Introduction

Rapid urbanization and growth in many developing countries has led to dangerously uneven improvements in the quality of life and standard of living of citizens. A recent statistic of the World Bank states that 50% of the world's poor population was living in the urban or peri-urban areas in the year 2000.

Urban poverty is largely localized in growing slum settlements. These slum settlements often lack even the most basic of civic amenities within households – water supply, sewage and sanitation, waste disposal, and electricity supply. Built haphazardly and often illegally, many of these shanty towns are dangerous places to reside.

Water is essential for our survival, as well as for us to carry out activities such as cooking, farming and manufacturing. Hence, the provision of clean water is a basic necessity and is also vital in reducing the spread of water-borne diseases such as cholera and polio.

Human waste, if not properly disposed of but rather left on the open ground, exposes individuals to harmful bacteria present in waste. This can cause contamination of the environment and of water supplies, one of the most pertinent concerns being the contamination of groundwater. Improper disposal practices can lead to widespread disease like dysentery.

About 2 million people die every year due to diarrheal diseases induced by poor waste facilities, most of whom are children of ages below 5 years old. The majority of the affected populations live in areas of dense populations, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, the Oceania regions, South-central Asia, and Eastern Asia.

Definition of Key Terms

**Slum Dwellers:** A *slum*, as defined by the United Nations agency UN-HABITAT, is a run-down area of a city characterized by substandard housing, squalor and lack of security. The term has traditionally referred to housing areas that were once relatively affluent, but deteriorated as the
original dwellers moved on to newer and better parts of the city. A slum dweller is an individual who's primary place of residence is situated within a slum.

**Adequate Sanitation and Water:** To be provided with adequate sanitation and water is broadly defined as a situation whereby slum dwellers are provided with basic infrastructure so that they can have access to a clean piped water supply and underground sewerage, individual toilets and solid waste collection. More specifically, The United Nations defines sanitation as having a connection to a public sewer or septic system, a pour flush latrine, a simple flush latrine, or a ventilated and improved latrine.

**Perspective of the UN/General Overview**

On World Water Day, which was commemorated on 22 March 2011, the UN Independent Expert on water and sanitation, Catarina de Albuquerque, stressed that water and sanitation are human rights that must be guaranteed to all people without discrimination, including based on tenure status.

The UN supports the view that inadequate access to water and sanitation cannot merely be seen as an unfortunate yet inevitable result of poverty, but rather as a result of deliberate political decisions to marginalize a particular demographic and “de-legitimize their existence”. In 2000, the UN set a Millennium Development Goal (MDG) to halve the proportion of people without sustainable access to both improved water supply and sanitation, in areas such as slums, by 2015.

The World Health Organization claims to have been a leading power in improving hygiene and sanitation conditions for those in need over the past years, and aims to provide improved drinking water, sustainable access to water, and improved sanitation facilities in the form of public sewers over years to come.

**Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

**African Countries, particularly those within the sub-saharan region**

A UN report in 2008 claimed that 400 million of Africa’s one billion people live in cities, and this number is expected to rise to over 1.2 billion by 2050. Among those who live in cities, an estimated 60% reside in slums, some without access to clean water, and even more without reasonable sanitation.
As illustrated by figures 1.1 and 1.2, Africa is increasingly becoming the main focal point for the battle against eradicating the grossly inadequate living conditions of the ultra-poor. Efforts aimed at solving the problems of poor sanitation and water access in this area would not only have major impacts on the UN’s goal of eradicating extreme poverty, but would also serve as important case studies for other governments attempting to similarly uplift the poor.

India

Local government institutions in India in charge of operating and maintaining the infrastructure are seen as weak and lacking of the financial resources to carry out their functions. As a result, no major city in India is known to have a continuous water supply, and an estimated 72% of Indians still lack access to improved sanitation facilities.

Current trends indicate an increased awareness of these poor water and sanitation conditions, and a greater effort towards improving them is being taken by government officials. As a result, India has seen a number of extremely innovative and successful approaches towards improving water supply and sanitation, especially in the early 2000s. These include demand-driven approaches in rural water supply since 1999, community-led total sanitation, public-private partnerships to improve the
continuity of urban water supply in Karnataka, and the use of micro-credit for women in order to improve access to water. These successful case studies can be used as models to direct slum improvement plans in other parts of the world.

For example, in the populous Ahmedabad, one of India's largest cities, we see that the Parivartan Slum Networking Program of 1995 is a positive case study of the importance of public-private partnerships and of close relationships with the slum dwellers themselves in ensuring the success of the slum improvement program. The program led to vast improvements in the quality and standard of life of slum dwellers, attesting to the importance of water and sanitation to a population.

Other South Asian countries

Diarrhea remains the leading cause of child deaths in South Asia, as nearly one billion people in the region live without access to adequate sanitation. A 2005, UN MDG reports indicate that 76% of rural populations in South Asia do not use improved sanitation, and in urban areas this figure is 34%.

Southeast Asia

Improved sanitation coverage has increased gradually as economic growth has spread to Asia’s poorer countries. However, the latest estimates put improved sanitation coverage at 28% in Cambodia, 57% in Indonesia, 76% in the Philippines and 69% in Vietnam, far below the universal sanitation coverage achieved in other Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand and Singapore. Hundreds of millions of people in the region still lack access to proper sanitation as a result or vastly uneven economic development.

Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam lose an estimated US$9 billion a year because of poor sanitation (based on 2005 prices). That is approximately 2% of their combined Gross Domestic Product, varying from 1.3% in Vietnam, 1.5% in the Philippines, 2.3% in Indonesia and 7.2% in Cambodia.

United States of America

As one of the wealthiest countries in the world, the US has a crucial role to play in pioneering initiatives aimed at improving water and sanitation facilities in slums, or by funding and supporting existing ones. Important programs like USAID have set up numerous partnerships with particularly stricken regions in attempt to alleviate the problems faced by slum dwellers. USAID/India, for
example, is working with Shelter Associates, a community-based organization representing slum dwellers in Sangli, to construct toilets for the use of 25,000 persons.

Possessing a valuable trove of expertise and technology, the US will undoubtedly be a major player and contributor towards slum improvement efforts. Additionally, the US’s involvement in these countries emphasizes the importance of public-private partnerships with local organizations to ensure the long term sustainability of water and sanitation services within slums.

UN-HABITAT

UN-HABITAT is one of the main organizations of the UN that has committed to playing an active role in improving sanitation and clean water access, in attempt to fulfill the 2015 MDG deadline. The main priority of the Water and Sanitation program is “improving access to safe water and helping to provide adequate sanitation to millions of low-income urban dwellers, and measuring that impact”.

Timeline of Events

1995 - Implementation of the Parivartan Slum Networking program in Ahmedabad, India

2000 - UN sets the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Goal 7 states: Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation

2008 - International Year of Sanitation

22 March 2011 - UN commemorated World Water Day, re-emphasizing its commitment towards increasing access to clean water

2015 - Deadline for MDGs

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

In 2000, the UN set the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) to halve the proportion of people without sustainable access to both improved water supply and sanitation, in areas such as slums, by 2015. The UN, has set up partnerships with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), to try to reach these goals by educating people living in unsanitary conditions of basic hygiene practices and by creating more adequate housing and human
waste facilities. Funding to support these goals has come from the World Bank, as well as donations from developed nations.

UNICEF works in more than 90 countries around the world to improve water supplies and sanitation facilities in schools and communities, and to promote safe hygiene practices.

Established in 2007, the UN-Water Task Force on Sanitation aims to increase the effectiveness of global efforts to reach the sanitation targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Task Force worked with the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and other partners to build evidence that links sanitation to child mortality, to develop plans and strategies and to form new partnership frameworks.

Possible Solutions

Partnerships with local organizations have shown to be a key determinant of the success of a slum improvement program.

It is important to acknowledge that many slum dwellers have begun actively participating in, and campaigning for, slum improvement programs. They have started to make a concerted effort to push for access to basic amenities, and often play a crucial role in solving their own problems. However, instead of harnessing their energy, governments and international organizations often discourage them from participating and contributing towards improvement plans for their own living environments. Nevertheless, as history has shown, the success many charitable plans drawn up by external organizations is dependent on whether locals feel that they have a personal stake and role to play in such improvement plans.

The sustainability of proposed programs must also be taken into account. Slum dwellers should be educated on how to maintain and repair any infrastructure provided, as well as be taught of their proper usage, in order to ensure the long term success of measures.

The issue of how to finance such programs continues to be a major hurdle in slum improvement efforts, thus a combination of government funding and private donations might be crucial in the general success of these efforts.

Conclusion

The correlation between improving sanitation and access to clean water and the effect of relieving extreme poverty within a region has been demonstrated time and time again. Slums are often brushed aside as unfortunate, albeit tolerable, consequences of economic growth within a nation,
whilst their negative impact on economic growth is largely ignored. The economic potential of these disenfranchised citizens is surprisingly large and merely waiting to be tapped into. A major challenge we face in the 21st century continues to be the question of how to alleviate income inequality in rapidly developing emerging economies, and the issue of sanitation and water remains a key aspect of this challenge.

Bibliography


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<http://iwawaterwiki.org/xwiki/bin/view/Articles/Slum+Sanitation+Project++India>.


