

Study calls for new global standard for safe drinking water and sanitation

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A new study conducted jointly by The Water Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine calls for a new global standard for improvements in household drinking water and sanitation access.

The study highlights that current benchmarks for access, established by the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation (JMP), treat water and [sanitation](#) differently, masking deficits in household water access. The JMP will soon set new targets for global progress in the Sustainable Development Goals, and the study's results could significantly influence their development.

Findings of the study were published online Dec. 11, 2014, in the journal *PLOS ONE*.

In the 1990s, the JMP set separate benchmarks to measure progress toward the United Nations' targets on water and sanitation between 1990 and 2015. A source of drinking water qualified as "improved" if it were provided at the community level, whereas sanitation had to be available at the household level to qualify as "improved." Global figures based on these standards suggested nearly three times more people lack access to improved sanitation than to improved [drinking water](#) sources.

The research team recalculated the progress for water and sanitation using matching benchmarks for both. The results showed that, with equal benchmarks, progress in sanitation outpaced water between 1990 and

2015. Therefore, if Sustainable Measurement Goals measure progress at the household level where benefits are greatest, it will become clear that water and sanitation both need priority attention.

"Our findings have significant implications for how we measure progress toward universal access," said Jamie Bartram, the Don and Jennifer Holzworth Distinguished Professor of environmental sciences and engineering at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health and director of the Water Institute. "Drinking-[water](#) and sanitation are essential for good human health and the benefits are maximized when delivered at home."

"Does Global Progress on Sanitation Really Lag Behind Water?" is an open-access article available [online](#).

Provided by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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