



Video statement
Millennium Development Goal drinking water target met
Sanitation target still lagging far behind

Dr Maria Neira
Director
Department for Public Health and Environment

Today we put the spotlight to the remarkable achievements made in countries in reaching the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target for drinking water. This calls for halving, by 2015, the proportion of the world's population without sustainable access to safe drinking-water. Since 2000, the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) has been the official UN instrument to track progress towards this target. The JMP has consistently measured and reported progress using an agreed proxy-indicator, access to improved drinking-water sources. A definition based on technology types that represent a plausible source of safe drinking-water, this includes, for example, piped water on premises, boreholes and protected wells. The use of this indicator has allowed cost-effective on-the-ground measurement through household surveys and censuses.

The proportion of the population without access to improved water sources decreased from 24% in 1990 to 11% in 2010, — one per cent beyond the MDG target. Between 1990 and 2010, over two billion people gained access to improved drinking-water sources, according to the WHO/UNICEF 2012 progress report published today. The drinking-water target is one of the first MDG targets to be met. This is a major triumph, five years ahead of schedule.

While tremendous achievement should be applauded a great deal of work still remains to sustain the results thus far and expand coverage further. After all, an estimated 11% of the world's population—780 million people—were without access to drinking water in 2010, and if current trends continue, some 650 million will have no access by 2015,

While there is cause for celebration, we must also face a number of drawbacks. One is, that global figures mask massive disparities between regions, between countries in regions and within countries between urban and rural settings as well as between rich and poor. For example - coverage in the developing world overall stands at 85%, but only at 63% in countries designated by the UN as least developed. Furthermore, the report points to a troubling distance between what we promised: sustainable access to safe drinking-water, and how this has been measured: use of improved drinking-water sources. Data limitations abound and complete information about drinking-water quality is not available for global monitoring. This is a chance to reflect on how to tackle this and other remaining challenges in future. Finally, while the 2012 progress report of the JMP indicates signs of acceleration in progress towards the sanitation target, in 2010 some 2.5 billion people remained without access to improved sanitation facilities. A staggering 1.1 billion these doesn't have any sanitation facility, what so ever, and therefore has no choice but to defecate in the open. This practice dramatically increases the risks of disease transmission and jeopardizes public health.

I urge the international community to look beyond 2015 and beyond business as usual. Together we can close the remaining gap in drinking-water, and double our efforts in sanitation. The Five-Year Drive

towards the Sanitation Target, launched by the UN Secretary General in 2011 deserves our full support. We cannot afford to leave the poor even further behind. All sectors of society will have a role to play – government policy and decision makers, the international community including multi- and bilateral donors, the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and water, sanitation and health professionals and practitioners around the world.

I encourage all of us, after a moment of rejoice over this MDG achievement, to double our efforts and build on the MDG progress already made.
