

Access to Drinking Water is deteriorating in the urban half of the world where rapid urbanisation is outpacing public services.

Stockholm – September 6, 2010. On July 28, 2010, the United Nations General Assembly recognised access to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right. Through the Millennium Development Goals, set by the United Nations, the world is aiming at developing access to safe water and sanitation. Huge efforts are being made by governments all around the world to develop access to drinking water, to toilets, to wastewater management and storm-water protection. Water operators, public and private, are contributing actively to implementing these water and sanitation policies. Current efforts are important and effective. Hundreds of millions of people have gained access to drinking water or to some sanitation services in the past decades.

However, these public policies are being outpaced by the rapid urbanisation of the world. Between 2000 and 2008, the world population increased by 635 million people. Of these, 511 million (80%) live in urban areas and 124 million (20%) in rural areas. All the UN statistics show that there is a great disparity in the results of the current water and sanitation policies between rural and urban areas. In the rural half of the world - where the needs are currently numerically the highest - it has been possible to improve access to water and sanitation in the past decade. There, practical improvements exceed the demographic growth for all the indicators available.

On the contrary, in the urban half of the world, despite having provided access to water or sanitation services to hundreds of millions of additional people, the current policies have been unable to prevent the situation worsening.

Comparing the latest figures (2008) with 2000, the initial year of the Millennium Development Goals programme, a clear deterioration is observed. The proportion of the urban population that benefits from satisfactory access to drinking water or sanitation is decreasing.

In cities, and towns of all sizes, over those 8 years there has been an increase of:

- 114 million more people without access to tapwater at home or in the immediate vicinity
- 134 million more people without access to private sanitary toilets (basic sanitation)

In both cases, this means an increase of 20% in the number of individuals living in cities who lack these accesses.

In the meantime, in urban areas, the number of people without access to “improved water sources” (i.e. more or less the sources that are protected from direct contaminations) and the number of people without any other option than open defecation has not decreased.

So, in cities, despite all the efforts, on average the world is not making progress in these domains that are essential to life and to social and economic development. The world is in regression.

A surge is necessary to reverse these trends. This is all the more urgent because further deterioration might create unmanageable situations in some cities, where the creation of infrastructure will be more and more difficult. Delays in action will make progress more and more costly. Obviously, current efforts in rural areas should continue while efforts in urban and peri-urban areas should be stepped up to prevent worsening the situation further. Water operators, public and private are willing to contribute to the more ambitious urban policies that are necessary.

Gerard Payen, President of Aquafed, said in the Stockholm World Water Week: “In cities, there are today more people suffering from a poor and unsatisfactory access to safe water and sanitation than at the end of the XXth century. In the urban half of the world, access to water and sanitation is deteriorating. Current efforts to develop access to water and sanitation in cities are outpaced by urbanisation. A surge in the efforts is urgent to reverse this trend. This requires new determination in public policies and practical approaches from operators and system installers of all kinds.”

Global trends between 2000 and 2008		AquaFed	
Change of population (millions)...		Urban half	Rural half
Safe Water	without access to permanent tapwater (running water)	<i>Not monitored</i>	
	without access to tapwater	+ 114 →	- 24 →
	without access to “improved” sources	+ 13 →	- 188 →
Sanitation	without wastewater treatment	<i>Not monitored</i>	
	without wastewater collection	<i>Not monitored</i>	
	without private sanitary toilets (= “improved” sanitation)	+ 134 →	- 69 →
	without toilets (Open defecation)	+ 7 →	- 129 →

Source : AquaFed based on UN statistics (JMP website)

Note: All numbers in this document come directly from, or are deduced from, the official UN statistics on access to Water and Sanitation as reported by the WHO-UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (www.wssinfo.org).

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AquaFed is the International Federation of Private Water Operators. Open to companies and associations of companies of all sizes and from all countries, it aims to contribute to solving water challenges by making Private Sector know-how and experience available to the international community. It brings together more than 300 water companies that serve hundreds of millions of people in urban and rural areas in 40 countries.

Members of the Federation participate actively in the improvement of water and sanitation services. For many years the Federation has warned of the underestimation of people’s needs for safe water and sanitation including access to toilets, collection of water after use, wastewater treatment and storm-water management. For many years through their International Federation, private water operators have supported the Human Right to Water and Sanitation and advocated for more ambitious water and sanitation policies.

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