



FROM MDGS TO SDGS: WHAT WILL IT TAKE? TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE AND SAFE WATER SUPPLY FOR ALL

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Abstracts: This paper reviews the history of international water supply policy from the early 1980s to the Sustainable Development Goals. Strives to achieve universal access to water and improving service quality, SDG water framework demands for a more complex monitoring framework and both generalized and localized target. This paper serves as an advocacy tool as that demand attention to the problems of service quality in water sector, as well as reflective tool to make sure that we are going to the right direction towards sustainable access of safe water for all.

Keywords: Water supply policy, MDGs, SDGs, sustainable water supply

THE INTERNATIONAL WATER SUPPLY POLICY: FROM TIME TO TIME

As the foundation of human life, water had been a major subject in international agenda. The notion of human rights to water was addressed in one of the earliest international water conventions in 1977. The resolutions of United Nation Water Conference held in Mar del Plata, Argentina, explicitly states that all people, regardless of their stage of development and socio-economic condition, are entitled to the rights to have access to drinking water in quantities and of a quality equal to their basic need. This event also initiated a new era for international cooperation for improved water supply in developing countries (Black, 1998).

The launching of International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (1981-1990) or the first Water Decade boosted resources allocated for the sector with its grand slogan: “Water and Sanitation for All”. At that time, only one person in five had access to clean water. This decade, countries were committed for the universal access or providing water for all by 1990 with priority to the poor and less privileged, and water scarce areas. During the Decade, low-cost water and sanitation technologies gained its popularity. Nevertheless, with the emphasis on hardware without thinking as much for the local cultural context, the maintenance of the technology by local community, or the software, many projects were not sustained for a longer period. The Hand Pump Project (1981-1991), a joint program of UNDP and World Bank, focusing on study of availability and maintenance of hand pump systems not only initiated software importance by developing community based maintenance for hand pumps, but also instigated multi-donors cooperation. Although the Decade has not triumphed in accomplishing its quantitative objective, it had been successful, at least, as learning experiences and binding commitment for larger resource allocation for water supply and emerging sector attentiveness and practicable strategies and models in regard to system sustainability (Black, 1998; Christmas



& de Rooy, 1991).

While the debate on water in the 1980s was largely focused on water and sanitation as adjuncts to public health, in the 1990s the scope of the debate dramatically expanded and the wider focus became the management and use of water as part of environmental protection and sustainable development. Post the first Water Decade, the Global Consultation on Safe Water and Sanitation was held in New Delhi, India in 1990. Not only implied equity issues by downgrading the previous commitment of ‘water for all’, to ‘some for all rather than more for some’, this consultation also highlighted institutions by advising to shift the role of government from provider to enabler and community based management of water. This event was followed by the UNDP symposium in Delft in 1991, sensing the urgency for management of water resources in integrated manner due to competing interests among water user sectors and the importance of capacity building towards sustainable water supply projects.

The recognition of growing scarcity to water, among other natural resources, was emphasized also in the Rio Conference of 1992, leading to the adoption of Agenda 21, a wide-ranging blue print for actions in achieving sustainable development. In the same year, the International Conference on Water and the Environment was held in Dublin. The four guiding principles of this conference deal with holistic, participatory, and gender-sensitive approach in managing water as finite and vulnerable resource, as well as the controversial notion of recognizing water as economic goods. The implication of such idea, as Black (1998) emphasized, that not only the quality of the water, but economic indicators, i.e. willingness to pay, shall be considered important in determining a success water supply provision. This milestones probably marked the rise of Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) and private sector participation in the issue of water.

Although the Dublin’s fourth principles recognized that access to water at an affordable price is a human rights, it had been facing resistance since post-Rio Ministerial meeting on water and sanitation in Noordwijk in the Netherlands in 1994 due to fears that economic concerns will overcome social, ecological, and religious concerns. Debates over water pricing –cost-recovery basis or pro-poor basis- reached consensus that pricing should be determined based on the level of service provided with cross-subsidy from higher volume to very low volume consumers (DFID, 2001). Since then, a number of overlapping and complementary approaches in water management have been put in to tests: appropriate technology, private sector involvement, reduction of subsidies, decentralization of decision-making to the lowest appropriate administrative level, user participation in services, reform of institutions and regulatory frameworks, and cost recovery and pricing.

At the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000, the largest-ever gathering of world leaders adopted the Millennium Declaration; from the Declaration emerged the Millennium Development Goals, an integrated set of time-bound targets for extending the benefits of globalization to the world's poorest citizens. Target 7C MDGs, is to halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. The international communities further recognized that the water target is the key to achieve other MDGs targets through improving economic opportunities that break the vicious cycle of poverty, enhancing school participation for children, improving health and well-being,



and ensuring sustainable-life supporting ecosystem.

In regards to the required major efforts to extend water service for those who still unserved, in December 2003, the United Nations General Assembly, in resolution A/RES/58/217, proclaimed the period 2005-2015 International Decade for Action 'Water for Life'. The decade officially started on World Water Day, March 22, 2005. The primary goal of the 'Water for Life' Decade is to promote efforts to fulfil international commitments made on water and water-related issues by 2015. Focus is on furthering cooperation at all levels. The challenge of the Decade is to focus attention on action-oriented activities and policies that ensure the long-term sustainable management of water resources, in terms of both quantity and quality, and include measures to improve sanitation. Achieving the goals of the 'Water for Life' Decade requires sustained commitment, cooperation and investment on the part of all stakeholders from 2005 to 2015 and far beyond. The water for life decade had been celebrated every year on March 25, as World's Water Day, on different focuses, ranging from financing, water and cities, to human right of water.

On 28 July 2010, through Resolution 64/292, the United Nations General Assembly explicitly recognized the human right to water and sanitation and acknowledged that clean drinking water and sanitation are essential to the realization of all human rights. The Assembly recognized the right of every human being to have access to sufficient water for personal and domestic uses (between 50 and 100 liters of water per person per day), which must be safe, acceptable and affordable (water costs should not exceed 3 per cent of household income), and physically accessible (the water source has to be within 1,000 meters of the home and collection time should not exceed 30 minutes). The Resolution calls upon States and international organizations to provide financial resources, help capacity-building and technology transfer to help countries, in particular developing countries, to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all.

WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED?

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have served as a shared framework for global action and cooperation on human development. Fashioned as a universal vision with the target date of 2015, the key features of MDGs are: visionary; concrete, simple, clear, time-bounded common goals; and focus to specific targets. Its emphasis on human development had shifted policy attention well beyond the economic growth objectives that dominated the previous agendas (UN, 2012). Not only it had risen proportions of supports to sectors included in the targets, the MDGs had also been successful in tying the knots of international dialogue and cooperation and invaluable for the advocacy and campaigns for improvement (Manning, 2010). Being useful in setting priorities in global and national level on specific development gains (General Assembly of United Nations, 2012), it also helps to focus actions at all levels (UN, 2012). Another externality that the MDGs brought is that its robust statistical indicators had helped governments to focus on results and galvanized the strengthening of international and national statistical system for policy design and monitoring (UN, 2012).

As the official United Nations mechanism for monitoring the MDG targets for safe drinking water and basic sanitation, the Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) use the proportion of



population using an improved drinking-water source as indicator in measuring progress. The data collected and disseminated by the JMP at global, regional, and national level form the basis for informed-decision making by key policymakers and program managers in the sector. A remarkable progress were made since the declaration of MDGs.

According to UN, the world has met the target of halving the proportion of people without access to improved sources of water, five years ahead of schedule. Between 1990 and 2012, 2.3 billion people gained access to improved drinking water sources, but in 2012, 748 million people remained without access. The 2014 report of Joint Monitoring Programme stated that there was a 13 percent increase of the global population in regard to access to improved drinking water sources; from 76 percent in 1990 to 98 percent in 2012; the number was more striking in developing regions: 60 percent increase within 12 years (WHO/UNICEF, 2014). While the target 7c has been achieved prior to the final deadline of 2015, according to UN, progress has been uneven within and across countries.

ARE WE COUNTING WHAT COUNTS?

The emphasis on statistical indicators may provide a robust approach in measuring progress that is internationally comparable, but it has reduced the complexity of poverty and development problems to the bare bones. Therefore, some dispute that the targets were not adequately formulated for it leave out the demographic challenges and the magnitude of certain social problems (UN, 2012). For example, Onda et al. (2012) indicated that despite astonishing increase in coverage, an additional 1.2 billion people still use water from sources or systems with significant sanitary risks. But some critics contend that governments and donors have picked off the low hanging fruit by only reaching the most accessible people: those who benefited the most, were the ones that were ‘better-off’ (Bruce, 2010). It perhaps has a glint of truth in it since the inequity within subnational, urban-rural, intra-urban, and quintiles persist and sometimes have increased (WHO/UNICEF, 2014).

Clasen (2012) has perfectly captures how MDG water target claim exaggerates achievement. Although MDG water target explicitly states to halve proportion without access to ‘safe’ (indicating quality) and sustainable ‘drinking water’ (indicating the point of use, not water sources), the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on MDG Indicators decided to rely on an existing system of reporting on water and sanitation that was never designed to capture the core components of the MDG water target (United Nations, 2003, in Clasen, 2012).

According to JMP, 89 percent of the developing world’s population have access to improved water sources and drinking water target were met by 116 countries worldwide (WHO/UNICEF, 2014). Statistically speaking, the achievement in water supply sector is remarkable; but the philosophy in providing water for the people is not only for the survival; formally proclaimed as basic human rights, water means to protect people’s health, to uphold their dignity, maintain their quality of life, and in broader framework, to serve as a pre-requisite towards a sustainable development. Such functions are represented on the elements of access: the equity, safety, quantity, continuity, and affordability of water supply. The facts that whether an acceptable quality, sufficient quantities, affordable and a reliable water is available for each and every household that were counted as having access to improved water sources, are unheard of in



official statistics.

This problem of water supply provision is also value-laden. In the management of public utility and natural resources, no single policy problem are value-neutral and the scholarly findings are often improper and ineffective on their uses. The emphasis on availability of technology in measuring access to water are proven to have many pitfalls, particularly when it does not account for the perspective of users and motivation of providers. The water supply and sanitation sector does not lacking of types of technology that can safely eliminate pathogenic and hazardous substance from the water and distribute it to the hands of consumers. Nevertheless, there were many cases when such technologies fail to bring the expected impact to the targeted society. For example, in the urban water system, it is often the variables of ‘water’ and ‘capital’ are accounted for. Meanwhile, the effect on power relation to the distribution of water supply service in municipalities is often excluded from the equation. That sometimes explains why the poor residents live near the main pipe network are discounted from receiving excellent service, why illegal provision thrives, and why even the ‘appropriate’ technologies does not appropriate in a sustainable manner.

In the attempt on solving a policy problem, a framing technique is necessary to determines which facts are relevant and at the same time, it gives meaning to a situation. In Indonesia, for example, there is a variety on the definition of access. BAPPENAS (2012) included households using bottled water combined with improved water in their estimate as ‘*improved*’ despite the motivation of users to use mixed water source at home; they further revise the number of households with access to improved water from 42.75 percent to 55.04 percent. But households using both borehole and bottled water can also be classified as ‘unimproved’ since, perhaps, the ground water is unfit for drinking nor does it provide a continuous supply of water in the dry season.

The households’ strategy on using mixed water source proposes a problem on framing. The use of mixed water source behaviour may be driven by the deficiency in the provision system; people are forced to cope with the poor performance of water provision system, signalling that the area of concern needs attention in the water policy agenda. Such behaviours are never accounted for in the frame of monitoring; people are either having access to improved water or unimproved water; the statistics reports were always consist of the two category, improved and unimproved. Never there were a mixed between improved water, combination of improved and unimproved, or improved water with a certain treatment at the point of use (such as boiling, filtering, or applying disinfectant in household scale).

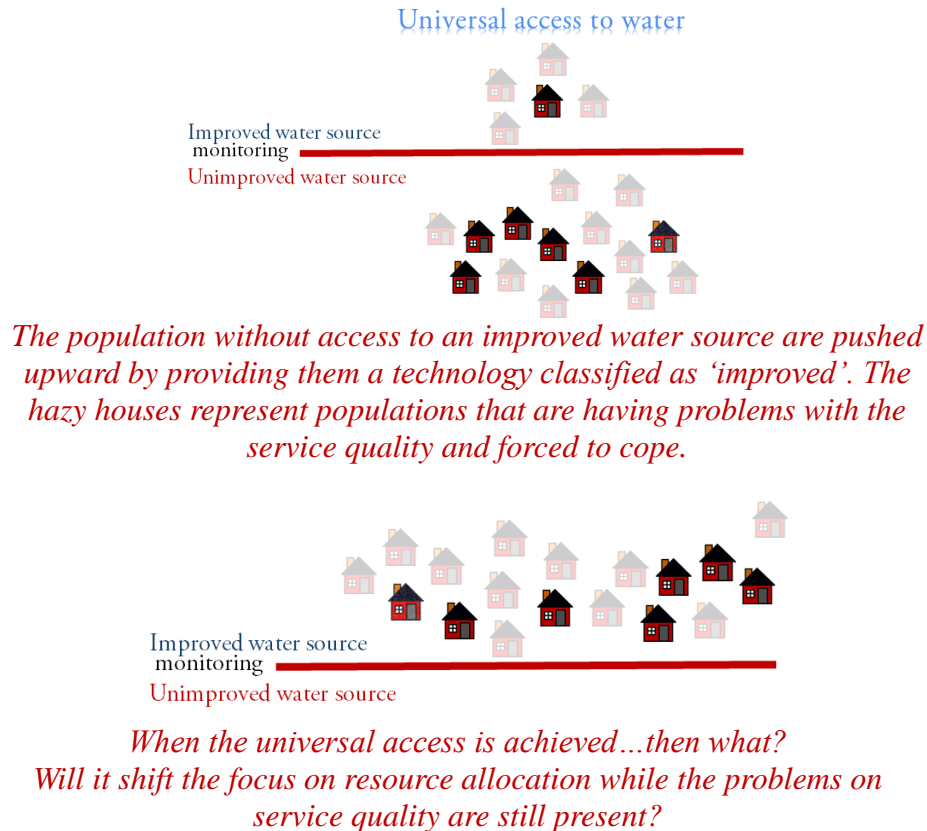


Figure 1. The pitfall on relying on access to water as the sole monitoring indicator in the contextual target

A common catch phrase of ‘if you cannot measure it, you cannot manage it’ had become too familiar in the management of public utility and natural resources. In his book, Stone (1997) had highlighted the dominance of ‘counting’ in measuring problems. He stated that by counting begins with categorization: deciding which things are included and which are excluded, which requires value judgment; “every number is a political claim about where to draw the line” (Stone, 1997, pp 167). He further asserted that measuring implies that actions must be done as a response.

Hauled into the political domain, counting and measuring is exactly the problem of framing; Stone implies that measurement can be a doubled-edge sword, sometimes you want it to be ‘good’ and you want it to be ‘poor’. In water supply sector, local governments desperately need to be ‘good’ to make a good rapport e.g. to secure political position; for example, local governments tend to polish their report on the coverage of access to water. Meanwhile, some other frantically needs their performance to be ‘poor’ in order to be eligible in benefiting from a grant scheme. Thus, the ambiguity nature of number trigger free interpretations.



THE WAY FORWARD

As the MDGs expires, the outcome document of the 2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the MDGs requested the Secretary-General to initiate dialogue on a post-2015 development agenda. Critics have argued that the shortcomings that MDGs faced could have been avoided if a more inclusive consultation process had taken place in formulating it, in which such a process could have more meaning to country context (UN, 2012).

At the September 2010 MDG Summit, UN Member States initiated steps towards advancing the development agenda beyond 2015 and a process of open, inclusive consultations on the post-2015 agenda. The set of eleven global thematic consultations and national consultations in over 60 countries is facilitated by the United Nations Development Group and involves partnership with multiple stakeholders. The two bottom lines agreed during this renewal of commitments are as follow. *First*, the future framework will be built upon commitments already made. An MDG format of concrete, time-bounded, quantitative, and measurable goals, targets, and indicators that implies a clear framework and easy to communicate will be preserved, but will be disaggregated by sex, age, and geography. *Second*, the framework will be global in nature and universally applicable to all countries. Nevertheless, there will be a sufficient space for national policy design and adaptation to local setting to avoid one-fits-all solution while respecting international standards. Different national circumstances, capacities, and priorities will be taken into account; and this will be best achieved through participatory processes. (UN, 2012, General Assembly of the United Nations, 2012).

In water sector, post-2015 agenda, the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), highlight the key role of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) in development framework. Water Aid (2013) emphasizes the critical linkages between WASH and a broad range of human development goals – including health, education, gender equality, environmental sustainability and employment. It shows the positive impact that improvements in WASH has on these goals, and conversely how poor WASH holds back their progress.

It is agreed that in post-2015 era, water related framework should be: (1) **integrated**, by reflecting integrated nature of factors affecting development, stronger focus on cross-sectoral and stakeholders integration, integrated programs reflecting the complex reality of people's lives, also integrated with other areas of poverty reduction, crosscutting nature of water resources that address on water's horizontal nexus with other sectors; (2) **Focus on equity**, targeting poor and marginalized groups and neglected areas of development, shall be reflected also in monitoring framework that focus on accountability of Member States in addressing inequity; (3) **Water as human rights**, any future development framework must reflect this reality and create incentives and accountability for progressive realisation of the human right to water and sanitation, (4) **Leave room for flexibility for adaptation** to local contexts, needs, and priorities. (WaterAid, 2013; The Post 2015 Water Thematic Consultation Report, 2013).

Water Aid (2013) specifies a target date of 2030 for achieving universal access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene globally in households, schools and health facilities, and ensure that water, sanitation and hygiene targets and indicators focus explicitly on reducing inequalities, by targeting poor and disadvantaged people as a priority, and on improving the sustainability of services to secure lasting benefits.



CLOSING REMARKS

Despite the triumph of MDGs, some critics argue that what had been the strengths of MDGs can also be perceived as its weaknesses: its focus on certain fields shifts attention from other important development elements; its shared common vision undervalues countries' contexts and differences in baseline conditions and became the 'one-size-fits-all solution (UN, 2012). Strives to achieve universal access to water and improving service quality, SDG water framework demands for a more complex monitoring framework and both generalized and localized target. This paper serves as an advocacy tool as that demand attention to the problems of service quality in water sector, as well as reflective tool to make sure that we are going to the right direction towards sustainable access of safe water for all.

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