Can informed, targeted campaigning really affect the policies of the major international financial institutions? What lessons can be learned from water privatisation policy change.

> ***"Access to safe water is a fundamental human need and, therefore, a basic human right. Contaminated water jeopardizes both the physical and social health of all people. It is an affront to human dignity."***
>
> *Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General. "Right to Water" WHO 2003*

The issue of International aid in developing countries, particularly in regard to water privatisation, as considered in module B8, is dominated by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), particularly the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), multinational companies and international consultancies.[1] It often appears that there is nothing the general public, can do to influence these monoliths. By looking at how WB/IMF water privatisation policy changed, guided by UK policy, itself influenced by informed campaigning, this essay will challenge this view.

The World Bank was established in the aftermath of the second world war to assist with the rebuilding of Europe[2]. In 1989 the World Bank's remit was changed to include poverty reduction[3] [WBO website]. The World Bank has become increasingly complex, encompassing five closely associated development institutions: the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the International Development Association (IDA), the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), and the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID).

The IMF's original mandate involved "assisting countries in stabilizing their short-term balance of payments and the exchange rates of their currencies" This mandate has grown to include "long-term financing for development purposes" [Alexander 2006a] Its remit changed in 1999. It now manages the budgetary decisions of most developing countries. The IMFs primary role today is to keep fiscal deficits and inflation as low as possible throughout the developing world. [Alexander 2006a]

Conditionality and Privatisation

Globally, where clean water is available, 95% is supplied by the public sector with the finance for infrastructure being raised through public borrowing and taxation, as well as through user charges.

According to the IMF the reason loans have been conditional on the adoption of prescriptive policies is to "resolve a country's balance of payments difficulties, to enable the government to repay the Fund, and give confidence to the borrowing country by clarifying the terms on which the IMF will continue to make its financial resources available". [IMF 2005]

Since 1990 there has been a background of global and national policies aimed at restricting public sector borrowing and expenditure, against which development banks and donors turned to promoting the private sector as the solution. In 1999 the IMF/WB issued a joint lending framework – the "Poverty Reduction Strategy" which was aimed at guiding their staff in decisions about lending to the poorest countries. These conditions have been used to enforce the policy of privatisation of water supplies.

> "Approaching development from a rights perspective informs people of their legal rights and entitlements, and empowers them to achieve those rights. Rather than seeing people as passive recipients of aid, the rights-based approach puts the individual at the centre of development."
>
> WHO: "Right to Water" 2003

In 1992 the "Dublin Principles (see Appendix 4) shifted global thinking towards treating water as an "economic good",[4] [5]

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1 The average total annual aid budget for water-related projects has been around £3.5 billion, with bilateral arrangements contributing the lion's share (£2.25 billion), with the World Bank as the largest single donor (£1.9 billion). [postnote May 2002]

2 Its first loan of $250 million was to France in 1947 for post-war reconstruction

3 Reconstruction after natural disasters, humanitarian crises and conflicts has remained part of its brief and its remit is claimed as being "focused on poverty reduction as the overarching goal of all its work" (WBO Website).

4 An economic good is a physical object or service that has value to people and can be sold for a non-negative price in the marketplace. (http://economics.about.com/library/glossary/bldef-economic-good.htm)

5 "being directly consumed by humans, water is an important production factor, in the broadest sense, and it is scarce. Hence it is an economic good... There is a demand for it, there are operators that make it available, it has a value". Savenije [2002]

which remains the consensus view today, and is fundamental assumption of current policy.

The UNCED 'Earth Summit' and Agenda 21, building on the thinking that communities should be participants in development not just receivers (e.g. see text box right), emphasised that planning and implementation should be based on the demand of users, not levels set by planners, and that willingness to pay was a 'secondary but vital' desired behaviour within communities. In order to address the concern that "overly supply-led approaches had been financially unsustainable, and therefore failed the poor" [ODI 2003], the "Demand Responsive Approach" (DRA) of the World Bank was developed in 1998, focussing on "financial sustainability" and "cost recovery". By devolving responsibility to the local level it was supposed to bring "water users into the process of selecting, implementing and ultimately financing the long term delivery of water". [6]

Much of the reasoning behind the privatisation strategy stemmed from the initial failure of the First UN Water Decade 1981 - 1990 and the perceived mismanagement of the water projects by the governments of developing countries. There was perceived corruption in governments and the judiciary in developing countries. Based on theoretical modelling work on corruption [7] it was expected there would be lower levels in the private sector. Two assumptions underlying this expectation were that it is harder for corrupt politicians to control private firms than public ones, and that reform to private companies makes political interference costlier or at least more visible. [Estache et al 2006].

The rationale of being able to terminate a contract with a private firm if targets are not met and give it to a competitor, sounds good until one looks at the real situation. The world water business is dominated by the two largest French multinationals, Suez and Vivendi, holding 70% of the international privatised water business between them. In 12 areas they have created joint subsidiaries, sharing the profits of a water concession instead of competing for them. In 2001 alone Vivendi was convicted three times for corruption offences such as bribery and donations to political parties. [IRC 2002]

Consequences.

Water supply is a complex business, applying not only to that which people need to stay alive but also to agriculture, transport, industry and leisure. These sectors have differing economic potentials and abilities. "Some users have a high willingness to pay, consuming relatively small amount (domestic users, industries), others have a low willingness and/or ability to pay and use large amounts (farmers), yet others have no ability to pay (environment, poor people)" [Savenije 2002].

In the US, UK and Canada privatisation did work and proved "the cheapest and most effective way to solve a wide variety of problems plaguing water and wastewater utilities" [Brubacker 2001].However there is an issue when applied to developing countries where lack of water equates to lack of life, education, and human dignity. Privatisation was a one size fits all solution, developed by economists considering the "non-essential" market, not by water and aid professionals concerned with the "essential". There was little flexibility - the same solution had to fit both sectors as they frequently overlapped geopolitically.

DRA and the concept of water as a human right come into conflict because there is no alternative to water. There is a recognised minimum of 20 litres of water a day required for a human to live (not including food production)[8] [UN Water 2007]. If a user cannot afford to pay for this water they cannot use something else. It is not the same as choosing which energy source to use, or whether to drive a car.

Privatised companies had to make a profit, hence they concentrated on lucrative urban areas and not on areas of greatest need such as the poorest countries; cities where the poorest people live and rural areas. Private contracts failed to deliver investment in new infrastructure. After 15 years, only about 600,000 households have been connected as a result of investment by private water operators in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and east Asia (outside China) – less than 1% of the number required to meet the MDG targets.[9] They also maintained the WB policy requirement of "full cost recovery" resulting in some water charges increasing to the point where they were accounting for over 20% of the income of the poor. Many people in developing countries became marginalised by the cost of water services. [Mulenga 2004].

6 It implicitly involved the assumption that "demand in poor communities" could be equated with the "willingness to pay" [ODI 2003]

7 Shapiro and Willig (1990); Shleifer and Vishny (1993); and Boycko, Shleifer and Vishy (1996)

8 Production of enough food to satisfy a person's daily diet requires 2000-3000 litres of water. 2-3 litres are required for drinking and 20-300 litres for domestic needs [UN Water 2007 p9]

9 This may be compared with the results of the 'decade of water' in the 1980s - when funding was provided to the public sector - which is usually referred to as a failure, yet reduced the overall percentage of people living without safe water supply from 56% in 1980 to 31% by 1990, results far better than the privatisation experiment has delivered. (Hall & Lobina 2006a)

Eventually there came a realisation within the "International Community"[10] that privatisation was not delivering the expected benefits. A WB internal policy report [Estache et al 2006] showed that even the introduction of independent regulators did not always have the expected effects on access, affordability or quality of services, and that there was "no difference in the level of corruption or price fixing than would have been expected in monopoly situations".

The very institutions towards which the IFIs were looking to deal with the issue of water poverty started to voice doubts. In Jan 2002 JF Talbot[11] told the World Bank that the private sector did not have the financial capacity to deliver for the poor [India Resource 2002]. "The scale of the need far out-reaches the financial and risk taking capacities of the private sector." He concluded that "without subsidies and soft loans from governments there is no scope for privatisation of water by multinationals". It was the inability, or unwillingness of governments to offer subsidies and soft loans that was one of the original excuses for privatisation. Private companies were unwilling to go it alone. There was no money in it for them, the currency risks were too great, as were the political difficulties, and institutional investors were not prepared to take such risks.[12]

Changing UK GovernmentAttitudes

"Privatisation is the only way to get the investment that [poor] countries need in things like banking, tourism, telecommunications and services such as water under good regulatory arrangements."

Clare Short, UK Secretary of State for International Development 2002

"Clearly there needs to be significantly increased public investment [in order to meet the MDGs] – making water and sanitation a priority of national plans in developing countries. There needs to be a recognition private sector investment may have a role too."

Hilary Benn, UK Secretary of State for International Development 2006

The effect of UK Policy change

Since 2002, UK Government attitudes have changed (see text box right). The Secretary of State for International Development, Hilary Benn, following campaigning and consultation with concerned groups[13] changed the emphasis of the UK policy. At the 2004 World Bank/IMF Annual Meetings, the World Bank agreed with the UK's suggestion that the Bank should carry out a review of its approach to conditionality[14], and report back at the 2005 Annual Meetings. This review and reporting was delivered [World Bank 2005].

In March 2005 a UK Policy Paper on conditionality was published[DFID 2005] which questioned the effectiveness of policy conditionality as applied by WB/IMF, raising concerns that "some conditionality has promoted reforms that have made the poor worse off."

In September 2006 the UK threatened to withhold a pledged increase of £50m to its £1.3bn donations[15] to WB because it did not agree with WB's conditionality. "Hilary Benn voiced concerns that the Bank is telling poorer nations how to run their affairs" [BBC Sept 14 2006]. A key point of contention was the slow progress being made on reforms to aid conditions agreed in 2005, particularly "removing the requirement on countries to liberalise their economies and to privatise key industries" [BBC 18 Sept 2006]

The world's politicians seem very ready to produce sound-bite commitments but sometimes low on action once the bite has been published. Despite lobbying, and the promise, in the 2005 G8 Summit communiqué "to deliver more and better aid to those living in extreme poverty", the 2007 G8 summit "ignored the need for urgent action to tackle the global water crisis as stated in the Human Development Report [2006]", and has "done nothing for the billions of people living without clean water and sanitation".[16] [17][WaterAid 2007]

Conclusions.

DRA was focused on financing sustainability. It was found that, contrary to free market doctrine, financial sustainability, based on full cost recovery, does not always work. Sometimes things have to be subsidised, and investment made for the common good, the result coming much later down the line and not in instantly realisable profit.

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10 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_community

11 CEO of SAUR International (4th largest water company)

12 e.g. SAUR was for sale for 2 years, before being bought by a financial investor, who refused to take on the non-European operations.

13 Particularly by "Make Poverty History" and WaterAid

14 Specifically 5 issues:" the scope and content of policy conditionality; the appropriate level for application of conditionality; improving harmonisation and alignment behind country-owned plans for poverty reduction; improving predictability; and conditionality in fragile states."[DFID 2005]

15 12% of UK Aid is channelled through the World Bank. DFID provided £403 million to the Bank in 2003/4. In February 2005 it announced a record level of support (over £1.3 billion over three years) for the International Development Association.

16 One sixth of the world's population (1.1 billion people) still does not have access to clean water. More than 80% of those without access to drinking water are in rural areas.[Moore and Urquart 2004]

17 "This means 1.8 million children will die from water-related diseases before the next G8 convenes".[WaterAid 2007].

There is no one solution, no one economic doctrine that will or can tackle all the problems in an increasingly complex global environment. A global economy run purely by economists without input from specialist practitioners with experience “on the ground” has shown a tendency to result in policy applicable to western industrialised society being applied to areas where it can do more harm than good. Privatisation / Free Market economics is not a magic panacea and cannot be relied on to provide in all situations. This will become particularly relevant in the issue of carbon reduction, adaptation and mitigation. Currently proposals are based on carbon trading and offsetting, and of encouragement of technological innovation through fiscal measures such as tax relief. The failure of privatisation to reduce corruption in the water industry, does not bode well for mechanisms of economic regulation which may well prove untenable in the long term due to lack of confidence in regulatory mechanisms.

With climate change now a near certainty, the world community is going to be faced with a number of serious humanitarian and development issues, water scarcity being just one. The World Bank and IMF are going to be integral to dealing with these issues. That there has been a change in WB/IMF water policy, stated if not yet seen practically, gives some hope that campaigners can make a difference. The UK government has a loud voice, due to the large aid contributions of the UK taxpayer. What has been seen is that UK government policy can be changed, and thence WB/IMF policy can be altered, by careful, considered, fact based and persistent campaigning. The prevailing wisdom of the “there is nothing we can do” mindset is incorrect. However campaigning must be kept up or nothing will be done once the political sound-bite has been published. There will be a requirement for varied, adaptable, and imaginatively integrated public and private sector solutions, based on local need, on local buy-in, not just the profits to be generated by large players. More research, and a wider mindset, is required to produce these solutions.

Of particular relevance to the environment debate is the move of Hilary Benn from International Development to Environment Minister in Gordon Brown’s first cabinet (June 2007). With his track record of listening to informed campaign groups and modifying policy according to facts presented comes the possibility that environmental debate can make progress, at least in UK policy.

Limitations of this essay

There is a lot of propaganda from both sides of the privatisation argument available and it takes a great amount of sifting to trace a path through it. It is also difficult to define what orthodox thinking is regarding this issue, as it is currently in a process of change, and it depends upon which side of the private /public debate one rests. This essay incorporates the author’s bias as a campaigner, and speaker for, WaterAid.

Word Count 2737

Appendix 1

The Millennium Development Goals

(source Wikipedia)

The United Nations Millennium Declaration, signed in September 2000, commits the states to:

1. **Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**
    - Reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than one U.S. dollar a day.
    - Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.
    - Increase the amount of food for those who suffer from hunger.
2. **Achieve universal primary education**
    - Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling.
    - Increased enrollment must be accompanied by efforts to ensure that all children remain in school and receive a high-quality education
3. **Promote gender equality and empower women**
    - Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.
4. **Reduce child mortality**
    - Reduce the mortality rate among children under five by two thirds.
5. **Improve maternal health**
    - Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio.
6. **Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases**
    - Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.
    - Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.
7. **Ensure environmental sustainability**
    - Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes; reverse loss of environmental resources.
    - Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water.
    - Achieve significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, by 2020.
8. **Develop a global partnership for development**
    - Develop further an open trading and financial system that is rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory. Includes a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction—nationally and internationally.
    - Address the least developed countries' special needs. This includes tariff- and quota-free access for their exports; enhanced debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries; cancellation of official bilateral debt; and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction.
    - Address the special needs of landlocked and small island developing States.
    - Deal comprehensively with developing countries' debt problems through national and international measures to make debt sustainable in the long term.
    - In cooperation with the developing countries, develop decent and productive work for youth.
    - In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries.

Appendix 2

Source
Sara Grusky
Globalization Challenge Initiative
sgrusky@igc.org
Website : www.igc.org

February 2001

Countries with IMF-imposed water privatization and cost recovery policies

Country	IMF Program	Loan Condition	Summary of Policy
ANGOLA	Staff-monitored program	Structural benchmark: Adjust electricity and water tariffs in accordance with formulas agreed with the World Bank. Reduce accounts receivables of the water and electricity companies to one month of sales revenue	Adjust water tariffs periodically to recover costs, including a reasonable return on capital.
BENIN	Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF)	Other measure: After the revision of regulatory framework, the government expects to complete the privatization before the end of the third quarter of 2001	Privatize the water and electric power distribution company (SBEE)
GUINEA-BISSAU	Emergency Post-Conflict policy	Structural benchmark: Transfer of electricity and water management to private company	Transfer of electricity and water management to private company
HONDURAS	Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF)	Other measure: Approve framework law for the water and sewage sector by December 2000	To facilitate private concessions in the provision of water and sewage services, approve the framework law by December 2000.
NICARAGUA	Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF)	Structural benchmark: Continue adjusting water and sewage tariffs by 1.5% a month. Offer concession for private management of regional water and sewage subsystems in Leon, Chinandega, Matagalpa, and Jinotega.	Adjust water and sewage tariffs to achieve cost recovery and offer concession for private management in key regions.

NIGER	Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF)	Other measure: Divestment of key public enterprises, including the water company, SNE.	Privatization of the four largest government enterprises (water, telecommunication, electricity & petroleum) have been agreed with the World Bank with the proceeds going directly to pay Niger's debt.
PANAMA	Stand-By Arrangement	Structural benchmark: Complete plan to overhaul IDAAN's (state-owned water company) billing and accounting systems, allow to contract with private sector operators, determine need for tariff increase and possible rate differentiation among clients.	Overhaul the water company's billing and accounting systems, allow it to contract with private sector operators, review the tariff structure.
RWANDA	Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF)	Structural benchmark: Put the water and electricity company (Electrogaz) under private management by June 2001.	The water and electricity company (Electrogaz) will be put under private management as a prelude to its privatization.
SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE	Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF)	Structural benchmark: The new adjustment mechanism for public water and electricity rates will be brought into operation by decree. The price structure will cover all production and distribution costs as well as the margin of the water and electricity company. The accounts will balance consumption and resources without recourse to government subsidies.	In May 2000, the government conducted a study of alternatives for the future of the water and electricity company (restructuring, leasing, concession or full privatization), with assistance from the World Bank. By December 2000, it will select one of the options and adopt a financial restructuring plan, and strengthen the revenue collection procedures.
SENEGAL	Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF)	Other measure: Regulatory agency for the urban water sector will be created by end-2000. Transfer the recurrent costs of water pumping and distribution equipment to the communities. Increase the involvement of private sector operators.	Encourage the involvement of private sector operators in the water sector. Assess the possibility of private sector operation and financing of the infrastructure required to meet Dakar's long-term water needs.

TANZANIA	Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF)	Condition for HIPC debt relief: Assign the assets of Dar es Salaam Water and Sewage Authority (DAWASA) to private management companies.	Assign the assets of Dar es Salaam Water and Sewage Authority (DAWASA) to private management companies.
YEMEN	Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF)	Structural benchmark: Implement adjustments in water, wastewater, and electricity tariffs to provide for full cost recovery.	Implement formulas for automatic adjustments in tariff rates to ensure full pass through of product prices and full cost recovery; establish regional water authorities with private sector participation and independence to set regional tariff structures.

Source: Letters of Intent and Memoranda of Economic and Financial Policies prepared by government authorities with the staffs of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. The documents are made available at the IMF website: www.imf.org.

Appendix 3

Types of contracts:
Concessions, leases and management
(taken from “*Pipe Dreams*” [Hall & Lobina 2006] p12)
Water supply is usually privatised through contracts between public authorities and private companies to operate water supply services. There are three main types of contract, which have different implications for investment, in particular investment in extending the network to households which have been previously unconnected.

Concession contracts give a private company a licence to run the water system and charge customers to make a profit. The private company is responsible for all investments, including building new pipes and sewers to connect households who are not so far connected. This does not have to be the company’s own share capital. The private company can use money from various sources, including the surplus on the operations, bank loans, and grants. Concession contracts may set out targets to be met by the company, for example to invest a certain amount during the first five years (as was done in Buenos Aires, Argentina), or to connect a target number of households who do not have water supply (as was done in La Paz, Bolivia). Concessions typically last for 20 or 30 years, but may sometimes be as long as 95 years.

Leases are contracts under which the company is responsible for running the distribution system, and for making the investments necessary to repair and renew the existing assets, but the public authority remains responsible for new investment. The private company is not responsible for the investment in extensions to connect households who were previously unconnected. Leases are also known by their French name of affermage contracts.

Management contracts make the private company responsible for managing the water service, but not for making any of the investment, or even, usually, employing the workforce. A typical management contract involves a few senior managers from the private company being assigned to run the water company for a period of between one and five years.

These contracts are risk-free for the private sector and do not involve any investment by the private company.

Appendix 4

The Dublin principles (1992) were an attempt to concisely state the main issues and thrust of water management:

- Freshwater is a finite and vulnerable resource, essential to sustain life, development and the environment;

- Water development and management should be based on a participatory approach, involving users, planners and policy-makers at all levels;

- Women play a central part in the provision, management, and safeguarding of water;

- Water has an economic value in all its competing uses, and should be recognised as an economic good;

Appendix 5

Some relevant water facts

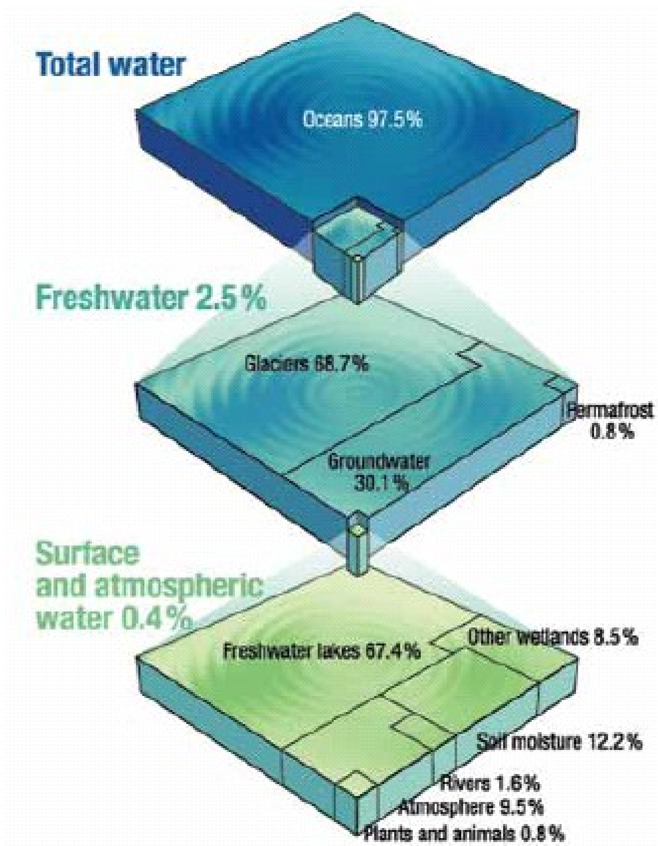
Water is a fundamental need for human, and indeed all life. The volume of the Earth's oceans is approximately 1.3×10^9 km^3 accounting for 97.5% of the worlds water. None of this is available for humans, or land living animals to drink. We need freshwater which constitutes only 2.5% (see figure 1).

In the past 100 years the world's population has tripled. The demand for fresh water has increased six-fold.

One sixth of the world's population (1.1 billion people) does not have access to clean water. More than 80% of those without access to drinking water are in rural areas.[Moore and Urquart 2004]

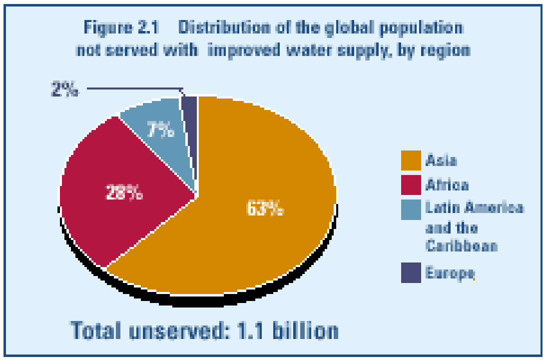
After 15 years, only about 600,000 households have been connected as a result of investment by private water operators in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and east Asia (outside China) – less than 1% of the number required to meet the MDG targets.

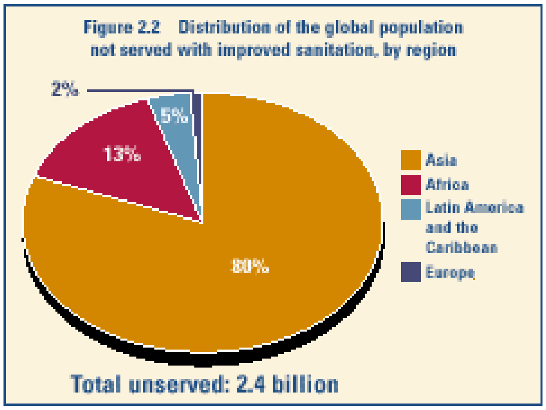
This may be compared with the results of the 'decade of water' in the 1980s - when funding was provided to the public sector - which is usually referred to as a failure, yet reduced the overall percentage of people living without safe water supply from 56% in 1980 to 31% by 1990, results far better than the privatisation experiment has delivered



Source: Data from Shiklomanov and Rodda, 2003. Freshwater has a global volume of 35.2 million cubic kilometres (km^3).

Figure 1 - **Global distribution of the world's water**





The Two UN Decated of Water:

The first Water Decade: 1981 - 1990: “International Decade for Clean Drinking Water” focussed on safe water and sanitation for everybody by 1990. It failed in its aim, mainly it is proposed because of problems of effective organization of waste and water programmes within developing countries, and secondly because inappropriate technology was proposed and used which rapidly fell into disrepair due to maintenance difficulties.[REF]

In 2002, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognized that water itself was an independent human right. Drawing on a range of international treaties and declarations, it stated: “the right to water clearly falls within the category of guarantees essential for securing an adequate standard of living, particularly since it is one of the most fundamental conditions
for survival.

We are currently in the second decade: International Decade for Action “Water for Life” 2005 -2015[18]

2003 was declared the UN International Year of Freshwater. One aim of the year was to reassert the UN Millennium Declaration Goal[19]: “to halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of people who are unable to reach, or afford, safe drinking water.” [20]

18 At its 58th session, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a draft resolution, without a vote (A/RES/58/217), proclaiming 2005 to 2015 as the International Decade for Action Water for Life.

19 The Millennium development (or declaration) goals (MDGs)[see Appendix 1] were “a set of time bound and measurable goals and targets for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women”. [UN 2002]. They were agreed in September 2000 at the United Nations Millennium summit. They are the working targets of the UN development issues and are driving the work of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs).

20 Para 19 Millennium Declaration (2000) Resolution referred by the General Assembly at its 54th session (A/55/2) adoption by 55th Session. The Johannesburg Declaration adopted at the World Summit of Sustainable Development in September 2002 extended this goal to include sanitation as well.

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