



THE UN-HABITAT
WATER AND SANITATION TRUST FUND
ANNUAL REPORT 2008

FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

UN  HABITAT

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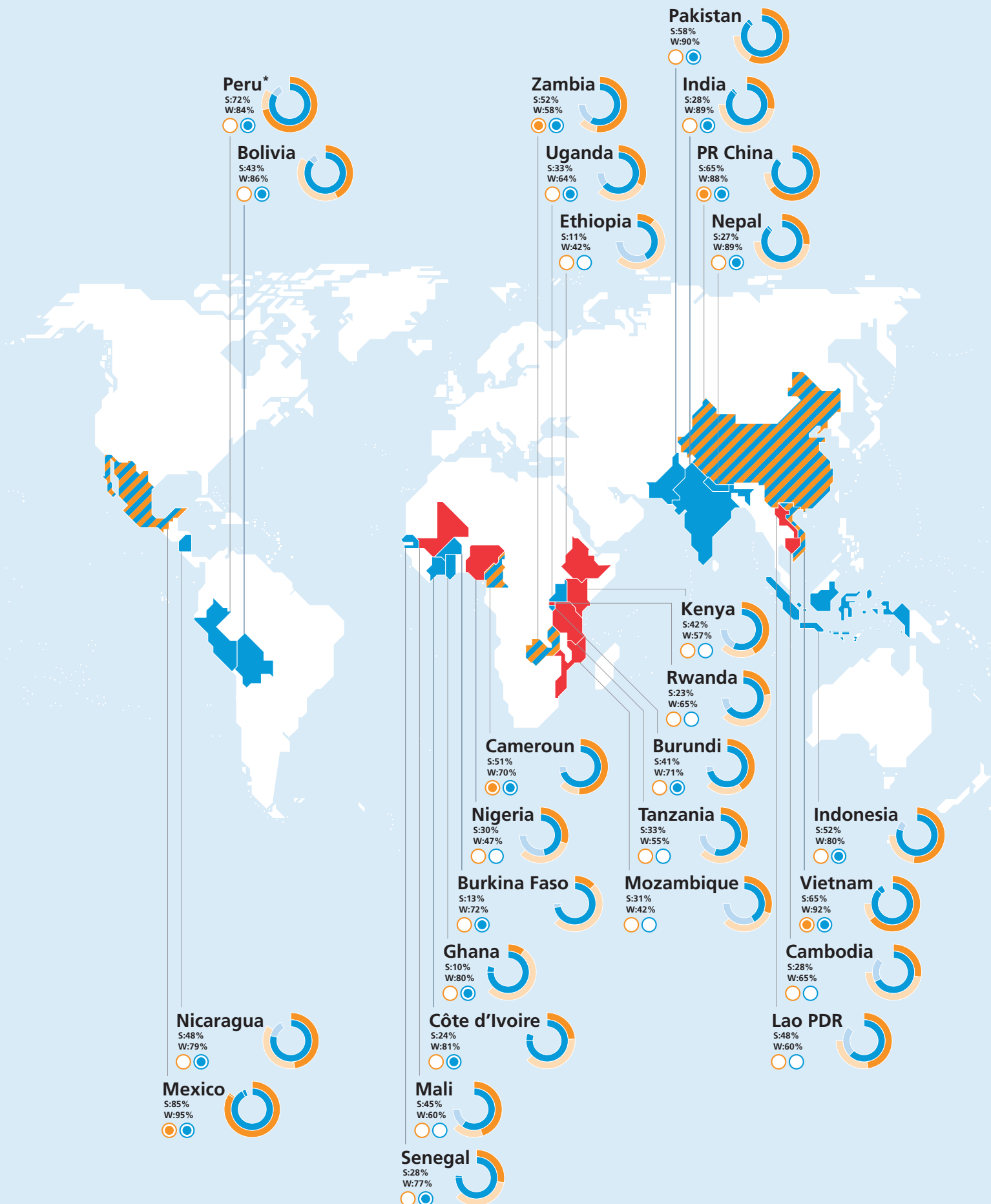
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Progress in meeting the MDG targets for water and sanitation in the Water and Sanitation Trust Fund countries

Introduction

Although sanitation has been hailed as “the most important medical advance since 1840”, over 2.5 billion people – most of them in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia – lack access to basic sanitation. The world is not on track to meet the 2015 Millennium Development Goal (MDG) for sanitation. For the drinking water MDG, progress is better, but the situation still critical in some regions. Meanwhile in the slums of cities such as Nairobi, Dar-es-Salaam and Mumbai, the daily reality is an extended struggle to find water, a place to defecate and a convenient location to dump or burn one’s rubbish.

The backdrop to this situation is the increasingly rapid rate of urbanization, with more than half the world’s population now living in urban areas, where slums and shanty-towns continue to proliferate. These settlements present unique problems. They are usually excluded from official statistics on housing and basic services, and municipalities and utility companies face acute problems in extending services to them. Insufficient resources are part of the problem, but progress is also inhibited by lack of capacity, institutional weaknesses and information gaps.

The primary objective of the UN-HABITAT Water and Sanitation Trust Fund (WSTF) is to contribute to the international efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals for Water and Sanitation. The strategy of the WSTF is to target the key constraints by focussing on:

- The countries that are not making sufficient progress, such as the lagging countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia;
- Training and capacity building to overcome institutional weaknesses and inefficiencies;
- Increasing the flow of investment, especially investment where it is needed most, in the expanding slums and shanty-towns where the urban poor are concentrated;
- Addressing information gaps by improving the information systems used to monitor service coverage and progress in meeting the MDGs.

Operational activities under the WSTF focus on countries which are not on track in achieving the Millennium Development Goals for water and sanitation. The map on the opposite page displays the countries where operational activities are taking place and their status in terms of progress in meeting the MDGs.

Exposing the real urban problem

The twin phenomena of urbanization, and the proliferation of slums and shanty-towns, together pose the most daunting challenge to human settlements today. Unsound dwellings, overcrowding, and lack of basic infrastructure, characterize neighbourhoods whose residents endure poverty, insecurity, and squalor. Many 'illegal' communities, including inner city pocket slums and squatter encroachments on municipal fringes, are unacknowledged in urban statistics. Despite the damage to social stability, their inhabitants' needs are neglected. This situation, which affects a significant proportion of the global population – perhaps as high as one-sixth – is at the forefront of UN-HABITAT's concerns. Ways must be, and are being, found to break down barriers to change, and transform degraded urban spaces into decent, safe and sustainable human settlements.

At the leading edge of this endeavour is activity to promote environmental sanitation and clean water supplies – services without which dignified and healthy living is compromised, and which can act as a vanguard for much broader community transformation. In 2002, under the impetus of the Millennium Development Goals (to halve by 2015 the proportion of those without service access in 1990), a Water and Sanitation Trust Fund was set up within UN-HABITAT. Its task was to bring in new investment and ideas, expand service coverage for poor urban dwellers, and help build momentum behind MDG attainment. The Fund's key donors have been the governments of Canada, Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Sweden. Speeding up progress towards the MDGs is a lodestar guiding all the Trust Fund's activities.



Since every municipality would prefer its slums to go away, and officials fear that ‘improvements’ will prevent that from happening, there has been a tendency to disregard the realities of urban squalor and under-invest in efforts to address it. This is an outcome of historical attitudes to urban planning that will take decades to erode. Today, official coverage figures suggest – because this is what has been reported – that the urban developing world is close to meeting the MDG for water, with sanitation not far behind. In reality, this is far from being the case.

Water and sanitation deficits in poor urban communities are often under-estimated. Indicators used for assessing drinking water supplies coverage, such as distance between standpipes, are suited to rural environments

only. In a slum, this may mean hundreds of people relying on one tap. With sanitation, criteria for ‘improved facilities’ are derived from spatial considerations also borrowed from rural settings where household plots are large enough to contain a separate ‘toilet cabin’ for every family. Shared toilets or toilet blocks – the only possibility in many densely crowded urban areas – are excluded from MDG recognition. Thus there is both major under-reporting of the problem, and under-recognition of practicable ‘improvements’.

Mind-sets need changing

To dispel the obscurity surrounding water and sanitation problems in urban areas and address them effectively requires radical mind-set changes: false perceptions of the problem's scale and nature are just one aspect. Municipal authorities need to be inspired to engage actively with low-income areas, and familiarized with ways of doing things that make dramatic improvement possible. Wherever urban poverty is acute, the whole

to be carried out within the parameters of UN-HABITAT's overall vision for sustainable urbanization and human settlement development. The framework is very wide-ranging, identifying strategic opportunities from macro to micro level. The main strategic ideas are as follows:

- Nothing succeeds like success
- Where models are successful, market them

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