

## Fostering investments in water and sanitation sector: a veritable tool to human health and sustainable development in sub-Saharan Africa

**OWOLABI, Abimbola**

MDP Alumnus, Center for Sustainable Development, University of Ibadan, Nigeria,  
owolabisnr@gmail.com

With population of about 800 million people in 2007, and current growth rate of about 2.3%, the UN predicts for sub-Saharan Africa region a population between 1.5 and 2 billion by 2050 (Wikipedia).

Meanwhile, the crucial role of water in achieving the region's development goals is widely recognized. But with almost all countries lacking the human, economic and institutional capacities to effectively develop and manage their water resources sustainably, the region faces endemic poverty, food insecurity and pervasive underdevelopment, (UNDCWS 2015). For instance, about two-thirds ( 273. 5 million ) of the region rural population and one-quarter ( 45.6 million) of the urban population are without safe drinking water, and even higher numbers lack adequate sanitation (WBG 1996). By the year 2000, approximately 300 million people risk living in a water-scarce environment, and within 30 years, 20 countries in the region may be water-scarce. The greatest impact of this situation is felt by the poor, who often have the most limited access to water resources (WBG 1996). Also, according to Neira, WHO Director, Department of Public Health, Environmental and Social Determinants of Health, “Contaminated drinking-water is the trends in the region and estimated to cause more than 500,000 diarrheal each year and is a major factor in several neglected tropical diseases in the region which include intestinal worms, schistosomiasis, and trachoma.” (WHO Report 2017).

However, access to water supply and sanitation in the region has been steadily improving over the past two decades .For instance, access to improved water supply has increased from 49% in 1990 to 60% in 2008, while access to improved sanitation has risen from 28% to 31%. But it still lags behind all other developing regions as it was unable to meet the Millennium Development Goals of halving the share of the population without access to safe drinking water and sanitation between 1990 and 2015 (WHO Report 2017). The report also stresses that some countries may not meet global aspirations of universal access to safe drinking-water and sanitation unless steps are taken to use financial resources more efficiently and increase efforts to identify new sources of funding. Thus, a large number of countries in the region will still face huge challenges in attempting to achieve the United Nations water-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

Similarly, in the last two decades 70% of investments in water supply and sanitation in Sub-Saharan Africa are financed internally and only 30% are financed externally(2001-2005 average). Most of the internal financing is household self-finance which costs about \$2.1bn and primarily for on-site sanitation such as latrines while the public sector financing was about \$1.2bn and almost as high as external financing which was about US\$1.4bn. The contribution of private commercial financing has been negligible at about \$10 million only Wikipedia. However, in the UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS

2017) report, most countries have increased their budgets for water, sanitation and hygiene at an annual average rate of 4.9 per cent over the last three years. Yet, 80 per cent of countries report that water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) financing is still insufficient to meet nationally-defined targets for WASH services (WBG 2016).

This is because in most cases national coverage targets in their budgets are based on achieving access to basic infrastructure, which may not always provide continuously safe and reliable services. Thus, planned investments have yet to take into account the much more ambitious SDG targets, which aim for universal access to safely managed water and sanitation services by 2030 (WBG 2016).

“This is a challenge that has to be resolved in the region as according to Guy Ryder, Chair of UN-Water and Director-General of the International Labor Organization, “increased investments in water and sanitation can yield substantial benefits for human health and development, generate employment and guarantees that no one is left behind.”

The objective of this paper is to examine the issues and challenges facing the leaders of the countries in sub-Saharan African region in the provision of access to safe drinking water and sanitation for their citizens and unlocking financial opportunities that will increase private and/or public finance in the region water sector to achieve poverty reduction and sustainable development.