The world has met the MDG drinking water target by halving the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water, five years ahead of the 2015 target.

However, 783 million people still remain without access to an improved source of drinking water and huge inequities exist.

Since the measurement of water quality is not possible globally, actual drinking water safety is not reflected in the current MDG indicator: ‘use of an improved drinking water source’ which is used as a proxy for access to safe drinking water. As a result, it is likely that the number of people with access to actually safe drinking water is over-estimated.

In urban areas 8 out of 10 people use an improved sanitation facility, compared to only half of the rural population.

Piped water on premises is a convenience largely enjoyed by urban populations. More than a quarter of the population in rural areas still practise open defecation.
89 per cent of the global population use an improved drinking water source


Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation 2012-Update

Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest drinking water coverage of any region

- Since 1990, over 2 billion people gained access to an improved drinking water source, bringing the total to 6.1 billion people with access, or about 89% of the global population.

- Global figures mask regional, national and sub-national disparities. Whereas in sub-Saharan Africa only 61% of the population has access to an improved drinking water source, in most other developing regions over 90% of the population has access.

Access to piped water supplies on premises varies widely between regions

Drinking water coverage, 2010

- 91-100%
- 76-90%
- 50-75%
- <50%
- INSUFFICIENT DATA OR NOT APPLICABLE
Only 63 per cent of the world population use an improved sanitation facility. In many countries sanitation coverage is still below 50 per cent.

- Since 1990, 1.8 billion people gained access to an improved sanitation facility, bringing the total to 4.4 billion people with access or 63% of the global population.
- An estimated 2.5 billion people are still without improved sanitation, almost three-quarters of them live in rural areas.
- Sanitation coverage has increased by 20 per cent in the developing regions, from 36 per cent in 1990 to 56 per cent in 2010.
- The number of people resorting to open defecation declined by 271 million since 1990. Still, open defecation is practised by 1.1 billion people - 15 per cent of the global population.

2.5 billion people are still without sanitation.
The Equity Imperative - Looking Beyond Averages


Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation 2012-Update

The poorest 40 per cent of the population in Southern Asia have barely benefited from improvements in sanitation, whereas improvements in drinking water supply have been equitably distributed.

Women bear the main responsibility for collecting water in sub-Saharan Africa

Main person responsible for collecting drinking water when water is not available on premises; based on MICS and DHS surveys from 25 countries in sub-Saharan Africa

Regional and national averages mask huge inequalities

Drinking water coverage in selected countries in sub-Saharan Africa and urban/rural coverage among poorest and richest households in Sierra Leone (per cent)

Source: JMP 2012, and Sierra Leone DHS, 2008

Southern Asia: Sanitation and drinking water coverage trends by wealth quintiles, based on population weighted averages from three countries, 1995-2008