

Critical issue in global health (water and sanitation in poor countries)

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Water and Sanitation in Poor Countries Aside from poverty, two of the most pressing problems in poor countries are access to water and sanitation. For example, at least 40 percent of India's population faces these problems and nothing meaningful is being done about it. The Indian case is particularly acute because about 22 percent of the population are living below the poverty line. This constitutes about 220 million people and their economic condition prevents them from addressing the water and sanitation problem on their own (Pouw & Baud, 2013, p. 83). These are the sector of the population living with less than one dollar per day. With this financial situation, poor people can barely sustain three meals a day, hence, food on the table remains the priority and all other concerns fade in the background. The same problem persists throughout the world because governments of poor countries lack the resources to build infrastructure and implement programs that would finally address the dilemma.

When one looks at the figures such as the case in India, the water and sanitation problem is approaching the scale of a humanitarian crisis. This is particularly true in case of urban centers such as Mumbai. Half of its population lives in the slums and shanties, which are typified by severely limited supply of water, bad sewage disposal, unclean public spaces, aggravated and are further aggravated by severe population density (Digby et al., 2000, p. 273). According to Dash (2000), there is one water tap for every 381 slum dwellers, only 30 percent of these communities have community latrine to the point that people are forced to defecate in the open, while less than that percentage have some semblance of garbage collection system (p. 256). The situation is also true in many parts of Africa.

As a matter of fact, the problems were responsible for devastating illnesses such as typhoid and dysentery (Offiong, p. 60).

For countries living in abject poverty, the priority is food security. It appears to be the most immediate and critical concern because hungry people means restive population. In India, for example, food security remains the top concern of public policy because that is what matters to the electorate. Politicians promise to focus on it as people are more at risk of dying from hunger than from disease due to poor sanitation or from unclean water. Indeed, human development reports confirmed that access to clean water and most especially sanitation receive less attention because it is a low-priority in national policy-making and that the responsibility is often delegated to the lowest level of governance (UNESCO, 2009, p. 104). The only meaningful solution, hence, to solve the problem rests in policymaking. Governments need to prioritize these issues and set aside bigger budgets to build infrastructures and systems so that clean water is accessible and living spaces have proper sanitation. There is a need for strong political will on the part of the national leaders to undertake this type of reforms. Resources in poor countries are limited while their bureaucracies are inefficient with a high degree of corruption. These challenges are also the reasons why it would be difficult to measure their impact. But this should not deter countries to introduce reforms to current policy on water and sanitation because that is the only viable solution available.

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