

In Pictures: Water still a luxury in Ethiopia

While 52 percent of Ethiopia's people have access to improved water, only 10 percent have water piped into their homes.

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Thirty years after Ethiopia's devastating famine, water is still as inaccessible as it is precious. While 52 percent of the people have access to improved water, only 10 percent have water piped into their homes. And in rural areas, this figure is as low as 1 percent. Only 24 percent have adequate sanitation.

The implications are extremely broad. In an agriculture-based country, water shortages largely affect not only the country's economy, but also the basic life of people whose subsistence depends on each season's crops. Often poor countries like Ethiopia, with high population growth, are the most vulnerable to water stress.

Not to mention that on a continent currently affected by major diseases, controlling outbreaks is also a question of access to water and sanitation.

There are a lot of factors contributing to the lack of access to water and sanitation, ranging from environmental degradation due to desertification and deforestation, natural disasters such as extreme drought and climate change resulting from global warming. Other factors include pollution, caused by massive congestions in urban areas. This has led to a vicious cycle: people are leaving rural areas due to poverty hoping to find better opportunities in the cities only to contribute to the depreciation of living conditions where they arrive by overpopulating the towns' slums.

The government has expanded its social service delivery programmes; NGOs projects are improving life in some communities, but it is a long process and on the larger scale, the infrastructure handling Ethiopia's water supply is still inadequate and the need for improved water and sanitation is still severe.

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The World Health Organisation/Unicef Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) estimates that 51 percent of improved water access is piped onto premises in urban areas, but the situation on the ground in the crowded slums on the outskirts of Addis Ababa, the capital, looks different.



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In the slums of Addis Ababa, access to improved water and sanitation becomes more difficult due to internal migration. People coming from rural areas settle in the poor urban areas with cheap accommodation, leading to overcrowding in these neighbourhoods.



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A water sales site in the Weregenu slum on the outskirts of Addis Ababa. Weregenu is populated by internally displaced refugees that have been building illegal houses which are periodically demolished.



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An Ethiopian woman living in the Weregenu slum comes each day to a water sales site, carrying a 20-litre canister on her back for a few kilometres.



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In terms of urban sanitation, JMP estimates that only 27 percent of the population has access to improved sanitation, 42 percent use shared and there is still 8 percent open defecation.



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Provision of water is complicated by insufficient financial, human and technical capacity.



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Access to adequate sanitation in rural and marginal urban area is currently as low as 20 percent, but steps forward are being taken. NGOs, like Emanuel Development, an associate of Water Aid, are working to improve life for marginalized communities.



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According to NGOs working on water and sanitation in the capital, one of the issues of water access is that the infrastructure does not reach the poor in the marginal urban areas.



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In rural Ethiopia, women and children often have to walk 5 to 10 km to collect water. In some cases, people collect water from unprotected ponds or shallow wells, which are not safe water sources since they are subject to contamination when rain water washes waste from surrounding areas into the source.



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Drought is undoubtedly the main natural hazard that has afflicted Ethiopia throughout its history. A lot of small family farms that do not have irrigation are dependent on rain water. Poor rainy seasons (long or short) directly affect people's ability to earn a livelihood.



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NGOs are working with farmer associations on irrigation projects that can improve both crop productivity and the quality of people's lives.



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Aberash Lemi and her children live in a village in Anona. They have no water, no toilet, no electricity and no heating. In rural Ethiopia, 23 percent have access to improved sanitation and 43 percent defecate outdoors, according to JPM.



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In times of drought, there is not enough water for bathing regularly. As a result, community members, especially children, may suffer from scabies and eye infections. Diarrhoea and water-related diseases are among the principal causes of death among young children.



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Out of Ethiopia's of 96 million people, 79 million or 82 percent live in rural areas, where only 42 percent of the people have access to improved water. But only 1 percent of the people in rural areas have water piped into their homes.