

Learning from the MDGs: Improved sanitation and drainage in cities

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World leaders have agreed on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but arguably Goal six - the water and sanitation goal - will have the hardest job building on the work undertaken by the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). A timely special double edition of the journal *Environment and Urbanization* on "Sanitation and drainage in cities" explores persistent gaps in urban sanitation provision and ways to address them.

The water MDG was widely acknowledged as the furthest from delivering against its objective, with criticism largely levelled at Target 7.C, which aimed to 'halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation'.

Across two issues of the journal, 22 papers tackle sanitation globally, alongside specific case studies and issues within Mongolia, Zimbabwe, Haiti, South Africa, Mozambique, Ghana, China, Zambia, Tanzania, and several cities in India.

Topics include:

- different technical models (container-based toilets, closed-loop system)
- ways of assessing sanitation quality (sanitation scores in Indian cities, a new system to measure sanitary risks in Maputo)
- differential impacts of sanitation on certain groups (urban poor adolescent girls in Bengaluru, women and girls affected by

- sanitation-related violence, the poor and socially excluded in Shanghai)
- frameworks for understanding sanitation ("sanitation cityscape", "sites of entitlement")
 - financing models (limitations to market-based services in East Africa, user willingness to pay in urban Haiti, public toilets in Ghana)
 - contextual factors for understanding sanitation (history in Dar es Salaam, a case study of Lusaka)
 - participation and inclusion (community-managed programmes in India, civil society partnership in Mumbai, reflections on inclusive sanitation, co-production of inclusive sanitation in Zimbabwe, stormwater drainage in Johannesburg, open-access water information platform)
 - policy (national sanitation policy in India, solid waste management in Chandigarh)

Despite these wide-ranging themes, many of the papers share a concern with the slow pace of sanitation improvement in the world's cities. This lack of progress is particularly notable now that it is clear that we have failed to achieve the Millennium Development Goal target of halving the proportion of the people without basic sanitation.

Yet the papers showcase positive context-dependent developments and point the way forward.

Diana Mitlin, the author of the October 2015 editorial and co-author of the April 2015 editorial said: "What is evident is that global commitments can and have made a difference - especially if there is the understanding that progress in [sanitation](#) requires a sophisticated knowledge of the local context and projects owned by those who are intended to benefit. Contextual knowledge, with innovation and flexibility in crafting solutions and determination to secure progress,

emerge as necessary conditions."

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