It's our water too!

Bringing greater equity in access to water in Kenya

1. Introduction

In Kenya, every citizen has a right to water. The National Water Strategy commits to ensuring that all people are covered by the formal water supply system and that poor Kenyans pay tariffs that they can afford.

Considerable progress has been made in facilitating access to water since the enactment of the 2002 Water Act. Spending by the Ministry of Water and Irrigation increased from Kshs 6.9 billion in the 2004/5 fiscal year to Kshs 18.6 billion in 2008/9. With the increase in spending, the amount available for investments (development budget) increased almost three-fold from Kshs 140 per capita to Kshs 391 (GOK, AWSR 2009). At the same time, policy reforms that separated asset ownership from service provision, regulation, and policy formulation were undertaken.

Despite these positive developments, a lot remains to be done. Millions of Kenyans are currently underserved and too many citizens continue to drink unsafe water, or are forced to use minimal quantities of water as distance, waiting times, and cost make water inaccessible. Inequities in access to water are glaring and the struggle for water by the excluded sections of Kenya's population contrasts sharply with the privileged, who benefit from water delivered to their homes, often at very low prices.

This brief presents eight facts about water in Kenya. At the current pace of expansion, it will take unacceptably long to cover populations that urgently need water. The Government urgently needs to address existing inequalities, in particular by making sure that budget allocations are formula based and reflect needs rather than political weight.

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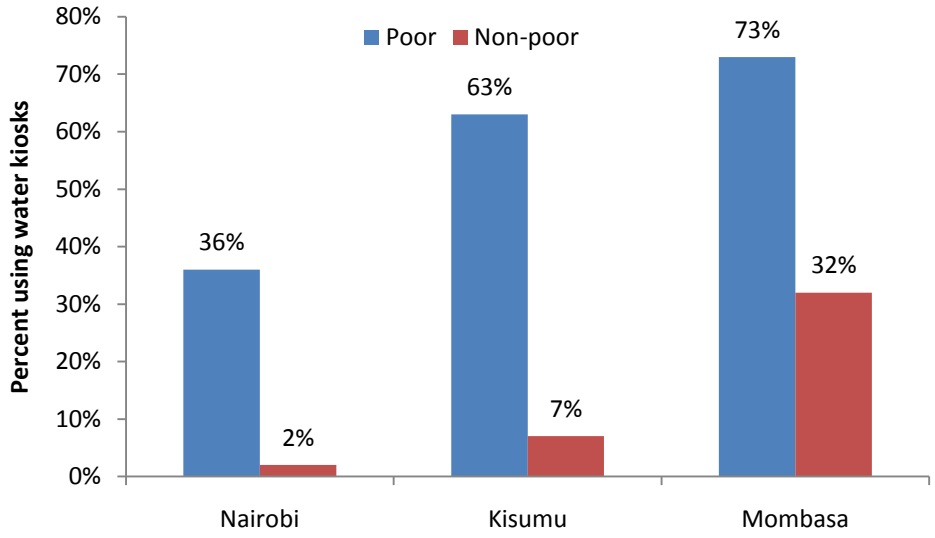
2. Eight facts about access to water in Kenya

Fact 1: Millions of Kenyans have inadequate access to water.

Reliable information on access to safe water is not available and estimates of the percent of urban households with access to improved water sources vary greatly. Here we use numbers compiled by the World Bank who present two sets of estimates (World Bank 2009). These estimates put nationally piped water coverage at between 42% and 59%, which leaves millions of citizens without easily accessible water. Even at the most optimistic, almost 16 million Kenyans rely on water kiosks, protected wells, rainwater catchment, and open water sources such as flowing streams and shallow open wells to meet their daily water needs.

Irrespective of the estimates, rural areas perform consistently worse than urban areas. In rural areas, where 78% of the national population lives, only 38% to 52% have easy access to safe water; in urban areas 59% to 83% have easy access to safe water (World Bank 2009). Within urban areas, there are huge differences. According to a Citizen Report Card exercise carried out in 2007 (CRC 2007), very few (2%) non-poor households in Nairobi rely on water kiosks for their water, but more than a third (36%) of poor households rely on such a source (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Percent of poor and non-poor households relying on kiosks for their water

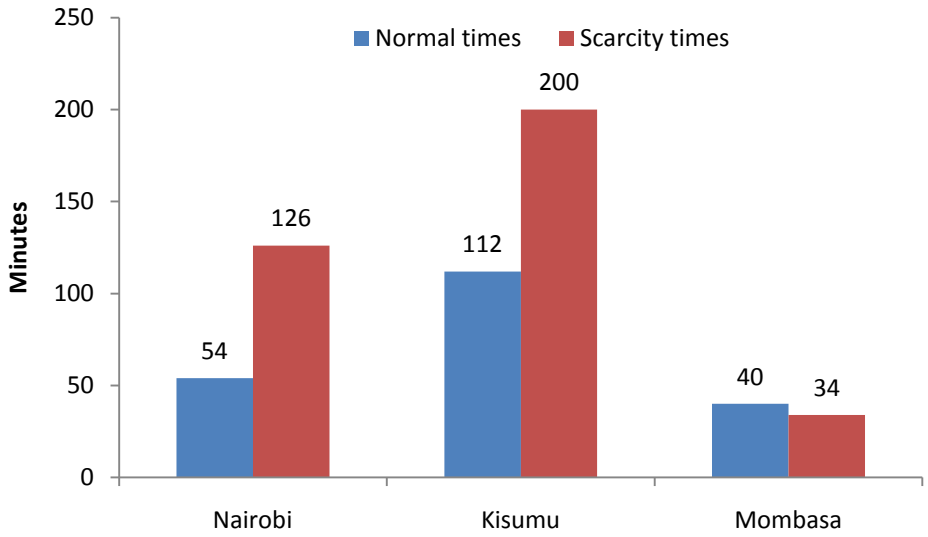


Source of data: Citizen Report Card on urban water, 2007.

Fact 2: Urban water kiosks provide inadequate water service.

In urban areas, a larger fraction of households have access to piped water, yet many are forced to rely on water kiosks (15% in Nairobi; 45% in Kisumu and in Mombasa) (CRC 2009). This situation presents a huge burden to households as fetching water is time consuming. A typical household makes 4-6 trips daily to fetch water; so, even when the water kiosk is nearby it consumes a considerable amount of time. In Nairobi, a typical household spends 54 minutes going to the kiosk in normal times, and more than twice that (126 minutes) in times of water scarcity. In other places, the situation is worse. In Kisumu, for instance, households relying on water kiosks spend almost two hours (112 minutes) collecting water every day, and, in times of scarcity, more than three hours (200 minutes). Furthermore, as women largely shoulder the burden of fetching water, inadequate access to water has a major gender dimension.

Figure 2: Time spent daily by poor households fetching water from sources outside the home

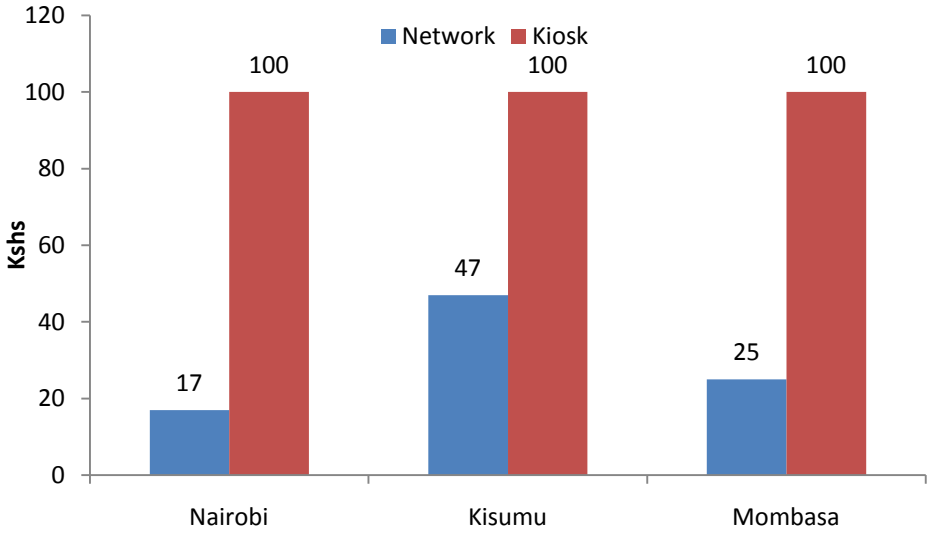


Source of data: Citizen Report Card, 2007.

Fact 3: Poor people in urban areas pay much more for water.

Inequitable investment and poor maintenance result in unaffordable water. In informal settlements, the poor buy water at a cost many times higher than the price paid by non-poor consumers who have access to piped water. In addition, supply at the water kiosks is unreliable and water shortages are common, at times artificially created by well-connected water vending cartels. As a result, those who can least afford to pay, pay the highest price and persistently have the worst access.

Figure 3: Average amount paid for 1,000 litres from the network and from kiosks



Source of data: Citizen Report Card on urban water, 2007.

According to the CRC research, people in urban areas obtaining their water from a water kiosk pay two to five times more than those who get their water delivered to their homes through the network. Often the situation is much worse: in Nairobi's Kibera neighbourhood, for instance, people pay up to 18 times more per unit compared to what middle and higher income residents pay (see Box 1).

Box 1: Poor Kenyans pay more for water

Mr. Ngarama, a resident of Kibera slums, Nairobi, explains: "I use about 40 containers of 20 litre jerry cans (800 litres) of water in a month for my family of five. We use this water for washing, cooking, and drinking. This costs me anything between Kshs 200 and 400 per month, depending on the season. The water is not sufficient for our needs, but if I want more, I have to spend more. But I do not have money to meet all my family's water needs, as we all depend on my meagre income of Kshs 2,000 for food, rent, and other family needs."

Mr. Yakobo, a resident of Kilimani, a middle-class area barely 2 kilometres from Kibera, lives with his family of three. They consume 9 cubic meters (or 9,000 litres) of water on average per month. They use the water for laundry, cleaning the house, cooking, bathing in a bath-tub, watering plants, and washing the car. The neighbourhood is metered and the Nairobi Water Company bills him at Kshs 12 per cubic meter of water, so, on average, he pays Kshs 108 every month.

Comparing the two residents of Nairobi, the poorer, un-metered Ngarama pays on average Kshs 0.375 per litre of water, about 30 times as much as the wealthier metered Yakobo who pays only Kshs 0.012 per litre.

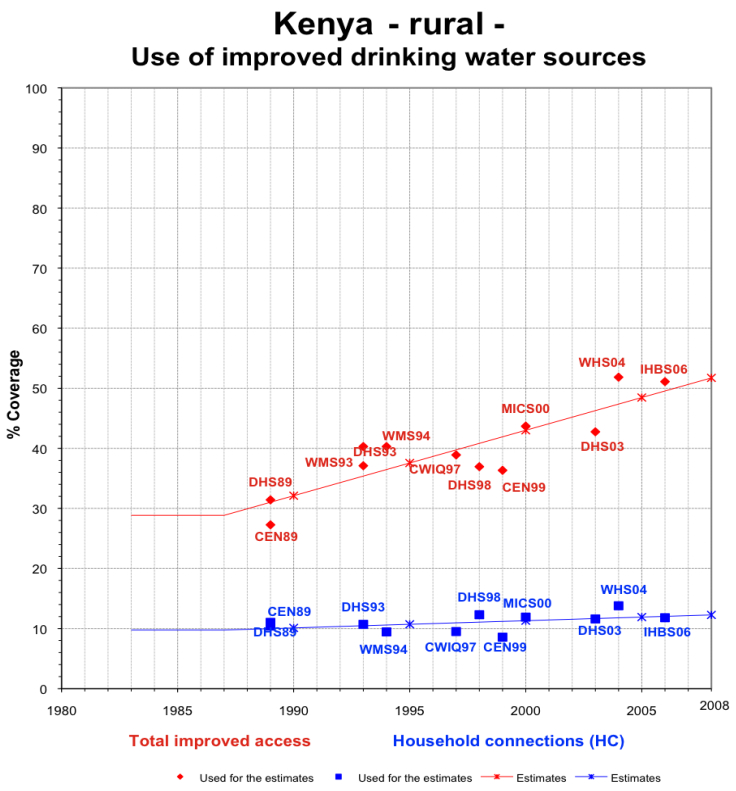
Source: Uwazi staff personal conversations, Nairobi, September 2009.

Fact 4: It will take at least 30 years for rural areas to have acceptable water coverage.

In rural areas, access to improved water sources is low. It has only gradually increased over time at a rate of approximately 1 percentage point per year.

In service agreements used for urban areas, *acceptable coverage* is defined as at least 80% of the population having access to adequate drinking water. *Good coverage* is defined as at least 90% having access. If these criteria are used and applied to the optimistic estimate for access to water in rural areas (Fact 1), it will take another 30 years until acceptable coverage is achieved in rural areas, and another 40 years for good coverage to be reached.

Figure 4: Trends in use of improved drinking water resources in rural areas

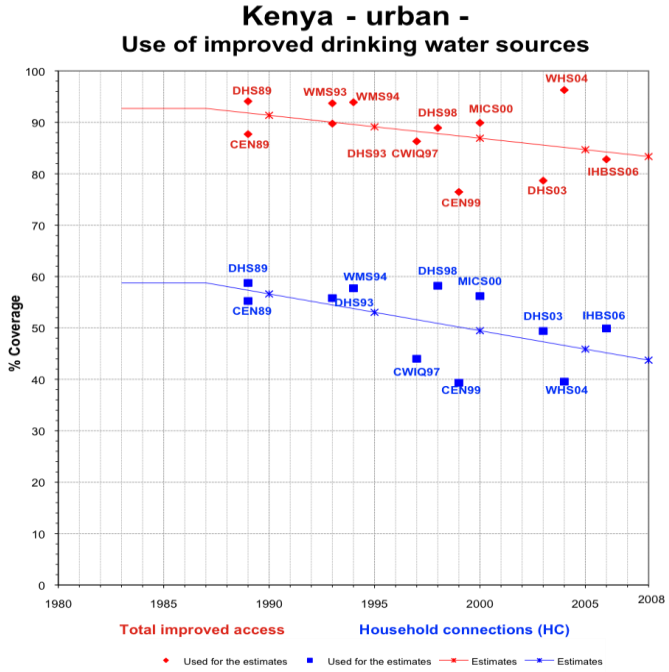


Source: World Bank, 2010.

Fact 5: In urban areas coverage is declining.

In urban areas, the trend is worrying as access to improved water has steadily declined over time. Even though access stands at 84% (the optimistic estimate), it is evident that the trend will need to be reversed. So far, investment in the urban water supply does not reflect a formula that matches the rapid urban population growth. Moreover, high percentatges of inactive connections in urban areas (Nairobi 56%; Kisumu 26%; Mombasa 38%) may mean that urban coverage could be actually lower than officially stated. The situation is further worsened for urban residents as volumes of unnacounted for water – through leakages, illegal connections, and corruption-fed supply disruptions – remain unacceptably high (Nairobi indicating 40%; Kisumu 66%; Mombasa 35%)(CRC 2007).

Figure 5: Trends in use of improved drinking water resources in urban areas



Source: World Bank, 2010.

Fact 6: Service from water providers is inadequate.

Despite statements and policies promising quality service from water service institutions, the level of service to citizens is still wanting. Many households, both poor and non-poor, experience water scarcity even when they are within areas that are well covered through mains connections and water kiosks.

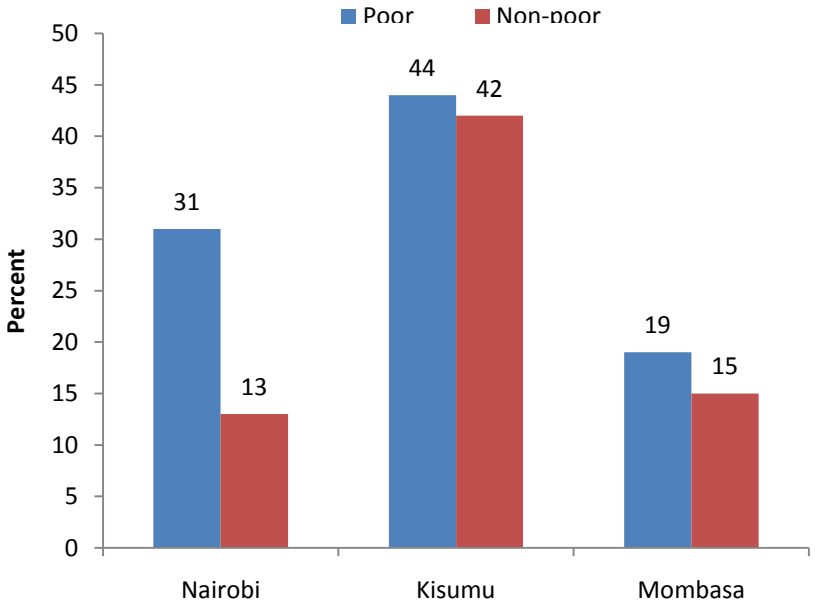
For example, even where water is provided through a piped connection, 13 – 42% of non-poor and 19 – 44% of poor households in urban areas report water scarcity. Scarcity is occasioned by frequent major stoppages that often last more than 24 hours for mains-using households (Figure 6).

To cope with water scarcity, many households incur costs by purchasing and installing storage tanks. Those who cannot afford to do so are forced to survive with the little water available, to use unsafe water, or to pay much higher prices for the little water available.

Inadequate maintenance and corruption are major reasons for water scarcity. Well connected water cartels, with seeming participation from state and water company officials, perpetuate

artificial scarcity to their own benefit. While some water traders are legitimate entrepreneurs, others are officials of water service institutions who draw water from public supply lines and sell it to under-supplied citizens at much higher costs than mains-supplied households. Some of the water classified as "unaccounted" (47% according to the World Bank, 2009) is, in fact, sometimes diverted through these means.

Figure 6: Percent of urban households using mains for drinking water, affected by water scarcity



Source of data: Citizen Report Card on urban water, 2007.

Box 2: Poor debt and revenue collection culture

I moved into this residence four years ago. When signing my lease documents, I also paid the property management agency the requisite application fee for a billing account with the Nairobi Water Company.

After two weeks of settling in, officials from the Nairobi Water Company came for a routine check and they disconnected the water supply to my house. They also left behind a note scribbled on a piece of carton that I owed the NWS Kshs 98,000. They made it clear that they would reconnect the supply only after the bill was cleared.

I told them that I had only stayed two weeks in the house and that there was no way that the bill could have been mine! They left without as much as listening to me. One of them pulled me aside and told me they could reconnect, if I bought them a 'small lunch'. I chose not to bribe and decided to pursue the matter officially through the property agency.

An hour after I spoke with the agency, my supply was restored. The property agent assured me the issue had been sorted and my new account details would be posted soon, within the month. The month passed and nothing came. Then my supply was disconnected again, on the same grounds. I called the agent and the supply was restored. My bill never came.

I decided to follow up the matter with the management of the NWC. This is when I discovered that the billing problem with the house was more than 11 years old. The company had a billing dispute with the landlord ever since the house construction was completed. I was the fourth tenant and none of the previous ones had been assigned an account. So none of them had paid for water used!

The company refused to assign me a new account to start billing my consumption until the old debt was settled. I have tried to explain my willingness to start paying as they sort out the outstanding debt, but the company officials have remained adamant. All this time, they have repeatedly come and disconnected my supply. I usually call the property agent and the problem gets sorted out.

The last time I checked, the bill on the supply to this house had hit Kshs. 224,000. I pity the company for all the losses they are incurring because of an old debt they are unlikely to recover. I am tired with the inconvenience of these disconnections. I am moving to a new house that has no problems.

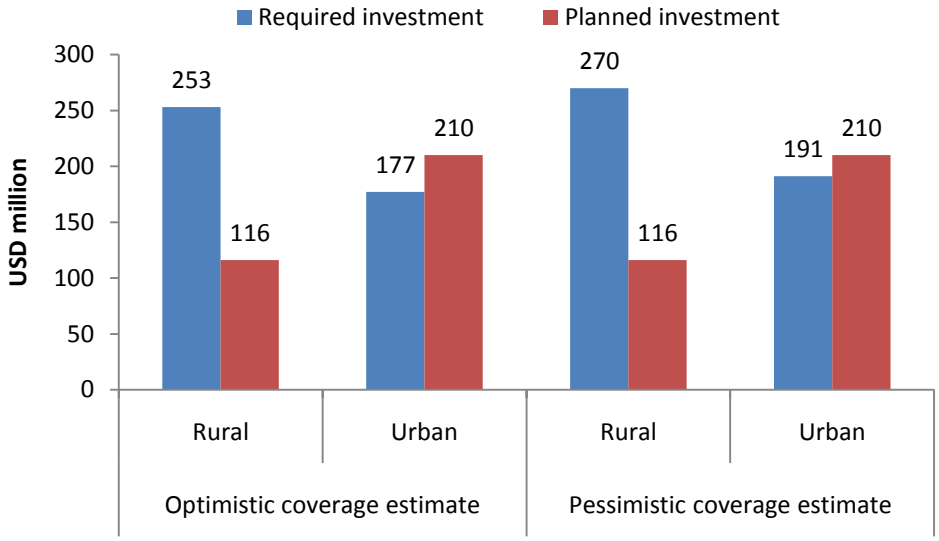
Mulandi, Nairobi resident

Source: Uwazi staff personal conversation, Nairobi, September 2009.

Fact 7: Budgets allocated do not reflect need.

Funding for investments in the water sector is distributed in a way that does not reflect need. According to the World Bank, for instance, the planned investment for water in *rural areas* falls 54-57% short of what is required to achieve the water MDG. In urban areas, on the other hand, the planned investment **exceeds** what is required by 10—19%!

Figure 7: Required versus planned investments in rural and urban water access



Source of data: World Bank, 2010.

The only water budget that takes need into account is funding allocated by the Water Services Trust Fund (WSTF). This Trust Fund was established specifically to increase coverage to poor underserved areas under the Pro-Poor Investment Program (PPIP). It allocates its funds according to three factors: geographical poverty mapping, public consultations, and political priorities (AWSR 2009). Unfortunately this approach leaves ample scope for patronage. In addition, the WSTF receives less than 1% of the Ministry of Water and Irrigation budget for Water Service Institutions (AWSR 2009).

Fact 8: A formula based budget allocation in water is feasible.

In view of the prevalent inequities in access to water, the budget allocations, and the need to speed up investments to reach acceptable coverage levels, it would be a step forward if the increased budgets for investment in water were allocated in an objective and equity enhancing manner. Such could be done by embracing a formula based budget allocation system.

For a long time, formula based budget allocation in water was hindered by lack of data, as illustrated by the confusion about the actual levels of coverage reflected in Fact 1. But, as the

2009 Population Census asked questions about a household's main source of water with 15 response categories, this issue is now largely resolved. It is feasible to establish by constituency, and even at geographic levels below that, the number of users that rely on unsafe sources of water. And these should be the basis for criteria that are key in any water budget allocation formula.

Other criteria to be considered include wealth (or poverty) and the performance of the Water Service Providers. The latter will help avoid past situations in which the corruption ridden National Water Conservation and Pipeline Corporation (NWCPC) received from the Government 99% of its Kshs 4,369.2 million budget at a time when officials implicated in grand corruption were still in office.

Information on wealth/poverty and the performance of Water Service Providers is readily available as well. Poverty maps give a good indication of where most poor households live, while some information about the efficiency of water service providers can be obtained from the Annual Water Sector Review.

3. Conclusion

This report has shown that close to 50 years after independence, water security remains a critical challenge in Kenya. Millions of Kenyans do not have, and at current rates of progress have no hope of having, ready access to safe drinking water in the foreseeable future. Inequitable pricing hurts the poor the most; those who can most easily afford to pay for water spend the least; while those who can ill-afford to pay for water pay dearly in terms of money, time, and health when using water from unsafe sources.

The Government of Kenya is aware of the situation and has, to its credit, increased the budget to be spent on improving access to water. Unfortunately, the criteria on which these allocations are based are subject to political manoeuvring and systemic inequality. Therefore the increased funds are not translating into improving water access for most Kenyans.

One simple action should be implemented as a priority to reduce inequities in access to water:

Adopt a formula based approach to budget allocation.

The key data for such a formula are available from the 2009 population census and the national poverty maps. More sophisticated information, for instance to reflect the efficiency of Water Service Providers and the functionality of public water networks, could also be used. Real, concrete action is possible – the question is whether Kenyans and their Government will act to make the difference.

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