

GLAAS 2012 report: Questions and answers

1. What is GLAAS?

The UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS) monitors the inputs required to extend and sustain water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) systems and services. GLAAS documents the various components of the “enabling environment”, which include government policy and institutional frameworks; the volume, sources and targeting of investment; the human resource base; nature of external assistance; and performance. GLAAS also analyses the factors associated with progress, or lack thereof, in order to identify drivers and bottlenecks, knowledge gaps, strengths, weaknesses and challenges, and priorities and successes, and to facilitate benchmarking across countries.

2. Does GLAAS fill a needed information gap?

The WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water and Sanitation regularly reports on how many people in the world use improved water and sanitation facilities. Despite this, little is known about the efforts and approaches of countries and external support agencies to improve WASH. No global repository of information exists on the “inputs” to provide an enabling environment. GLAAS therefore helps countries to review and document these inputs and by doing so, to help answer the question, “What works to effectively extend and sustain WASH service provision?”

3. What are the key findings of GLAAS?

- There is growing political will for WASH implementation, as expressed in new efforts to be more accountable and to plan and coordinate more effectively.
- With some exceptions, this growing commitment has not been translated into results. Most countries are falling short on meeting their own national WASH commitments, with over 70% of countries reportedly falling significantly behind the trends required to meet their defined national access targets for sanitation and drinking-water.
- There is insufficient financing to meet the internationally agreed target for sanitation. This is exacerbated by difficulties in spending the limited funds that are received.
- There is a risk of slippage of progress made against significant progress made on increasing access to drinking-water unless sufficient financial and human resource support is given to sustain operation and maintenance.
- External and domestic support for WASH is not well targeted to assist those most in need.
- Improved monitoring is required to generate the information for evidence-based decision making. The lack of robust data on financing, effectiveness of policies, human resources and other aspects of WASH appear to be a major constraint to progress.

4. How many countries contributed to GLAAS data and what was the methodology employed?

This second UN-Water GLAAS report presents data received from 74 developing countries, covering all the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) regions, and from 24 external support agencies (ESAs), representing approximately 90% of official development assistance (ODA) for sanitation and drinking-water.

The 2012 GLAAS report draws on the latest information, including data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Creditor Reporting System (CRS), and data gathered through two sets of questionnaires: one for low- and middle-income countries and one for ESAs. These questionnaires have allowed countries and donors to score their progress and WASH inputs according to objective criteria with responses based on consensus from multiple stakeholders.

5. Why are UN-Water and WHO producing this report?

This report contributes importantly to the implementation of the UN-Water strategy of delivering strong messages on water that help shape the post-2015 sustainable development landscape. Its publication is timely in the lead up to the next key event in this process, the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

Unsafe water, inadequate sanitation and poor hygiene transmit disease in countries in all continents—from the poorest to the wealthiest. The most predominant waterborne disease, diarrhoea, causes two million deaths every year.

Provision of safe water and adequate sanitation services has, and continues to be a key pillar of primary public health prevention. Yet provision of WASH services is not necessarily adequately financed, supported by effective policies, and implemented with sufficient human resources. For example, only 10 of 74 developing countries reported having sufficient funds needed for sanitation. Moreover it is fragmented across ministries, and is largely managed by non-health sector actors.

Thus it is imperative for WHO with its presence and convening power in every country, and UN-Water as a global coordinating entity, to advocate for WASH services, encourage monitoring, and support all stakeholders to fulfill their essential public health protection functions.

6. Which countries are progressing well on WASH-related issues?

There are many ways in which progress can be judged. One indicator of success is whether countries are on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goal targets for water and sanitation. Many countries, in all regions have achieved this for both water and sanitation. Another indicator is countries that have made the most progress in providing services (as measured by the proportion of the population that gained access since 1995). Countries that have done very well in Sub-Saharan Africa include for example Angola, Gambia, Malawi, and Rwanda.

While these countries have done well on the WASH "outputs" of provision of services, GLAAS monitors "inputs" like establishment of policies and financing. According to the self-assessments reported to GLAAS, countries that have done particularly well in these areas are: Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Oman, Rwanda, South Africa, Thailand, and Uzbekistan.

7. Which countries need the most funding?

Many countries have indicated they are critically short on funding for both water and sanitation. Example of countries from Sub-Saharan African that report a shortage of funding, and have high needs (ie countries where the average water and sanitation coverage is less than 50%) include: Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Togo.

Examples of countries in other regions reporting serious financial shortfalls to GLAAS include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Lao PDR, Pakistan, Philippines, Kyrgyzstan, Senegal, and Viet Nam.

8. What are the main challenges?

The principal challenge identified in this report is to maintain focus on sustaining the WASH services that have already been delivered. The focus has traditionally been on putting in place new systems, which is often more attractive in terms of a visible accomplishment, and often more appealing to investors.

A cross-cutting challenge for all countries is to harness the political will that has been generated and translate this into concrete actions to extend WASH services to the hardest to reach. This requires efforts on many fronts from planning, to financing, to implementation. Very often, it is difficult to diagnose the specific bottleneck along the chain of WASH service delivery because of lack of information caused by ineffective monitoring.

Insufficient human and financial resource support for WASH, and in particular, sanitation continues to be an important barrier to providing services. This challenge is sometimes further exacerbated by the WASH sector's limited capacity to use funds allocated by domestic governments or committed by external donors. Very often the countries that are most in need of funding are the very countries that have difficulty "absorbing" these funds. This perpetuates a vicious cycle where donors become reluctant to invest in places where it is most needed.

9. How can these challenges be addressed?

Based on the evidence emerging from this report, key actions to address the identified challenges include:

- Focusing on building institutional and human resource capacity for both increasing WASH services to the unserved and maintaining existing services by directing more resources to operations and maintenance;
- Considering adopting a human-rights based approach to focus attention on the vulnerable and to ensure that they are not excluded from the benefits of WASH services;
- Strengthening system-wide support of the delivery of WASH, and link WASH services to core government systems for planning and resource allocation; and
- Establishing better monitoring WASH systems in order to identify where bottlenecks exist.

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10. How do you expect senior decision-makers to respond?

Ministers of Finance from developing countries and Ministers of Development Cooperation from developed countries will be able to carefully examine the evidence presented in the GLAAS report during the Sanitation and Water (SWA) for All High Level Meeting on 20 April 2012. It is expected that this meeting will result in a set of specific actions to redouble efforts to invest in effective best practices to scale up sustainable access to sanitation and water.

11. What are the next steps?

The immediate next steps are for the Ministers at the SWA High Level Meeting, taking the GLAAS findings into account, to make concrete commitments relating to the following:

- Increasing political prioritization of sanitation and drinking-water;
- Improving targeting of funds to where they are most needed;
- Improving research, monitoring and evaluation to strengthen the evidence available to enable better decision-making; and
- Strengthening of planning, management information systems, and human resources capacity to increase the capacity to scale up implementation and sustain services.
- The longer steps for GLAAS-related research is to promote, and provide guidance on more effective monitoring of WASH financial flows and human resources. This data will then be disseminated through the next GLAAS report due out in 2014.

12. What are the implications for donors providing external support for WASH?

Due to the financial crisis, donor governments are under pressure to reduce their spending. This domestic pressure on donor governments makes it difficult for donors to maintain their level of spending, but also makes it imperative that they are able to demonstrate that individual donors' funding for aid is delivering results.

Attributing results to specific donors is often extremely difficult given the different sources of funding and the central role that recipient countries play in ensuring WASH (and other development) outcomes. Despite this pressure, some donors have maintained and even increased their funding for water and sanitation. However, the pressure to show relatively short term results could threaten longer term initiatives to build in-country capacity and to work collaboratively with others on through mechanisms, such as general budget support, sector budget support or sector wide approaches.

Where there are 'good news stories', such as the recent announcement that the global target for drinking-water had been met in 2010, five years ahead of schedule, helps donors to demonstrate to their electorate that achievement of ambitious targets is possible. However, there is a potential danger that donors consider that 'the job is finished' unless the remaining challenges are made clear.

Ensuring that past gains are sustained is a major challenge for WASH, but may not be a strong selling point to donor governments unless the reasons why it remains a challenge, and what should be done to support governments to ensure progress continues, is clarified. Explaining the difficulty of serving a rapidly rising and urbanizing population in a way that is comprehensible to the general public is key to ensuring sustained interest in WASH.