

Water MDGs in the Arab Region Status, Challenges, and Opportunities

Introduction:

In September 2000, The United Nations General Assembly had the historical Millennium summit where the Millennium Declaration was announced. It was adopted by the 189 member countries and signed by 147 heads of states and governments. From the actions and targets of that declaration, eight Millennium Development Goals were drawn. These goals are anticipated to be achieved by the year 2015. Goal 7 is of particular relevance to the water sector. Like other MDG's, goal 7 was broken down into quantifiable targets that are measured by indicators. Target 10 of goal 7 focuses on freshwater. It aims to bring down the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation to half by the year 2015 (UNDP, 2008).

Status of MDG's in the Arab region:

The Arab region is characterized by its relatively limited water resources. More than half of its water originates from outside. Achieving the MDG means a constant and guaranteed water supply for drinking and sanitation purposes. A major progress was witnessed in many Arab countries in the areas of water supply and sanitation even before the implementation of the MDG's, due to the general developmental trend that started in the last decade. However, achieving the MDG's targets needs further investments. These investments are not necessarily feasible in all Arab countries due to the high disparity in wealth within the Arab region.

Taking a close look into the status of MDG's in specific Arab countries, we find that Bahrain is on the right track towards achieving the 2015 target with anticipated water supply coverage of 94% and sanitation coverage of 75% (CEDARE/AWC, 2005).

Egypt is on the right track with respect to water supply coverage but is facing a big challenge to achieve the 2015 target in sanitation coverage (CEDARE/AWC, 2005).

Algeria and Libya are both on the right track for achieving the MDG as their actual and planned water supply and sanitation coverage exceed the 2015 target. Same thing applies to Morocco and Tunisia (CEDARE/AWC, 2005).

Saudi Arabia is on the right track towards achieving the millennium target in water supply coverage. However, the actual sanitation coverage is below the millennium goal track (CEDARE/AWC, 2005).

The United Arab Emirates is the highest achiever in the Arab region with the water supply and sanitation coverage exceeding the MDG target and fully attained (CEDARE/AWC, 2005).

Yemen and Djibouti have the lowest coverage in the Arab region in both services (CEDARE/AWC, 2005)

Table 1. Shows the current MDG status in selected Arab countries according to the 2005 CEDARE/ Arab Water Council report. Tables 2 and 3 show the drinking water coverage and sanitation coverage respectively for the 22 Arab countries with specific data on the manners of improvement according to the 2008 UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) report.

Country	Water supply coverage					Sanitation coverage				
	1990	2005	Planned In 2015	MDG target	Status Above/ under	1990	2005	Planned In 2015	MDG target	Status Above/ under
Algeria	71%	88%	95%	85.5%	above	69%	88%	93%	84.5%	above
Bahrain	88%	100%	100%	94%	above	50%	87%	98%	75%	above
Egypt	65%	82%	100%	82%	above	39%	46.5%	83%	69.5%	above
Libya	45%	84%	100%	72.5%	above	85%	97%	100%	92.5%	above
Morocco	50%	98%	100%	94%	above					
Saudi Arabia	85%	90%	100%	94%	above	20%	41%	62%	60%	above
Tunisia	75%	96%	100%	88%	above					
UAE	100%	100%	100%	100%	above	100%	100%	100%	100%	above

Table 1. Current MDG status in selected Arab countries (CEDARE & AWC, 2005).

Challenges:

While there has been some progress on the recognition and implementation of the right to water, the same is not true for sanitation services. Labeling the year 2008 as International Year of Sanitation presents an opportunity to address the lack of attention paid to sanitation and hygiene in human rights terms.

The main objective for 2008 is to recognize sanitation as a crucial aspect of the right to an adequate standard of living, setting out the most important strategies and measures that stakeholders and decision-makers can prioritize in order to ensure that sanitation is accessible and affordable to all.

The Arab region as a whole faces a severe water shortage problem, with seven countries ranking among the ten most water-scarce in the world. By 2004, the demand for water had already exceeded the actual water resources available in the region by about 46 per cent. The various sub regions have been slowly improving access to sanitation facilities during the last 15 years. However, in 2004, the proportion of the Arab Least Developed Countries (LDC) population using improved sanitation facilities was still as low as 36 per cent. If Arab countries maintain their sluggish progress on this front, an estimated 124 million people will be without access to basic sanitation in 2015, 50 per cent of them in the Arab LDCs. Moreover, in 2001, an estimated 57 million people in the region lived in urban slums, with slum dwellers representing around 70 per cent of the urban population in the Arab LDC (Al-Dafa, 2008).

Reaching the millennium goal for water supply and sanitation requires a general improvement to water technology. Many Arab countries have low water technology and rely on imported equipment. Moreover, the private sector is not efficiently filling the gap left by the governmental entities.

Country	Year	Population		Drinking water coverage (%)						
		Total (Millions)	Urban%	Urban		Rural		Total		
				Improved	Unimproved	Improved	Unimproved	Improved	Unimproved	MDG target in 2015
Algeria	1990	25.283	52	99	1	88	12	94	6	97
	2006	33.351	64	87	13	81	19	85	15	
Bahrain	1990	0.493	88	100	0	-	-	-	-	unknown
	2006	0.739	97	100	0	-	-	-	-	
Comoros	1990	0.527	28	98	2	91	9	93	7	96.5
	2006	0.818	38	91	9	81	19	85	15	
Djibouti	1990	0.561	76	79	21	68	32	76	24	88
	2006	0.819	87	98	2	54	46	92	8	
Egypt	1990	55.137	43	97	3	92	8	94	6	97
	2006	74.167	43	99	1	98	2	98	2	
Iraq	1990	18.515	70	99	1	46	54	83	17	91.5
	2006	28.506	67	88	12	56	44	77	23	
Jordan	1990	3.254	72	99	1	91	9	97	3	98.5
	2006	5.729	83	99	1	91	9	98	2	
Kuwait	1990	2.143	98	-	-	-	-	-	-	unknown
	2006	2.779	98	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Lebanon	1990	2.974	83	100	0	100	0	100	0	100
	2006	4.055	87	100	0	100	0	100	0	
Libya	1990	4.364	79	72	28	68	32	71	29	85.5
	2006	6.039	85	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Mauritania	1990	1.945	40	30	70	41	59	37	63	68.5
	2006	3.044	41	70	30	54	46	60	40	
Morocco	1990	24.808	48	94	6	58	42	75	25	87.5
	2006	30.853	59	100	0	58	42	83	17	
Oman	1990	1.843	65	85	15	73	27	81	19	90.5
	2006	2.546	71	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Qatar	1990	0.467	92	100	0	100	0	100	0	100
	2006	0.821	96	100	0	100	0	100	0	
Saudi Arabia	1990	16.256	77	97	3	63	37	89	11	94.5
	2006	24.175	81	97	3	-	-	-	-	
Somalia	1990	6.717	30	-	-	-	-	-	-	unknown
	2006	8.445	36	63	37	10	90	29	71	
Sudan	1990	25.933	27	85	15	57	43	64	36	82
	2006	37.707	42	78	22	64	36	70	30	
Syria	1990	12.721	49	96	4	70	30	83	17	91.5
	2006	19.408	51	95	5	83	17	89	11	
Tunisia	1990	8.219	60	95	5	62	38	82	18	91
	2006	10.215	66	99	1	84	16	94	6	
UAE	1990	1.867	79	100	0	100	0	100	0	100
	2006	4.248	77	100	0	100	0	100	0	
Yemen	1990	12.314	21	-	-	-	-	-	-	unknown
	2006	21.732	28	68	32	65	35	66	34	

Table 2. Drinking Water Coverage (Modified from UNICEF & WHO, 2008)

Country	Year	Population		Sanitation coverage (%)						
		Total (Millions)	Urban%	Urban		Rural		Total		
				Improved	unimproved	Improved	unimproved	Improved	unimproved	MDG target in 2015
Algeria	1990	25.283	52	99	1	77	5	88	3	89.5
	2006	33.351	64	98	1	87	2	94	1	
Bahrain	1990	0.493	88	100	0	-	-	-	-	unknown
	2006	0.739	97	100	0	-	-	-	-	
Comoros	1990	0.527	28	34	62	12	81	18	76	56
	2006	0.818	38	39	48	26	72	35	63	
Djibouti	1990	0.561	76	-	-	-	-	-	-	unknown
	2006	0.819	87	76	15	11	12	67	15	
Egypt	1990	55.137	43	68	29	37	40	50	35	67.5
	2006	74.167	43	85	13	52	41	66	29	
Iraq	1990	18.515	70	75	6	-	-	-	-	unknown
	2006	28.506	67	80	0	69	11	76	4	
Jordan	1990	3.254	72	-	-	-	-	-	-	unknown
	2006	5.729	83	88	11	71	27	85	14	
Kuwait	1990	2.143	98	-	-	-	-	-	-	unknown
	2006	2.779	98	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Lebanon	1990	2.974	83	100	0	-	-	-	-	unknown
	2006	4.055	87	100	0	-	-	-	-	
Libya	1990	4.364	79	97	3	96	4	97	3	98.5
	2006	6.039	85	97	3	96	4	97	3	
Mauritania	1990	1.945	40	33	31	11	45	20	40	40
	2006	3.044	41	44	26	10	8	24	15	
Morocco	1990	24.808	48	80	1	25	4	52	2	53
	2006	30.853	59	85	0	54	6	72	3	
Oman	1990	1.843	65	97	1	61	7	85	3	86.5
	2006	2.546	71	97	1	-	-	-	-	
Qatar	1990	0.467	92	100	0	100	0	100	0	100
	2006	0.821	96	100	0	100	0	100	0	
Saudi Arabia	1990	16.256	77	100	0	-	-	-	-	unknown
	2006	24.175	81	100	0	-	-	-	-	
Somalia	1990	6.717	30	-	-	-	-	-	-	unknown
	2006	8.445	36	51	16	7	6	23	9	
Sudan	1990	25.933	27	53	37	26	26	33	29	47.5
	2006	37.707	42	50	36	24	23	35	28	
Syria	1990	12.721	49	94	2	69	8	81	5	83.5
	2006	19.408	51	96	0	88	7	92	4	
Tunisia	1990	8.219	60	95	0	44	4	74	2	75
	2006	10.215	66	96	2	64	14	85	6	
UAE	1990	1.867	79	98	0	95	0	97	0	97
	2006	4.248	77	98	0	95	0	97	0	
Yemen	1990	12.314	21	79	17	14	36	28	32	44
	2006	21.732	28	88	5	30	24	46	19	

Table 3. Sanitation Coverage (Modified from UNICEF & WHO, 2008).

MDG 7 supports equity in the sense that it calls for serving people who are not covered with proper drinking water and sanitation. However, it must be noted that there is a very fine line between reaching the 2015 target and reaching a state of inequity. In clearer words, governments may charge water service prices and/or privatize water services which will add to the burden of poor people who are the main target of MDG7 in the first place.

MDG 7 is interrelated to many other human rights; one of these rights is the right for proper accommodation. It has been reported by the United Nations that there are more than 100 million homeless people around the world. Proper water supply and sanitation are among the basic prerequisites in a proper accommodation. With many countries in the Arab Region suffering from eccentricity and trying to establish new communities far away from the population centroids, providing water and sanitation to these new communities would be a big challenge (RAED, 2008).

Informal settlements is another challenge, where in many countries building without a permit is a violation of the law that dictates not to provide informal settlements with any services including water supply services. This puts governments in a dilemma between, not providing drinking water services as a mean for law enforcement to prevent informal settlements, and providing basic water needs and services for violators.

OPPORTUNITIES:

In the Arab Region, improving sanitation will have a deep moral effect and a direct role in enhancing many human attributes affected by severe conditions, such as pride and dignity. Many of these unfortunate people have reached a level of despair that makes them not aware of their rights as humans, leaving them in a state of total submission to external circumstances that is out of their control.

MDG7 also facilitates further cooperation between Arab states. This can be emphasized by promoting regional integration and offering technical support for initiatives in all areas of development. Closer coordination of economic and environmental policies, sharing of best practices and success stories between peers, from education policy to disease control, and the creation of new regional initiatives to foster human development in the poorest countries of the region, are among the most important means by which Arab countries can accelerate progress towards the MDGs (Al-Dafa,2008).

Some of the Arab countries, namely North African countries have initiated a sub-regional program for enhancing the achievement of the water MDGs through the establishment of the Regional Water MDGs Monitoring and Evaluation Unit with national task forces. The objective of the program is to advocate the importance of the MDGs, and to raise awareness about methodology of assessing status and progress, and evaluate the investment needed to achieve the MDGs, and identify gaps to mobilize the necessary financial resources needed achieve the MDGS. (CEDARE/N-AMCOW/AWF 2008).

Recommendations:

Arab states should have reliable and up to date databases to reflect their current MDG achievement status.

Many efforts have to be devoted to public awareness on many issues, including the importance of achieving MDG targets and the important of proper sanitation as a human right and the importance of bridging the gap between the rich and the poor and its positive impact on the whole community.

For funding the necessary drinking and sanitation coverage, targeted subsidies may be introduced where service charges are according to income classes. This creates some form of social integration where the rich cares for the needs of the poor.

The same social integration concept may be expanded regionally and can be applied between different Arab countries, where wealthy countries and development banks contribute to an Arab Water MDG Fund that can finance achieving the Water MDGs in the less fortunate Arab countries.

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