

United Nations Development Programme

POVERTY REDUCTION AND ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

## SMALL-SCALE WATER PROVIDERS IN KENYA: PIONEERS OR PREDATORS?





*Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.*

# **Small-Scale Water Providers in Kenya: Pioneers or Predators?**

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AWSB	Athi Water Services Board
CBO	Community-based organisation
CDF	Kenyan government's Community Development Fund
CESR	Center for Economic and Social Rights
GoK	Government of Kenya
GPOBA	Global Partnership on Output-Based Aid
ICEFI	Central American Institute for Fiscal Studies
ISD	Informal Settlements Department
JMP	WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation
KENSUP	Kenya Slum Upgrading Programme
Kshs	Kenyan Shillings
KWTP	Kinoo Water Trust Project
MWI	Kenyan Ministry of Water and Irrigation
NCWCS	Nairobi City Water and Sewerage Company
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OBA	Output-based aid
PPIP	Pro-Poor Implementation Plan
UfW	Unaccounted-for-water
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UN OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
WASREB	Water Services Regulatory Board
WHO	World Health Organization
WSBs	Water Services Boards
WSP	World Bank's Water and Sanitation Program
WSPs	Water Service Providers
W&S	Water and Sanitation
WSTF	Water Services Trust Fund



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are two main schools of thought about the role of small-scale private water providers. Proponents view them as pioneers and gap-fillers, supplying water where utilities are not providing it adequately. Sceptics argue that they are predators who charge high prices and supply poor quality water. This study examines which argument holds true in the urban and peri-urban areas of Kenya. The study is based on household and provider surveys, as well as topical interviews with government officials and stakeholders. We find that small-scale providers increase water supply coverage and reduce time poverty.

As predicted by the “poverty penalty” concept, however, low-income households pay high prices for water of questionable quality. For two-thirds of households, expenditure on water is above the affordability threshold. And 57 percent of households consume below the water poverty line. Water is also exposed to contamination by external toxic residuals, mainly during transportation and as a result of pipe leakages. Given their inability to store water, low-income households suffer disproportionately in times of scarcity and rationing.

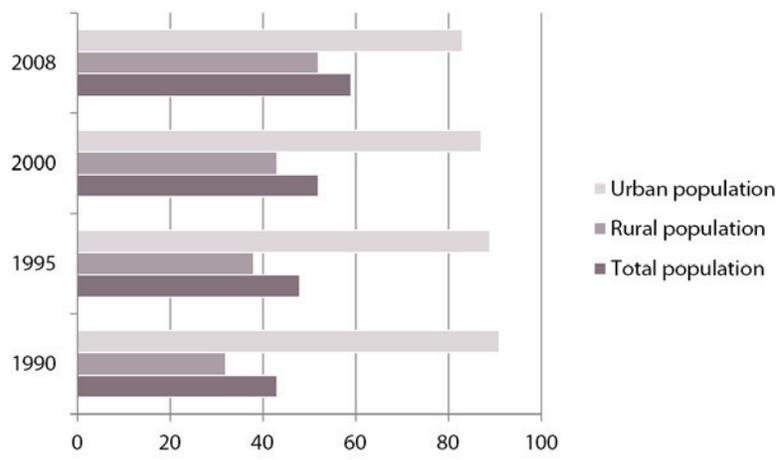
As regards policy intervention, piped water connections on premises remain the most affordable and safe system of water provision. In the meantime, supporting fixed-point water suppliers such as public taps and water kiosks represents a second-best solution. Strengthening capacity within regulatory institutions is required to ensure affordability and quality of the water provided.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Kenya faces challenges in realizing its “2030 Vision” for the water and sanitation sector “to ensure that improved water and sanitation are available and accessible to all” (GoK, 2007, p. 18). The 2010 constitution made access to water and sanitation the right of citizens.<sup>1</sup> This is in line with the United Nations stipulation of access to water and sanitation as a human right that requires member states to take “deliberate, concrete and targeted steps” to ensure the progressive realisation of this right (UN OHCHR, 1990).<sup>2</sup> Despite these ambitious objectives, the proportion of people with access to an improved water source remains low (MWI, 2007). As shown in Figure 1, in 2008 only 59 percent of Kenyans had access to safe drinking water, although the share had increased from 44 percent in 1990. In urban areas the figure is 83 percent, down from 91 percent in 1990. This gradual deterioration in urban water access is mainly due to rapid population growth, especially in the informal settlements.

**Figure 1: Improved water source (% of population with access), Kenya 1990–2008**



Source: World Bank (2011).

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