

# Sanitation and water

Why we need a **global framework for action**





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**There is a global sanitation and water crisis and governments are failing to act.**

**This crisis is undermining all development efforts, causing one in five child deaths,<sup>1</sup> slowing progress in education, burdening health systems and preventing economic growth.**

**Those who suffer most are the vulnerable and marginalised.** Girls are often denied an education because they are tasked with hours of water fetching labour, and many drop out of school completely when they reach menstrual age because of inadequate sanitation. Millions of women spend at least four hours a day fetching water – time that could be spent earning a living – and are tasked with looking after those that are ill and dying from diarrhoeal disease.

**So far this development crisis has been met with the weakest of international responses.**

Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 7, Target 10, outlines the global ambition to halve the proportions of people without access to water and sanitation by 2015. However, at current rates of progress, in sub-Saharan Africa the water target will not be met until 2035 and the sanitation target will not be met until the 22nd century.<sup>2</sup>

The lack of improvement is a major contributing factor to the poor progress of other seriously off-track MDGs:

- **MDG 1 to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**
- **MDG 3 to eliminate gender disparity in education**
- **MDG 4 to reduce child mortality**

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<sup>1</sup> WHO (2008) Safer water, better health: Costs, benefits and sustainability of interventions to protect and promote health

<sup>2</sup> Based on trends in the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Report (2008)

This paper looks at the current international response to this crisis and highlights the low political and financing priority given to sanitation and water. It shows that:

- Overall, aid is rising but the share given to sanitation and water is in decline
- Sanitation and water are vital to health and education yet are given a low priority by both donors and aid recipient governments
- Aid is not going to the poorest regions or countries. Less than a quarter of aid to water and sanitation goes to the Least Developed Countries
- Donors are increasingly investing in large-scale schemes in urban areas which are not benefiting the poor

International leaders have declared the lack of progress on the MDGs a development emergency.<sup>3</sup> The UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has called for an extraordinary effort to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that are most off track and has declared 2008 a critical year to make progress.<sup>4</sup>

This paper proposes a global framework for action including an annual review and meeting and a commitment to find the necessary resources to address the poor progress in the sector. This framework would seek to recalibrate development priorities and bring about a more rational allocation of resources. This paper does not seek to privilege the sanitation and water sector but rather calls for it to be brought up alongside the other essential sectors and recognised as integral to their progress.

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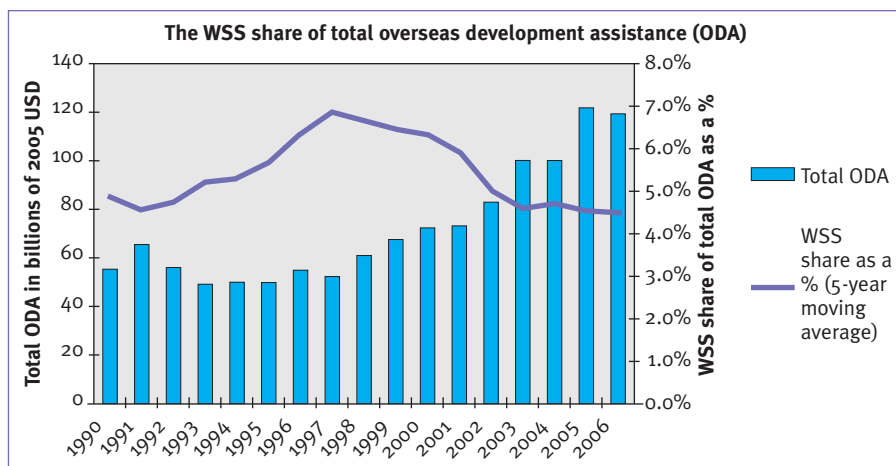
<sup>3</sup> For example, [Gordon Brown in his speech](#) at the United Nations (2007)

<sup>4</sup> [Ban Ki-moon's speech](#) at the World Economic Forum (2008)

# A neglected sector

## Aid is on the rise but the sector's share is in decline

Sanitation and water continue to be overlooked. While international aid has been rising steadily since the mid-1990s, the share to water supply and sanitation (WSS) has decreased since that time. In 2006, total aid flows to the sector reached \$6.3 billion. The 2006 Human Development Report argued that aid flows should rise by around \$4 billion each year.<sup>5</sup> However, that figure is an underestimate since it does not take into account the cost of maintenance and rehabilitation of existing facilities.



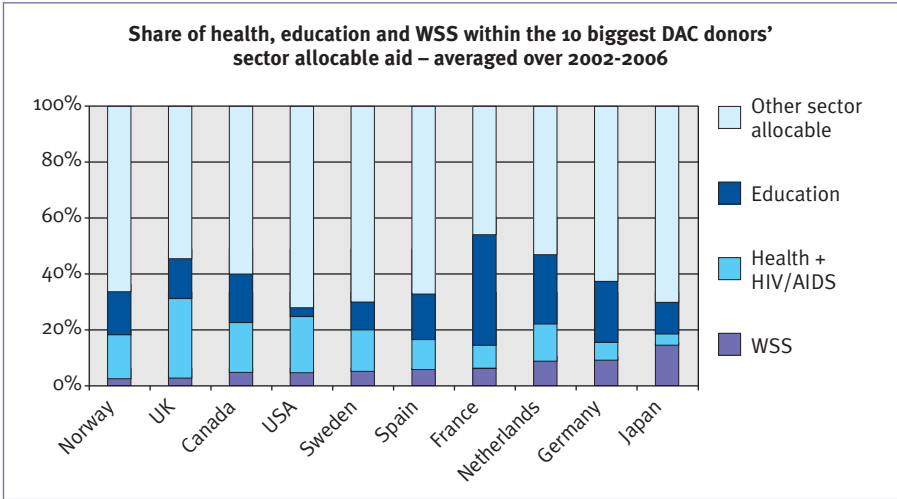
## Sanitation and water underpin health, education and economic growth

Progress in health and education is dependent on access to affordable sanitation and safe water and yet donors fail to recognise the inter-relationship between these three essential services.

Until the mid-1990s the inter-dependency between the three sectors was reflected in aid levels. Since the late 1990s, however, global aid flows for health and education have risen progressively without a commensurate rise in the sanitation and water sector.

<sup>5</sup> UNDP (2006) Human Development Report *Beyond scarcity: Power, poverty and the global water crisis*

Japan is by far the largest donor to sanitation and water, with 14% of allocable<sup>6</sup> aid going to the sector, representing an average of 8% of Japan’s total development assistance. At the other end of the scale the UK and Norway are spending just 1.5% of their overall aid budget on sanitation and water.



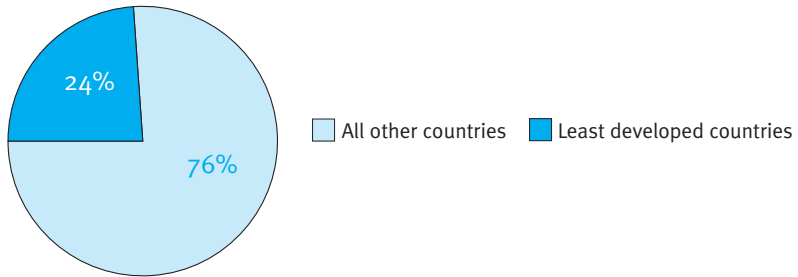
Donor governments often explain the decreasing levels of allocable aid to the sector as an outcome of their shift to General Budget Support. But the OECD donors’ average spend on Budget Support was, in 2006, only 3% of total aid spending.<sup>7</sup>

**Donor investment is failing to target the poorest countries**

Poor sector coordination and monitoring at the global level has resulted in a failure to target aid at the poorest countries with the lowest levels of access to sanitation and water services.

<sup>6</sup> Aid that is targeted at specific sectors of a recipient country’s economy.  
<sup>7</sup> OECD DAC database at <http://stats.oecd.org>

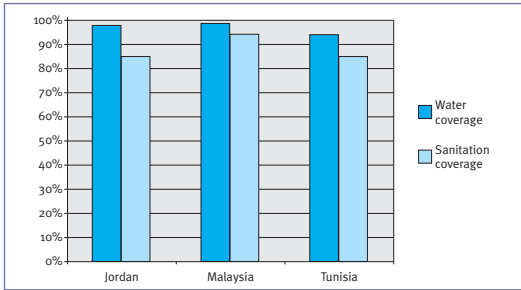
Share of ODA to WSS by recipient nation income level, averaged over 2002-2006



The region in the world that is most off-track is sub-Saharan Africa. At current rates of progress, the MDG water target will not be met until 2035 and the sanitation MDG target will still not be met a hundred years from today.

And yet, of the five countries receiving most aid for water and sanitation over the past five years, none were in sub-Saharan Africa. From 2002 to 2006, Least Developed Countries received less than a quarter of aid for sanitation and water. By contrast, a large share went to Middle Income Countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia and China. Over the last five years Malaysia received an average \$500 in aid for every person without access to water. Madagascar, eighty places behind Malaysia on the Human Development Index, received less than \$2 per un-served person.

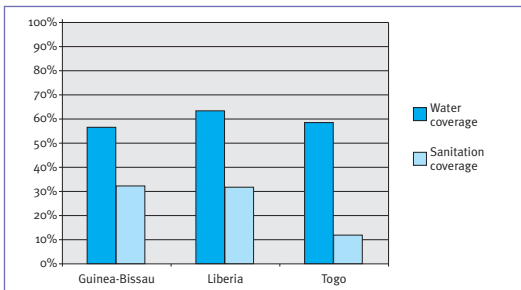
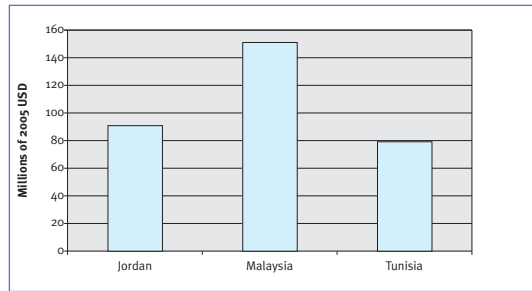
## The poorest countries are losing out



**WSS coverage levels in three Middle Income Countries**



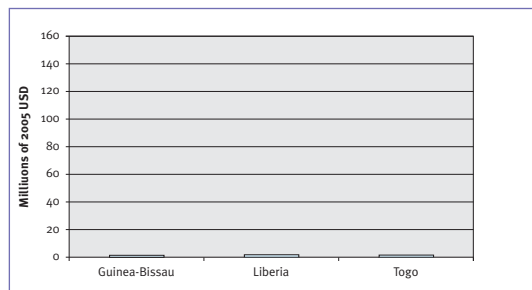
**Annual ODA to WSS averaged over 2002-2006 in three Middle Income Countries**



**WSS coverage in three Least Developed Countries**



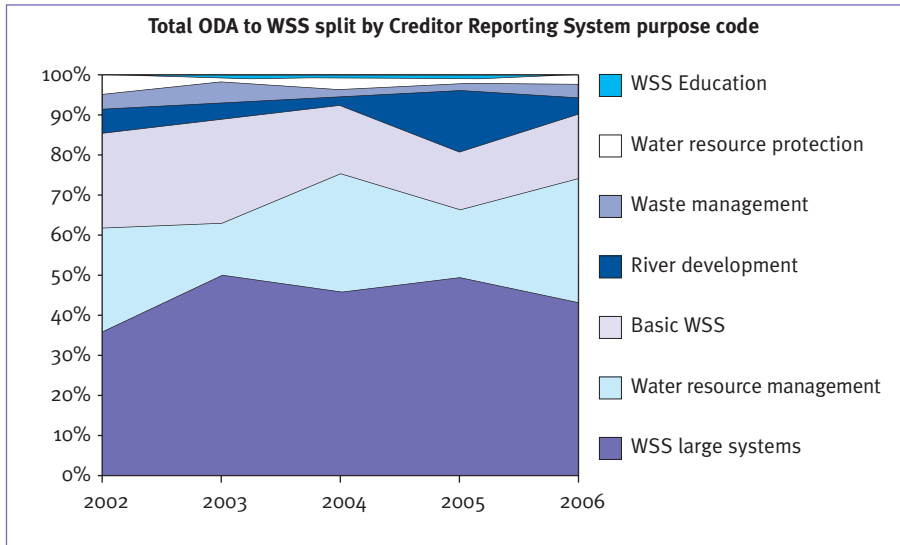
**Annual ODA to WSS averaged over 2002-2006 in three Least Developed Countries**





## Aid is not reaching the poorest communities

Another failure of the aid system is that finance is not reaching the poorest communities who do not have access to basic services. Investment is predominantly in large-scale sewerage systems and piped networks. As a result, poor communities in urban and rural areas are losing out while resources are channelled towards the maintenance of existing networks – in other words, aid is subsidising those consumers who already have connections. Overall, development assistance for basic water supply and sanitation to poorer households has gone down since 2002.



# What needs to happen

## Diagnosing and addressing the structural deficits of the sector

Concerted action is imperative to secure significant progress towards MDG 7. While the health and education sectors have, in recent years, undertaken initiatives to improve aid volume and quality, financing for the sanitation and water sector continues to be insufficient and poorly targeted.

The following issues need urgent attention:

- Low levels of financing and priority afforded to a sector that is critical to all development efforts
- Absence of effective monitoring of aid volumes and targeting for both water *and* sanitation<sup>8</sup>
- Absence of an appropriate mechanism or forum for donor and recipient governments to review progress and formulate policy responses

## Focus, authority, accountability – a global framework for action

A global framework for action is essential in order to ensure greater focus and coordination of efforts, to confer authority on the key stakeholders to act, and to increase the accountability of actors at national and international levels. Without these building blocks, the sanitation and water sector will continue to lag behind.

Multiple international commitments have been made but these actions and declarations have not been binding and have failed to drive progress in the sector. Nor has a consensus emerged among key international actors regarding barriers to progress in the sector that could inform coordinated remedial efforts. Above all, the sanitation and water sector has suffered from a lack of political will to address a crisis that is denying millions of men, women and children health and dignity.

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<sup>8</sup> Currently, the OECD Creditor Reporting System does not require donors to disaggregate expenditure on water supply and sanitation.

Tearfund and WaterAid, in support of End Water Poverty,<sup>9</sup> are calling for governments to urgently tackle this crisis by agreeing to a **global framework for action on sanitation and water**. This framework must include:

- **An annual review of the sector**
- **An annual High-Level Meeting**
- **A commitment that no credible national water and sanitation plan should fail for lack of finance**

### **An annual review of the sector**

There is a need for an annual review to report on the volume of spending on the sector, sector performance and the effectiveness of donor support reported separately for both sanitation and water. Furthermore, there is a need for analysis of developing countries' own levels of investment in the sector. The review should diagnose and identify key bottlenecks and points of structural failure behind the current crisis. It would look at both donor and recipient performance and identify gaps in funding.

UN Water's Global Annual Assessment on Water and Sanitation (GLAAS) report provides a good starting point for such an annual review but requires further development in order to ensure it meets the objectives outlined above.

### **An annual High-Level Meeting**

An international High-Level Meeting on sanitation and water should take place once a year. The meeting would be attended by high level officials (at the ministerial level) from the largest bilateral and multi-lateral donor agencies and by representatives from the most off-track regions (Africa and South Asia). The purpose of the meeting would be to review and assess global progress, drawing on analysis presented in the annual review. The meeting would identify specific issues affecting off-track countries and financial gaps that require concerted action. The aim of the annual meeting would be consensus on the key challenges for the sector and remedial policy or financing actions that can be reviewed in subsequent meetings.

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<sup>9</sup> End Water Poverty is an international coalition of organisations from across Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America calling for sanitation and water for all.

## No credible national plan should fail for lack of finance

For the sector to make progress, developing country governments must strengthen national frameworks to plan, coordinate and monitor the delivery of services.

A credible plan would address key constraints to meeting the MDG targets in the areas of policy, data, capacity and financing. It would provide:

- Realistic annual coverage targets with timelines against which progress on key policies and outcomes could be measured
- Costed and separate strategies, including institutional reform, for accelerating progress towards the MDG targets for water supply and sanitation
- An analysis of constraints to implementation and strategies to address them
- Policy actions which promote equity, sustainability and accountability in service delivery
- Indications as to how the plan will be monitored and evaluated

The High-Level Meeting would also be responsible for identifying credible plans which have failed to mobilise the required finance from external sources, and decide to realign donor support in order to fill gaps which have arisen due to poor coordination at the global level. Recognising that the development of robust policy frameworks requires considerable resources, High-Level Meeting participants might also wish to pool technical and financial resources in order to support developing countries to build policy and institutional capacity.

## Conclusion

The water and sanitation sectors are among the weakest performing MDG sectors with sanitation trailing furthest behind. But they are also sectors integral to the progress made across all other MDGs – most notably gender equity in primary school enrolments and reducing the mortality rate of the under-fives by two thirds.

The critical weaknesses in water and sanitation are down to a failure of leadership. The international development community must now urgently constitute the necessary high level bodies that can target human, technical and financial resources at the areas of critical failure.

Now is the time to build an integrated and accountable approach to development. Without a framework for action, we will continue to see unbalanced financial inputs and perverse developmental outcomes. Not only is progress against the sanitation and water target unlikely, there is also a genuine risk that many of the Millennium Development Goals will not be met.

Tearfund and WaterAid call on governments to urgently tackle the crisis by agreeing to a global framework for sanitation and water including:

- **An annual review of the sector**
- **An annual High-Level Meeting**
- **A commitment that no credible national plan should fail for lack of finance**

## Notes



**2.5 billion people live without sanitation.  
One in eight live without safe water.**

**WaterAid and Tearfund are campaigning as part  
of End Water Poverty, the international coalition  
calling for sanitation and water for all.**



[www.endwaterpoverty.org](http://www.endwaterpoverty.org)

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