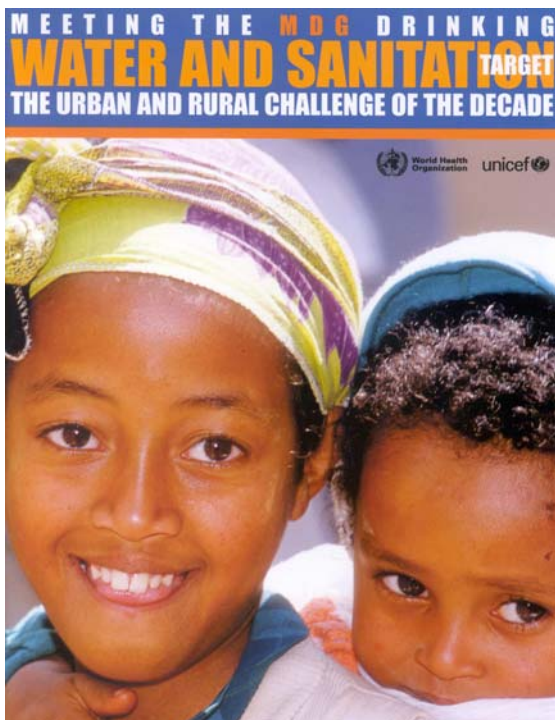

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World Health Organization

Meeting the MDG Drinking-water and Sanitation Target

The urban and rural challenge of the decade



“Keeping up with the population increase is a major challenge for urban areas; maintaining current coverage levels till 2015 requires serving 700 million urban dwellers over the coming decade”

Safe drinking water, sanitation and good hygiene are fundamental to health, survival, growth and development. However, these basic necessities are still a luxury for many of the world's poor people. Over 1.1 billion of our fellow citizens do not use drinking water from improved sources, while 2.6 billion lack basic sanitation. Safe drinking water and basic sanitation are so obviously essential to health that they risk being taken for granted. Efforts to prevent death from diarrhoea or to reduce the burden of such diseases as ascariasis, dracunculiasis, hookworm, schistosomiasis and trachoma are doomed to failure unless people have access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. Lack of basic sanitation indirectly inhibits the learning abilities of millions of school-aged children who are infested with intestinal worms transmitted through inadequate sanitation facilities and poor hygiene.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have set us on a common course to push back poverty, inequality, hunger and illness. The world has pledged to reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. Entering the International Decade for Action, Water for Life, 2005-2015, this report looks at the challenge of meeting the MDG target for drinking water and sanitation. Achieving the MDG drinking water and sanitation target poses two major challenges: a rapid pace of urbanization, which requires a major effort even to keep up the current coverage levels; a huge backlog of rural people unserved with basic sanitation and safe drinking water, which calls for an intensive mobilization of resources to reduce the vast coverage gap between urban and rural populations.

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