

## X. ACCESS TO SAFE WATER

### International goals

*All countries should give priority to measures that improve the quality of life and health by ensuring a safe and sanitary living environment for all population groups through measures aimed at ..., ensuring access to clean water ... (para. 8.10 of ICPD Programme of Action).*

*... Providing ... access to safe drinking water in sufficient quantities ... for all (para. 36(l) of WSSD Programme of Action).*

*... Ensure the availability of and universal access to safe drinking water ... as soon as possible (para. 106(x) of FWCW Platform for Action).*

*... Promoting access for all people to safe drinking water ... and other basic services, facilities and amenities, especially for people living in poverty, women and those belonging to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups (para. 40(c) of the Habitat Agenda).*

*In addition to the conference goals above, international targets for this indicator have been established under the auspices of the World Health Organization. The Global Strategy of Health for All by the Year 2000 set a target of 100 per cent by the year 2000. The more recent Ninth General Programme of Work for 1996-2001 establishes a target of 85 per cent by the year 2001.*

*The International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, 1981-1990, was proclaimed by the General Assembly in 1980. It was also a component of the WHO Global Strategy of Health for All by the Year 2000.*

*The World Summit for Children and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development also adopted goals on universal access to safe water.*

### DEFINITION

Access to safe water is measured by the proportion of population with *access* to an *adequate amount* of *safe* drinking water located within a *convenient distance* from the user's dwelling. Under the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme, the words in italics were defined at the country level. "Access" is interpreted as actual use by the population.

### RECENT SITUATION

The International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (1981-1990) envisaged as its primary goal the attainment of full access to water supply and to sanitation by all inhabitants in the developing countries by the year 1990. Initiatives taken during the Decade succeeded in providing access for an additional 1 billion people to safe water supplies (WHO/UNICEF, 1990). The significant progress made during the 1980s is considered to be

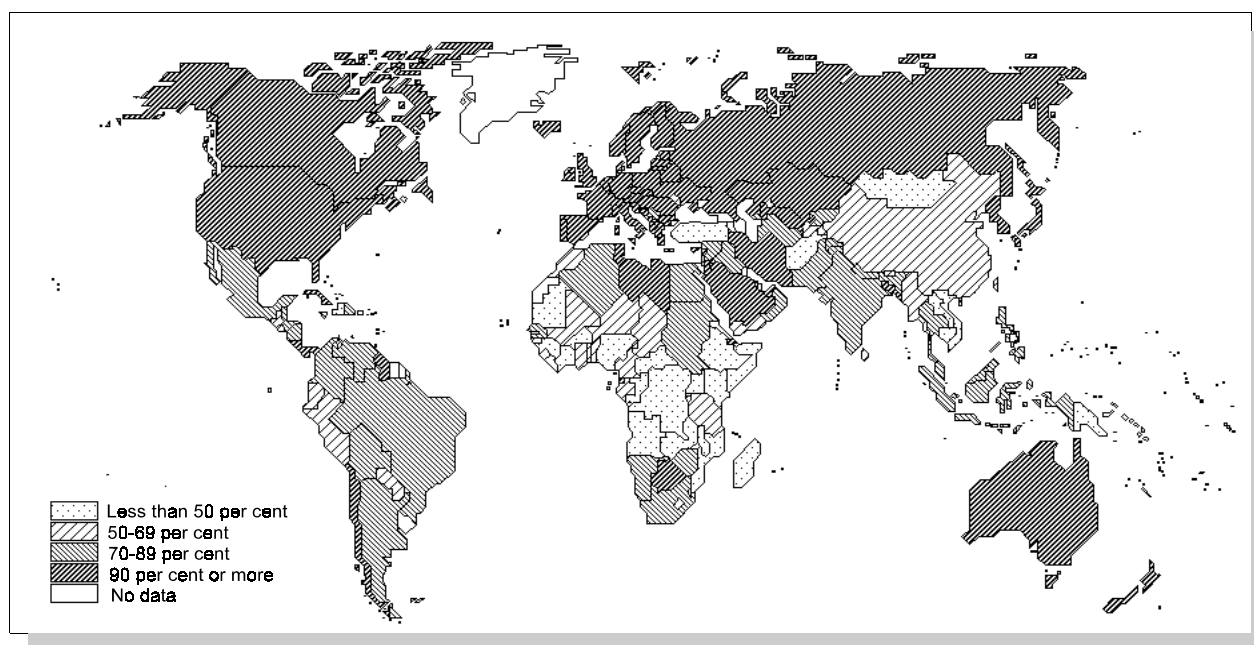
due to the rediscovery and improvement of various simple and low-cost water and sanitation technologies and the promotion of community participation. Yet, a large proportion of the world's population still live without access to safe water, on which health and productive capacity depend (see fig. X.1.)

Of 117 countries with data available in the less developed regions, the majority of the population lack access to safe water in 25 per cent (table X.1 and fig. X.2). A similar percentage of countries have achieved or are close to achieving the goal of universal access. The situation in the least developed countries is much more serious. In half of the least developed countries, the majority of population live without access to safe water.

In contrast to the other less developed regions, in Latin America and the Caribbean only one country (Haiti) has access below 50 per cent and around three quarters of the countries have access of 70 per cent or more. In around 40 per cent of the African countries, however, the majority of the population lacks access to safe water. In Asia and Oceania less than one fifth of the countries have such limited access.

Figure X.3 shows the percentage share of population with and without access to safe water. The base population includes only those in the less developed regions and with data available. About 30 per cent of the population in the countries included do not have access to safe water, which amounts to about 1.3 billion people. The other 70 per cent—3.2 billion people—are estimated to have access to safe water.

**Figure X.1.** Percentage of population with access to safe water, 1990-1998



Source: UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 2000* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2000).

NOTE: Estimates are not presented for countries or areas with populations under 150,000. Countries in the more developed regions are assumed to have access to safe water at more than 90 per cent.

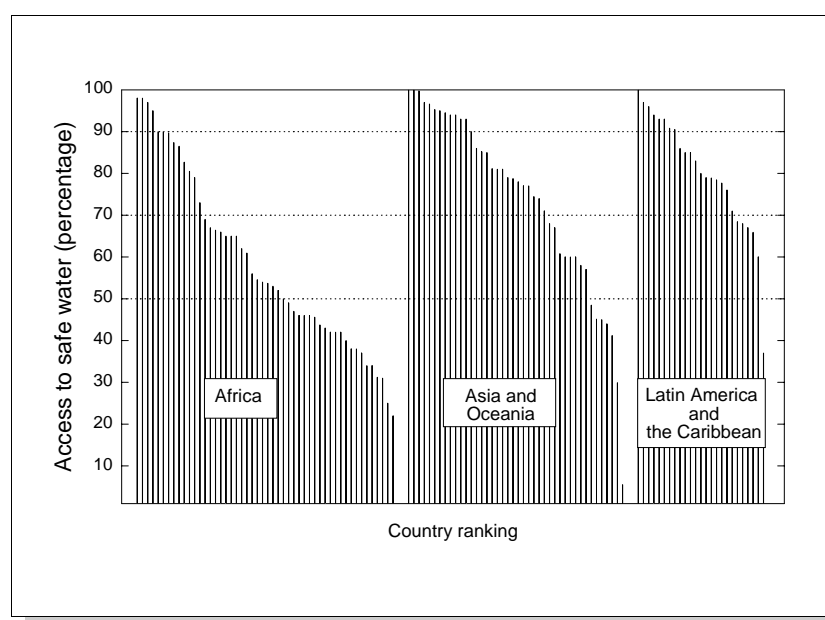
**Table X.1.** Distribution of countries according to percentage of population with access to safe water, 1990-1998

	Percentage of countries with access to safe water					Number of countries	
	90 per cent or more	70-89 per cent	50-69 per cent	Less than 50 per cent	Total	With data available	Total
Less developed regions	24	26	25	25	100	117	141
Least developed countries	7	7	37	49	100	41	45
Africa	14	12	32	42	100	50	53
Asia and Oceania <sup>a</sup>	31	33	19	17	100	42	57
Latin America and the Caribbean	32	44	20	4	100	25	31

Source: UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 2000* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2000).

NOTE: Excludes countries and areas with populations under 150,000. Due to rounding, the sum of the subcategories may not be equal to 100 per cent.

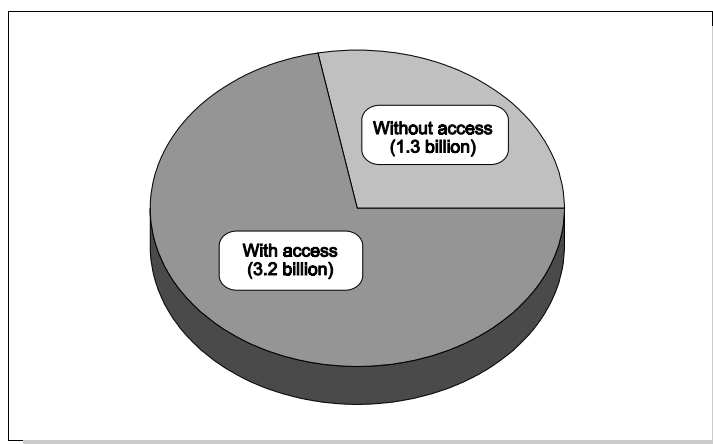
<sup>a</sup> Excluding Japan, Australia and New Zealand, which are included in the more developed regions.

**Figure X.2.** Percentage of population with access to safe water, 1990-1998, by country ranking and region

Source: UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 2000* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2000).

NOTE: Bars show level of access to safe water for individual countries.

**Figure X.3.** Distribution of population in the less developed regions, by access to safe water, 1990-1998



Source: UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 2000* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2000).

NOTE: For countries with data on access to safe water, representing 96 per cent of the population of the less developed regions.

### SOURCES OF DATA, COVERAGE AND QUALITY

Data are collected by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund under their Joint Monitoring Programme and are published in the *Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Monitoring Report* series; an updated review will be released in 2000. The most recent data currently available appear in *The State of the World's Children, 2000* (UNICEF, 2000). Data are available for 1990-1998, depending on the country, and for 117 countries or areas (83 per cent of the countries in the less developed regions). Data for several countries in the more developed regions are included in the annex.

Most countries have a variety of data sources from which to estimate water indicators, such as administrative records, population censuses and household surveys. However, a review by WHO/UNICEF of the water data indicates considerable variation in national estimates over a short period of two years or less, suggesting that the estimates are sometimes based on uncertain data (WHO/UNICEF, 1993).

The critical elements of the water indicator are "adequate", "safe" and "convenient distance", since how they are determined will affect the estimates of coverage. A common approach of censuses is to determine the source of water, but not always specifically for drinking water. While the type of source is often used to assess whether the supply is "safe", it is rare to find questions which provide information on "adequate amount" and "convenient distance", which are distinct in the sense that there may be access to water but it is not necessarily convenient to fetch it owing to distance.

Household surveys generally have more flexibility to include additional questions. But this flexibility frequently leads to survey questions which differ across surveys, resulting in different estimates of water coverage, even for the same geographical area and time period. For the current indicator, definitions of the critical concepts are determined at the country level. When no definition is available at the country level, the following definitions from WHO (1996b) may be used:

(a) *Access to water*: In urban areas a distance of not more than 200 metres from a home to a public standpost may be considered reasonable access. In rural areas, reasonable access implies that a person does not have to spend a disproportionate part of the day fetching water for the family's needs;

(b) *Adequate amount of water*: 20 litres of safe water per person per day;

(c) *Safe water*: Water that does not contain biological or chemical agents directly detrimental to health. It includes treated surface water and untreated but uncontaminated water from protected springs, bore-holes, sanitary wells, etc.;

(d) *Convenient distance*: In urban areas, to fetch 20 litres of safe water per person per day, 200 metres would be a reasonable distance from the home.

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