a whole range of reasons. Specifically, more women are sole parents and more are likely to work part-time compared to their male counterparts.
- Women grow a substantial proportion of the world's food, and there is considerable evidence that their labour-intensive food production practices tend to be environmentally sound, and are contributing substantially to food production while at the same time protecting the resource base.
- Women bear the largest share of responsibility in ensuring the environment children live and play in around their homes is safe.

Why water, sanitation and hygiene?

- Improved water and sanitation facilities within reasonable distances enhance women's dignity, status and opportunities in Kenya.
- Access to a safe water supply reduces the time women spend collecting water and therefore enables them to engage in income-generating activities.
- Where there are working and well maintained sanitation facilities for girls, school enrolment and performance increases.
- Improved water and sanitation facilities reduce the burden of domestic tasks and give women more time to participate in environmentally sustainable economic activities as well as managing the environment children conduct their activities in.
- Improved access to water, sanitation and hygiene contributes to appropriate environmental management to promote people's health and contributes to greater hope and better opportunities for the future generations in Kenya.
- Water and sanitation interventions can be used as entry points to promote widespread awareness on the importance of appropriate environmental management for sustainable development in Kenya.
- Improved sanitation through provision of latrines for human waste disposal is an important step towards curbing widespread use of plastics for the purposes of 'flying toilets' by the slum residents, which is a major obstacle to effective environmental management.
- Construction of latrines and earth dams as integral components of water and sanitation interventions is essential in mitigating the negative impacts of natural disasters such as El Nino in Kenya.

Poverty

The facts

- In Kenya about 70% of the land is classified as arid and semi arid. This mostly falls within the rural areas and the poor communities living in these areas are most vulnerable to the effects of environmental degradation including frequent droughts.
- The poor bear the brunt of water scarcity, pollution, droughts and flooding resulting from inappropriate environmental management practices.
- Experience in Kenya indicates that there is an absolute need to improve water security, sanitation and hygiene especially for the peri urban and rural poor who often live in harsh environmental conditions.
- Real and lasting reduction in poverty can be achieved by enhancing environmental quality and protecting human health from the adverse effects of pollution; maintaining ecosystems and effective natural resource management policies and practices.
- Poverty is a major contributor to ill health and poor hygiene practices among the slum dwellers in Kenya. Providing access to safe water and hygiene services will contribute to poverty reduction and lead to more focused efforts towards implementing environmentally friendly initiatives.
- The ecosystems occupied by poor segments of the population in Kenya are most vulnerable to environmental degradation and similarly, the communities affected have limited capacity and resilience to cope with the impacts of poor environments.

Why water, sanitation and hygiene?

- To promote disaster prevention measures for the poor to be included in all water and sanitation projects.
- Increased access to water and its management, especially in small scale farming using appropriate technologies such as drip irrigation, is essential in boosting economic growth and eventual reduction in poverty among the rural poor in Kenya.
- Investment in the provision of water and sanitation is a potential catalyst for initiating kitchen gardens using available water. The revenue generated can be used to start small-scale businesses that could eventually lead to local and regional development.
- Management of water resources and the delivery of water services are central to investments aimed at reducing poverty among the Kenyan populace.

This Country Note presents evidence for the impact of water supply, sanitation and improved hygiene on environmental sustainability.

Key references

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Country Note compiled by Gerald Rukunga and David Mutethia – AMREF Kenya

Photographs by AMREF, Kenya

Editor: Frank Odhiambo, WEDC

For further information, contact:

Gerald Rukunga

African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF) Kenya, P.O. Box 30125 – 00100 GPO Langata Road, Wilson Airport, Nairobi, Kenya

Phone: +254 20 601593

Fax: +254 20 602531

Email: rukungag@amrefke.org

WELL

Water, Engineering and Development Centre (WEDC)

Loughborough University

Leicestershire LE11 3TU UK

Email: WELL@Lboro.ac.uk

Phone: 0 (44) 1509 228304

Fax: 0 (44) 1509 211079

Website: <http://www.Lboro.ac.uk/well/>



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