

A young girl with braided hair, wearing a blue school uniform with white cuffs, is smiling and washing her hands at a public water tap. The tap is mounted on a rough, textured wall. A bar of white soap sits on the edge of the metal sink. The background shows a blue corrugated metal door and a brown wall panel.

# PROGRESS ON DRINKING WATER AND SANITATION

SPECIAL FOCUS  
ON SANITATION

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**Cover:** The provision of hand-washing facilities near toilets is critical for supporting school-based hygiene education efforts. Heshima Primary School, Nairobi, Kenya.

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# Foreword

## Sanitation and drinking water – at the heart of human health and development

2008 is the International Year of Sanitation. Accordingly, this report by the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation (JMP) has sanitation as its focus.

The importance of sanitation is indisputable. It is a crucial stepping stone to better health: sanitation offers us the opportunity to save the lives of 1.5 million children a year who would otherwise succumb to diarrhoeal diseases, and to protect the health of many more. It is fundamental to gender equity as it protects women's dignity. And it is key to economic development: investments in sanitation protect investments made in other sectors, such as education and health, and bring measurable economic returns.

However, the data in this report show that the world is not on track to meet the MDG sanitation target, and 2.5 billion people still lack access to improved sanitation, including 1.2 billion who have no facilities at all. The message is clear: We need to greatly accelerate progress in sanitation, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia. The number of people who still do not have access to improved sanitation is staggering, and we know that the disease, loss of earnings and indignity lock huge numbers of people into poverty.

But the news is not all bad. Although greater impetus is needed, the data show that people are choosing to move up the 'sanitation ladder', abandoning open defecation and revealing a demand for sanitation facilities.

In the case of drinking water supply, the news is good. For the first time, the number of people without improved drinking water has dropped below one billion. More than half of the global population now benefits from piped water reaching their homes, and the numbers using unimproved water supplies are going down. But we must maintain our efforts and galvanize the global community to continue to advance, focusing on those countries and regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa, which are struggling to stay on track.

The overall message from this report is positive. Progress can be made, and the sanitation and drinking water battle can be won. Our agencies are proud to present this report on status, and to press forward together.



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