The global target for safe drinking water has been met but more than 780 million people still lack access to clean water

Since 1990, more than 2 billion people have gained access to improved water sources, such as piped connections and protected wells, according to a joint report by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Almost 6.1 billion people—or 89 percent of the world’s population—used safe drinking water in 2010. That beats the 88 percent target for access to safe drinking water in 2015 set by the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

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63% of the world’s population had access to sanitation facilities in 2010

Sub-Saharan Africa and the Pacific are not on track to meet the MDG drinking water target.

(Progress toward the MDG drinking water target, 2010)

Toward universal access

The UNICEF-WHO report shows why the job is far from finished. More than 780 million people still have no access to safe drinking water, and the world is unlikely to meet the MDG target for access to sanitation facilities. Continued efforts are needed to reduce urban-rural disparities and inequities associated with poverty, dramatically increase coverage in sub-Saharan Africa and the Pacific, promote global monitoring of drinking water quality, bring sanitation on track, and expand the MDG target toward universal coverage. ■