

BIGMUN 2018

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

Research Report

Topic 3: The availability of clean drinking water in Sub-Saharan Africa
through the introduction of the necessary infrastructure



Šimon Olmer and Rebecca Pham

Introduction

The countries of Sub-Saharan Africa are some of the least developed and most conflict prone countries in the world. The ongoing water crisis further compromises the health and safety of the persons living in the region. Nearly 319 million do not have access to a reliable, clean drinking water source. Only 16% of the total population have access to drinking water through a household connection.¹ The UN and several non-profit organisations attempt to ameliorate the situation with minimal success as their immediate aid, in building wells for example, cannot be continued as national funds are not allocated for their upkeep. A sustained effort must be maintained to truly change the situation.

Key Terms

Water scarcity: The lack of sufficient available water resources to meet the demands of water usage within a region.²

Water stress: Water stress then refers to economic, social, or environmental problems caused by unmet water needs. Lack of supply is often caused by contamination, drought, or a disruption in distribution.³

Water crisis: A water crisis is a situation where the available potable, unpolluted water within a region is less than that region's demand.⁴

Sub-Saharan Africa: All countries in Africa below the Saharan desert. One of the poorest and least developed regions in the world.

Main Body

A global study conducted by the United Nations, found unsafe water to be responsible for around 80 percent of diseases and 30 percent of deaths in developing countries throughout the world.⁵ The obvious and well-documented health risks that derive from the lack of access to clean drinking water are, however, also accompanied by safety risks as water scarcity often fosters hostility and violence. The crisis in Darfur, for example, was partially caused by disputes over water. The initial conflict that

¹ Research center of the water project 2016. "Facts about water: statistics of the water crisis" https://thewaterproject.org/water-scarcity/water_stats (January 11, 2018).

² Chris White 2012. "Understanding water scarcity: Definitions and measurements" <http://www.globalwaterforum.org/2012/05/07/understanding-water-scarcity-definitions-and-measurements/> (January 12, 2018).

³ Chris White 2012. "Understanding water scarcity: Definitions and measurements" <http://www.globalwaterforum.org/2012/05/07/understanding-water-scarcity-definitions-and-measurements/> (January 12, 2018).

⁴ Chris White 2012. "Understanding water scarcity: Definitions and measurements" <http://www.globalwaterforum.org/2012/05/07/understanding-water-scarcity-definitions-and-measurements/> (January 12, 2018).

⁵ UNDESA 2014. "The Human Right to Water and Sanitation" http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/human_right_to_water.shtml (January 12, 2018).

then evolved into the violent crisis arose from tensions between nomadic farming groups who were competing for water and grazing land – desertification making both increasingly scarce.⁶

The issues with resolution

The resolution of the so-called “water crisis” is extremely difficult – the direct link between the availability of water and development forms a nearly inescapable vicious circle. The availability of clean drinking water needs to precede development, whilst underdevelopment is the reason for the unavailability of clean drinking water. The basic survival needs of a person must be met, before he can be expected to reasonably contribute to the economy; to educate himself and to work. However, the underdevelopment of public infrastructure, which experts find to be the cornerstone of water stress in Sub-Saharan Africa, can only improve alongside the economy.

The fulfilment of this initial survival premise, however, is not the only complication to the revival of African economy in the context of water stress. Agricultural development has the potential to improve African economies, yet unsurprisingly it is water dependent. In a continent, as climatically volatile as Africa, the agricultural industry must rely on irrigation to grow their crops. Alongside the necessary infrastructure, an educational as well as research framework would need to be built to assure the sustainability of irrigated farm land in Africa - 40% of which is now considered unsustainable.

Some would argue, however, that even if one would manage to overcome the many obstacles and supplement the growth of African economies, the problem would not cease to exist. Inefficient, corrupt and weak governance would prevent the allocation of necessary funds for infrastructure development, whilst the resulting urbanisation (with a complete lack of an urban culture and appropriate education) would only serve to exacerbate the problem. One also needs to account for the post-colonial territorial division of Africa, which oftentimes separates people from resources. To effectively provide people with clean, drinking water would thus necessitate transboundary, international agreements, which would need to be negotiated.⁷

Previous attempts at a resolution

Several international and non-governmental organizations already operate in the region generally working on small-scale development and education. In particular, they focus on limiting water waste, providing technological solutions to water acquirement and harvesting “green water” – water that can be found only underground. Though these efforts are certainly worthwhile and serve to alleviate local problems, governments remain largely inactive, and therefore no meaningful progress is actually being done.⁸

⁶ Christopher W. Tatlock 2006. “Water Stress in Sub-Saharan Africa” <https://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/water-stress-sub-saharan-africa> (January 11, 2018).

⁷ Christopher W. Tatlock 2006. “Water Stress in Sub-Saharan Africa” <https://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/water-stress-sub-saharan-africa> (January 11, 2018).

⁸ Lori Lewis 2007-2017. “RURAL AND URBAN WATER ISSUES IN AFRICA” <https://thewaterproject.org/water-crisis/water-in-crisis-rural-urban-africa> (January 11, 2018)

Possible solutions

Locally limiting water waste and diversification of water sources is necessary to combat water scarcity, however, without the overarching regional development framework, such efforts result in solely immediate aid with no future prospects. Experts point out several steps that need to be taken to combat the water crisis long-term:

- Public infrastructure must improve drastically – both water storage capacity and distribution capabilities must increase to compensate for Sub-Saharan Africa’s climatically volatile nature.
- The degree of international, national and individual commitment to resolve the issue must be strengthened. The international community needs to stop upstaging water stress with global environmental issues and thereby provide resources to combating water stress. More publicity inherently means more funding, as well as devoted research and development. National governments need to make enquiries into corruption and make sure the funds provided by the international community and their tax-payers are used promptly and effectively for the original intents and purposes. Individuals then need to make sure they partake in the educational framework and dedicate the necessary time to facility upkeep.
- Water treaties need to be negotiated and ratified to cultivate international cooperation and reduce the probability of conflict, or alternatively its intensity.
- Local education and development must be continued and accelerated. Technological advancement must translate into the development of Sub-Saharan Africa.

A sustained, long-term effort is necessary to develop the region and ultimately, fully mitigate the root causes of water stress.⁹

Relevant Countries

South Africa – In 2017 Cape Town, the legislative capital, faced a severe drought crisis. The response in South Africa was immediate. Water saving guidelines were spread among the general population and water was redirected from some of South Africa’s 589 large dams (accounting for more than a half of Sub-Saharan Africa’s large dams) to alleviate the crisis. As a result of competent governance and developed infrastructure, South Africa was able to counter the crisis quite easily, which is essentially what sets it apart from the majority of Sub-Saharan nations though there is still room for improvement, especially in rural regions.¹⁰

Côte d’Ivoire – The shortage of clean, drinking water in Côte d’Ivoire is reaching critical levels. Rapid, yet uncontrolled urbanisation has a detrimental effect on the quality of groundwater reserves,

⁹ Christopher W. Tatlock 2006. “Water Stress in Sub-Saharan Africa” <https://www.cfr.org/background/water-stress-sub-saharan-africa> (January 11, 2018).

¹⁰ Pam Wright 2018. “Cape Town, South Africa, Is Running Out of Water” <https://weather.com/science/environment/news/2018-01-10-cape-town-south-africa-water-shortage-day-zero> (January 12, 2018).

which cannot then be utilized for public use. Post-conflict this country needs to focus on sustainable development and education to limit deforestation for agricultural and primary resource extraction reasons. There are many NGOs as well as UN entities operating in the region, but strengthened governmental and development backing is needed.¹¹

Ethiopia – 61 million Ethiopians lack access to safe water and 65 million lack access to improved sanitation. Dubbed the Lion of Africa, in the last ten years Ethiopia underwent significant economic growth through development of its agricultural sector and maintenance of a pro-active and assertive foreign policy. Despite the success story of its economy, it seems as if this development did not proportionately translate into amelioration of the standard of living. Some also claim that the government's weak foundation could in the case of a drought give rise to a severe socio-political crisis.¹²

Relevant Organisations

UN water – UN Water is a UN initiative that coordinates the efforts of UN entities and international organisations working on water and sanitation issues. Its focus is to support UN member states to sustainably manage their water and sanitation. Specifically, they inform and educate on proper water usage and infrastructure. They monitor and report on the situation in affected regions and inspire and coordinate action.¹³

The Water Project – The Water Project is one of the most important NGOs working in the region. For ten years, they have been helping communities in Sub-Saharan Africa gain access to clean, safe water by providing education, expertise and financial support. They also have a research centre, which seeks to create independent reports, propose solutions and publicise the issue to the general public.¹⁴

Relevant UN Resolutions

A/RES/64/292

Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 28 July 2010 during the Sixty-fourth session, on *The Human Right to Water and Sanitation*

Available at: <http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=A/RES/64/292&lang=E>

A/HRC/RES/18/1

¹¹ UNICEF 2006. “*Water and Sanitation: Côte d’Ivoire*”
<https://www.unicef.org/cotedivoire/wes.html> (January 12, 2018).

¹² Daniel Speckhard 2016. “*How Ethiopia Can Overcome the Worst Drought in 50 Years*”
<http://time.com/4209936/ethiopia-drought/> (January 13, 2018).

¹³ UNDESA 2014. “*The Human Right to Water and Sanitation*”
http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/human_right_to_water.shtml (January 12, 2018).

¹⁴ The Water Project 2017. “*Who we are*”
https://thewaterproject.org/about_us (January 13, 2018).

Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 12 October 2011 during the Eighteenth session, on *The Right to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation*

Available at: <http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=A/HRC/RES/18/1&lang=E>

WHA64.24

Resolution adopted by the World Health Assembly on 24 May 2011 during the Sixty-fourth session, on *Drinking-Water, Sanitation and Health*

Available at: http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA64/A64_R24-en.pdf

Bibliography

Christopher W. Tatlock 2006. “*Water Stress in Sub-Saharan Africa*”

<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/water-stress-sub-saharan-africa> (January 11, 2018).

Research center of the water project 2016. “*Facts about water: statistics of the water crisis*”

https://thewaterproject.org/water-scarcity/water_stats (January 11, 2018).

Lori Lewis 2007-2017. “*RURAL AND URBAN WATER ISSUES IN AFRICA*”

<https://thewaterproject.org/water-crisis/water-in-crisis-rural-urban-africa> (January 11, 2018).

Chris White 2012. “*Understanding water scarcity: Definitions and measurements*”

<http://www.globalwaterforum.org/2012/05/07/understanding-water-scarcity-definitions-and-measurements/> (January 12, 2018).

UNDESA 2014. “*The Human Right to Water and Sanitation*”

http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/human_right_to_water.shtml (January 12, 2018).

Pam Wright 2018. “*Cape Town, South Africa, Is Running Out of Water*”

<https://weather.com/science/environment/news/2018-01-10-cape-town-south-africa-water-shortage-day-zero> (January 12, 2018).

UNICEF 2006. “*Water and Sanitation: Côte d’Ivoire*”

<https://www.unicef.org/cotedivoire/wes.html> (January 12, 2018).

Daniel Speckhard 2016. “*How Ethiopia Can Overcome the Worst Drought in 50 Years*”

<http://time.com/4209936/ethiopia-drought/> (January 13, 2018).

The Water Project 2017. “*Who we are*”

https://thewaterproject.org/about_us (January 13, 2018).