

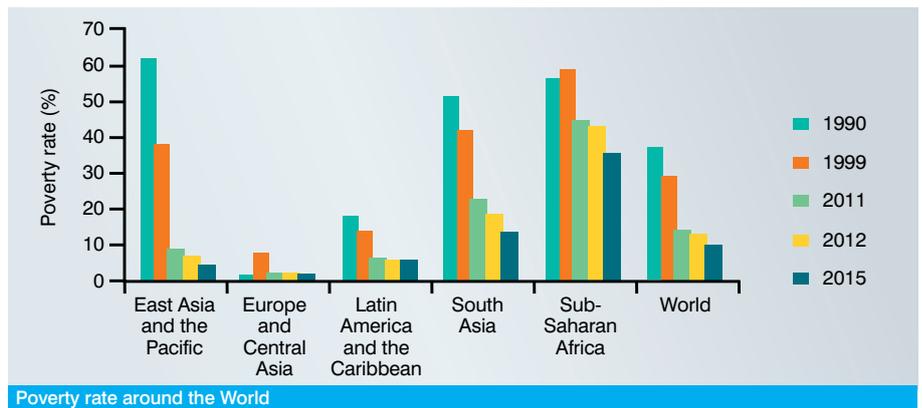
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CLEAN WATER ACCESS FOR ALL IN AFRICA¹

BY SELESHI B. AWULACHEW

At the turn of the new millennium, world leaders gathered at the United Nations to shape a broad vision to fight poverty. The vision was translated to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), packaged under eight goals dealing with i) poverty and hunger ii) universal primary education iii) gender equality and women empowerment iv) reducing child mortality v) improving maternal health vi) combatting HIV/Aids, malaria and other diseases vii) ensuring environmental health viii) developing global partnership for development.

The MDGs have immensely helped to tackle significant social and some environmental challenges particularly in developing countries. They have helped to lift more than one billion people out of extreme poverty, and enabled better access to education, health, water and sanitation, etc. They enabled more girls to attend schools, saved life of children and improved food and nutrition and enabled significant strides to protect our planet.

As examples, 47% of people in 1990 lived on less than \$1.25 a day and that number dropped to 14% in 2015; and the global number of



people living in extreme poverty has declined from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015². Water supply and sanitation was under Goal vii of the MDGs. In 2015, 91% of the global population is using an improved drinking water source, compared to 76 % in 1990; out of the 2.6 billion people who have gained access to improved drinking water since 1990, 1.9 billion gained access to piped drinking water on premises; 2.1 billion people have gained access to improved sanitation. Globally, 147 countries have met the drinking water target, 95 countries have met the sanitation target and 77

countries have met both. The world has met the MDG drinking water target five years ahead of schedule but work is not yet completely done. Despite success, progress has been uneven across regions and countries, leaving significant gaps. Millions of people are being left behind, especially the poorest and those disadvantaged because of their sex, age, disability, ethnicity or geographic location. Most of the disparities occur in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), and the actual disparities are masked in the averages of global figures. The poverty figure from 1990 to 2015³, clearly demonstrates the slow progress





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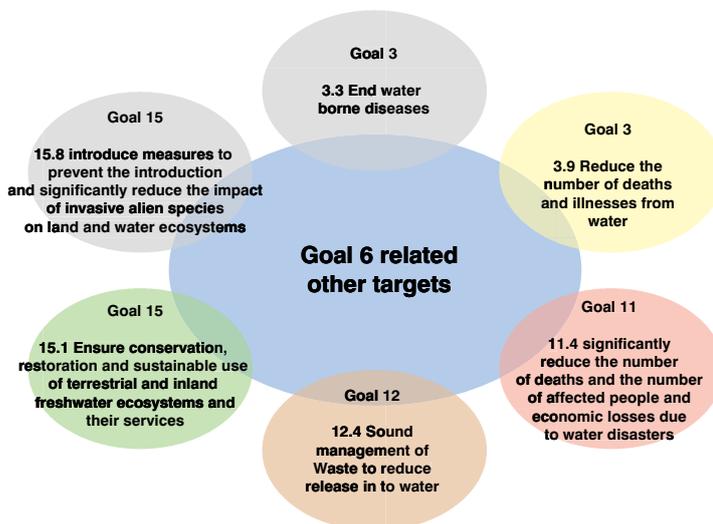
in SSA compared to the rest of the world, and extreme poverty still remains well above 30%, and where over 40 % of all people without improved drinking water live. In this part of the world, the disparity between urban and rural populations is also high.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and Water

In September 2015, a high level plenary meeting of the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including 17 Goals shown in the figure of previous page, and 169 targets⁴. The agenda is holistic and includes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development, with a number of principles such as universality, people and planet focus.

Water is established as an independent goal number six of the SDGs. It has six targets and two means of implementation. Besides being proposed as an independent goal, water has been identified as a target or sub-target in a number of other SDGs, due to its overarching and enabling roles, as shown in the figures on the right hand side.

Furthermore, water is also implicitly linked to other goals as it is one of the most overarching resource as well as economic, social and environmental good and as such can be linked to each and every other goal. Its development influences the success of other goals and the progress of other goals also influence the development of water resources. For example, progress on health targets (goal 3), depends on infrastructure targets (goal 9) that gives



everyone access to safe water and improved sanitation. Zero hunger and nutrition targets (goal 2), gender equality targets (goal 5) and many other goals are not achievable without access to clean water.

Opportunities for Clean Water and Sanitation for All

The MDGs played an important role in helping to mobilize and galvanize the efforts of development community. The 15 years of MDGs experience will serve the achievement of the newly endorsed SDGs. MDG 7 on ensuring environmental sustainability, that was encompassing water and sanitation, has been expanded into five dedicated SDGs such as SDG 6, 12, 13, 14 and 15 as well as featured in other SDGs like 8, 9, 11 and off course goal 1 on poverty. The SDGs not only bring new dimensions of development but also enable completion of the unfinished business of the MDGs and they provide significant continuity as

we transition to the new era of the 2030 Agenda. The first two particular targets of SDG 6 are to “by 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all” and “by 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations”. These two targets, while they are specially showing the continuity of MDG, they are also highly aspirational in that the world will reach these targets leaving no one behind, and a promising opportunity for ending the gap in SSA. ■

1) The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily represent those of the Secretariat of the United Nations; the designations employed or terminology used concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of frontiers do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations.
2) The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015, United Nations (2015)
3) Global Monitoring Report 2015/2016, Transitioning from MDGs to SDGs, The World Bank and The International Monetary Fund (2016)
4) United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), United Nations (2015), <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>