

Nigeria's Water Challenges and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's)

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Abstract

Water is a pre-requisite for human health and well-being as well as preservation of the environment. It is vital to all living creatures on earth. To underscore the importance of this fact the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 2005 elevated water to the status of human right of the people. Again at its Millennium Summit in the year 2000 the UN signed up to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) which represent a global agreement by the world leaders setting out key standards that nations of the world should achieve by the year 2015. The component of water in the MDG's is very prominent. Apart from standing alone as a principal target (Goal 8) it is also directly or indirectly related to Goals 1,4,5 and 6, a total of four other goals. This paper examines the current rate of progress in this sector vis-a-vis the MDG's targets, whether the nation is on track or off-track in realizing this particularly essential, inclusive goal. It concludes with some suggestions in finding ways to achieve this time-bound commitment

Keywords: Water target, Accessibility, Funding, Financial Autonomy, Social capital.

1. Introduction

Access to water is vital for every living creature on earth. The importance of water, rightly termed, "fluid of life" is clear to us all and cannot be overlooked. It is a pre-requisite for human health and well-being as well as preservation of the environment. Indeed if water is polluted or destroyed, it means virtually every life is endangered. We can last weeks without food, but not more than four days without water (Pickering & Owen, 1995). Furthermore, the use of clean water is a preventive measure, and as the saying goes, "prevention is better than cure". But it is a paradox that this most widely occurring substance on earth, covering over 70% of the planet, yet remains a scarcity to millions of people. Of this estimated amount about 90% is ocean water which is too salty and therefore is hardly used for drinking, farming or manufacturing (UNICEF, 2004).

The percentage remainder exists variously in polar icecaps, in rivers and lakes and a portion imprisoned in underground aquifers. It is such a precious resource, revered by many customs and has a lot of relevance in traditional and religious rituals (Nelson, 1999).

A 2012 report by the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) established that over 70 million Nigerians lack access to clean, potable water. This grim reality is corroborated by the minister of Water Resources, Sarah Ochekepe on the occasion of celebrating World Water Day on March 22, 2013.

To underscore the importance of water the UN General Assembly in 2005 elevated water to the status of human rights of the people, and designated March 22 of every year as World Water Day. Going by the UN declaration it follows that millions of Nigerians are suffering from gross violation of their fundamental human right.

Indeed Governor Banbangida Aliyu of Niger State at the Presidential Water Summit in February, 2013 in Abuja called for a legislation that will empower citizens to sue the government

for failing to provide water and other essentials. We cannot agree more with governor Aliyu. It will be recalled that the Federal Ministry of Water Resources organized a Presidential Water Summit on 12/02/2013 which was well attended by stakeholders. President Goodluck Jonathan himself attended and made some pronouncements on the subject matter.

2. Situation Analysis of Water and Sanitation in Nigeria

There's no gainsaying the fact that there exist huge challenges to water, sanitation and public health in the nation, and there's every need to improve on the situation. Even going by African standards Nigeria with over 40% of the population lacking clean drinking water is a worst case scenario.

Sanitation generally refers to keeping the environment clean, especially by providing facilities and services for the safe disposal of human waste. Hygiene, a twin relation to sanitation, is the practice of keeping oneself clean in order to avoid disease(s). Both sanitation and hygiene are integral to water supply, and health benefits can surely be maximized by improvement in this area.

In many parts of the country people and livestock struggle for water from unsafe stagnant ponds, while children trek over 5km daily to fetch water from streams for household usage before going to school (UNICEF, 2004).

Because of lack of access to clean water and sanitation, water-borne diseases such as dysentery, cholera, typhoid fever, and diarrhoea remain rampant, killing hundreds every year. The water that is supposed to be a source of life ends up killing people.

According to WaterAid, an International Non-Governmental Organization dedicated to the provision of safe water, infant mortality in Nigeria is 198/1000, with a great number of those deaths caused by diarrhoeal diseases.

A 2012 UN report also reveals that about 40 billion hours per day are lost in Africa in the frantic search for water, and goes on to reveal that, "these lost working hours equals a whole year's worth of labour by the entire workforce in France." These lost man-hours in fetching water from long distances should have been devoted to other productive ventures, and economically viable activities. The overall economic loss in a year can better be imagined. School days are also lost by pupils because of water and sanitation related diseases.

3. Water Component of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's)

At its Millennium Summit in the year 2000 in NewYork, the UN signed up to the MDG's which represent a global agreement by the world leaders setting out key standards that the nations of the world should achieve by the year 2015.

The key standards are as follows:

- i. Eradication of Extreme Poverty and Hunger
- ii. Active Universal Basic Primary Education
- iii. Promotion of Gender Equality and Empowering Women.
- iv. Reduction of Child Mortality
- v. Improve Material Health
- vi. Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other Terminal Diseases
- vii. Ensure Environmental Sustainability
- viii. Provide Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation
- ix. Develop Global Partnership for Development.

The water target is to supply 75% (three quarters) of the population with potable water by 2015 and 70% of the same population with adequate sanitation

But statistics from the ministry of Water Resources shows that only about 60% of the population has access to safe drinking water while access to sanitation is put at 32%.

It can be seen that provision of water being itself a principal target is also directly or indirectly

related to Goals No. 1, 4, 5 and 6. The critical position of water in realizing the MDG's cannot be overemphasized.

Potable water helps to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger while it also helps to reduce incidences of water-borne diseases.

When combined, water, sanitation and hygiene reduce the number of deaths caused by diarrhoeal diseases by an average of 65%. This assertion is by WaterAid (2013), an International NGO whose vision is a world where everyone has access to safe drinking water and effective sanitation.

With the target date (2015) by the corner the big question is whether the water and sanitation targets are achievable. Minister of Water Resources, Sarah Ocheke assures Nigerians and the world that the water goal is achievable.

Her words, "... government recently launched a road map for its water sector with the target of achieving 75% access to potable water for all Nigerians by 2015."

According to her, the road map is also expected to facilitate the improvement of Nigeria's sanitation rating and ensure that no Nigerian child in the next few years trek long distance to carry water on their heads before going to school. But a 2012 report by WaterAid shows that,

"At the current rates of progress the water target will be missed by 18 years (2033) and the sanitation target is currently completely off-track, coverage having fallen from 37% in 1990 to 32% in 2008."

We shall live to see how the two predictive statements on water and sanitation targets between WaterAid and the Water Minister will play out.

4. The Water-Sanitation Matrix

The water-sanitation connection is such that the level of sanitation of a community is directly proportional to the availability of water. That is to say that, communities with access to potable water tend to have adequate and efficient sanitation. The issue of sanitation has not been given the attention and promotion it deserves. For example, markets, motor parks, sports stadia etc lack supplies of drinking water, water for washing hands after defecation and adequate toilet facilities. During the last World Toilet Day on November 19, 2012 no effort was made by the various governments to celebrate the occasion and to draw attention to the acute shortage of toilet facilities in the nation. Not to talk of efforts towards addressing the issue.

Toilet facilities should be an integral part of designs of common markets, motor parks, shopping complexes etc. The idea of open defecation should be discouraged as much as possible. Engineers and architects should come with designs of toilet facilities suitable for these various cultural and geophysical settings.

5. Sector Funding and Responsibilities

Nigeria has a 3-tier system of federal, state and local governments each having different responsibilities for the funding, provision and management of water, sanitation and hygiene. Given the proximity of Local Governments to the most vulnerable communities it will not be out of place to shift emphasis on provision and management of water and sanitation to the local governments.

But the Local Governments have limited authority, limited funding and limited technical capacity which constrain their ability to meet their ever growing statutory obligations, water supply inclusive. In addition they do not have financial autonomy.

There is no doubt that sector funding is low and inefficient. At the presidential water summit in February, 2013 inadequate funding was identified as a major constraint. President Goodluck Jonathan himself acknowledged that the water sector, "requires a commitment of N350billion," to

fix the sector.

The water sector gets an average of N40 billion in the national annual budgets, which is a far cry from the figure the president mentioned.

Matters get aggravated with these *ab initio* insufficient budgets being grossly misused and outrightly embezzled, leaving the taps dry and accentuating the plight of citizens, especially the rural dwellers.

In a 2012 investigative report by Premium Times titled, "The massive MDG Mess: How Nigeria's Water Ministry steals billions..." it is revealed how the Federal Ministry of Water Resources and its agencies, mismanage billions of naira allocated as part of the MDG funds.

The report concluded by blaming the presidency for not acting on recommendations of the Monitoring and Evaluation teams, thus allowing massive corruption to continue. Meanwhile, Nigerians continue to suffer from lack of potable water due to excessive graft and greed of water ministry officials. A clear negation of universal values and lack of social capital. If only these culpable ministry officials could imbibe values of common good, transparency etc. and realize the urgent water need of the people as typified in a statement by this Erin-Emu community woman that, "we don't even want to know how much they have collected or spent, let them just help us and come and give us the water".

6. Disproportionate Funding

Government has many needs to cater for and cannot meet them all at a go. There has to be priority, proportionate disbursement of funds for these needs. This brings to mind the ritual of allocating the lion's share of the nation's annual budgets to defense (security) which came to a head last year (2012), when a whopping N921 billion was budgeted for security. A budget that was bigger than that of 12 other ministries combined. In spite of this generous, overdressed security budget Nigerians are not any safer. We are yet to reduce incidents of kidnappings, armed robbery etc. Bombs are still booming across the nation.

Securing lives and property is extremely essential but the nation can deploy some of this security funds to areas like water, agriculture and health care. Meanwhile instead of the proliferation of security check points across the nation, relevant technologies for intelligence gathering such as remote cameras, closed-circuit television (CCTV) etc. should be encouraged. These are security measures experts have propounded and which is the norm in various other climes of the world. We just need to reduce drastically the security budget and deploy more funds to priority areas such as water.

7. Types of Water Resources

In managing water resources there are two categories of water to deal with, surface water and ground water. Between the two, managing surface water resources is more tasking, requiring large structures such as dams with equally large accompanying appurtenances. It is technically easier to tap the underground water resources than harnessing and channeling the surface water resources that abound for consumption. This explains why there is indiscriminate drilling of boreholes by individuals and "pure – water" manufacturers across the nation.

Coupled with the difficulty in harnessing surface water resources there is insufficient manpower in water resources management, which is even more acute at the most critical level, the local governments. According to Mustafa and Yusuf (2013), "In Nigeria today, there are about 130 universities and less than 6 of them offer courses in water resources."

There is every need for the nation to improve on the training of manpower in this priority area. There are enough water resources in the nation; we only need to properly harness them. Water accessibility remains fragile due mainly to poor resource management than actual scarcity.

8. Water as a Social Amenity

In 2005, U.N declared water as a right of the people. This means that water resources should be seen as a social amenity, an essential resource that everybody should have access to. This declaration notwithstanding, water can be used as an economic commodity through which government can generate some revenue. The poor should not be denied access to water but could be granted some level of subsidy. Moreover, if the poor can afford to spend on airtime recharge cards, they should as well pay a token for water. It can also be argued that if people are made to pay, however small, they will be mindful of deliberate wastages.

9. The PVP Component of Rural Water Supply

PVP stand for Photovoltaic Pumping system, which utilizes solar energy from the sun. In this system photovoltaic modules convert solar energy into electricity which drives an electric pump that pumps water from a deep well or borehole into an elevated (over-head) storage tank. The water is then tapped by the community for their domestic and other uses as the case may be. We are in the tropics where solar energy is abundant, free and inexhaustible.

The PVP option is suited for remote, rural areas where the communities are not covered by electricity supply from the national grid lines. Furthermore, it is cheaper, cleaner than diesel or petrol generators, and is easy to operate and maintain.

Some states have already installed the PVP system. It is hoped that more states, and indeed the local governments would follow suit and utilize this reliable water supply scheme for the benefit of their people.

10. Summary and Points of Recommendation

As we all know, water is a pre-requisite for human health and well being, a vital element to all living creatures on earth. It preserves the environment generally. From the MDG's perspective it can be seen that apart from standing on its own as a primary target, it is directly or indirectly related to 4 other goals. They are goals number (i), (iv), (v), and (vi).

But given the current rate of progress it is doubtful that the water target will be realized despite assurances from the Minister of Water Resources.

And if the water target is missed it is almost certain that the other 4 water-related goals will also be missed. Efforts have to be doubled or even trebled in order to realize the MDG's water and associated targets in the remaining period and sustain it thereafter. Towards this end, the following recommendations/ suggestions are hereby offered.

11. Sector Funding

There is no doubt that water sector funding is low as confirmed by president Goodluck Jonathan himself. Funding is inefficient in the sense that the little that is budgeted is grossly misused and/or outrightly pilfered, leaving the taps dry. Even funds from donor agencies are not spared. The issue of insufficient funding leads to the practice of disproportionate budgeting.

12. Disproportionate Budgeting (Funding)

Agreed that there are growing security challenges but the practice of security budget outstripping those of twelve other ministries combined as happened in 2012 borders on overdressing the issue. Securing lives and property is essential but the nation can deploy some of this security funds to areas like water, agriculture etc. If children (people) keep dying from water-related diseases then what is there to secure and protect.

13. Manpower Development

That there is shortage of trained manpower in the area of water resources management cannot be gainsaid. This is glaring from the fact that out of over 100 universities in the nation today less than 6 of them offer courses in water resources management. The shortage is even more acute at the most critical level, the local government areas.

There are enough water resources in the nation, we only need to properly harness them. We need to train more personnel in the field who, with needed financial backing, will do the harnessing for the nation. Water accessibility remains fragile due largely to poor resources management than actual scarcity.

14. Financial Autonomy for the Local Governments

It is hoped that the on-going debate at the National Assembly on this subject matter will conclude by legislating in favour of financial autonomy for the Local Governments. Proximity of the Local Governments to the most vulnerable communities underscores the need to grant independence to Local Government Councils so that they will effectively play their deserved role as catalysts for grassroots development.

Local Government Councils are not meant to be mere appendages, tied to the apron strings of state governments.

State Governors are doing a lot of damage to Local Government finances. They keep on appointing illegal Caretaker committees against the constitutional stipulation that, "local government administration must be run by democratically elected members" (Nigerian Constitution, 1999).

15. Water as an Economic Commodity

Notwithstanding the UN declaration that water is a right of every citizen, which means it should be treated as a social amenity, water should be treated as an economic commodity, through which government can generate some revenue. But water privatization is not advocated; the reasoning being that water is too vital an element and should remain in the hands of the government. The poor should not be denied access though, because they cannot pay for it. Government should subsidize for the poor, which is to say they should pay a token (not full) rate for water. Afterall, the poor do pay for GSM recharge cards without subsidy from anybody.

16. The PVP Option

The Local Government councils are encouraged to embrace this environmentally friendly technology of providing water to their communities, utilizing the abundant, free and inexhaustible solar energy.

Technicians will be trained in the installation, operation and maintenance of the system which is not difficult in any way. The communities will be involved and made to view the project as actually their own.

The local governments can utilize this technology to improve on the standard of living of their people and remove poverty from them who constitute the bulk of the entire population.

17. Social Capital

It must be stated that, with all necessary funding and all necessary suggestions they stand to take us to nowhere near the targets without that culture of universal virtues. Virtues of common good, transparency, patriotism and the like. The truth is that monumental deficit in these virtues does

bestride and straddle the nation precariously. It is lack of these virtues that is behind pilfering of water budgets, deliberately running down the country's refining capacity in order to partake in the lucrative import of fuels, deliberately running down the country's power generation capacity and so on.

We must learn to imbibe the culture of accountability, and be paragons of these virtues in order to make any meaning progress.

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