

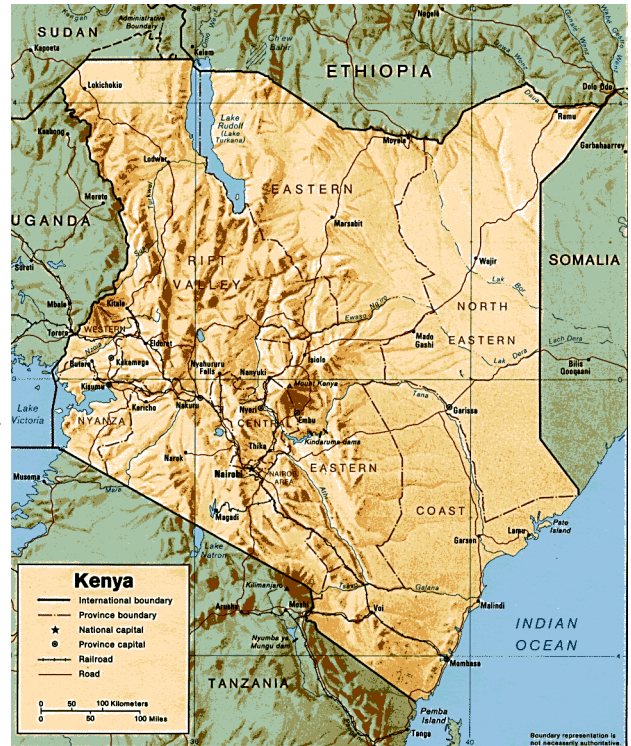
Water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink may be a famous saying, but it is a reality in Kenya. A mention of water in this country more often than not brings to mind the problems facing many Kenyans.

Water in Kenya is a very valuable and often a very rare commodity - this is because though it is very essential to human beings, it is not as equally available to all everywhere as it should be. Clean water, as that in many parts of the world, is even more elusive.

Issues concerning water in Kenya fall under the Ministry of Water Resources but in the recent past, a parastatal known as National Water Conservation and Pipeline Corporation has been mandated to take over matters concerning water resources. Some of its duties include provision of transport and water supply, maintenance equipment, provision of water bills, and the training of both water supply and management staff.

Currently, accessibility to water remains a major problem in rural Kenya and among the country's poor urban dwellers. Statistics show that over 50 percent of the rural population and more than 25 percent of the urban population have no access to clean water, despite the colossal amounts of money that is spent on the sector every year.

A report by the Kenya Association of Manufacturers says that in certain towns, such as the third largest, Nakuru, inadequate water supply has greatly hampered industrial growth and discouraged entrepreneurs from investing in the towns. In fact, Nakuru, which has many major factories, such as EverReady Batteries and the Pyrethrum Board of Kenya is losing business to other neighboring towns which have adequate water within the town precincts.



The task of collecting water from many of the available sources is left to women and girls. Woe unto them if the sources are kilometers away from home, because this could mean no other work is done during the day except fetch water. If the girl is in school, there will be no time for homework.

The water ministry spends about 13 percent of total government expenditure on water projects and activities annually, an amount that is also supplemented by the many NGO's working in the country's water sector. But not much result is seen.

Slum dwellers, in particular, are caught between the growing demand for fresh water on one hand and the high cost of buying water piecemeal on the other. The irony of it all is that families living in poor informal settlements are paying more to acquire water as compared to residents who are connected to the city or towns' council water meters. They also have to walk long distances and spend many person-hours hauling water.

There are many reasons for water shortages or lack of it in various areas in Kenya. They are:

- That water has not been piped to many places (especially the rural areas). Piping of water is often the privilege of financially able people.
- When dirt clogs water supplies, especially during heavy downpours or due to pollution by factories or slaughter houses, this source cannot be used.

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- Disconnection of power to pumping stations due to non-payment of electricity bills. This happens especially to government institutions such as hospitals and schools. It's anyone's guess what transpires at a hospital or prison when there is no water for several days. Small towns are also affected.
- Delay in repairing damaged equipment at key supply areas.
- Vandalism and illegal connection of water supply equipment. Vandals often steal certain equipment such as valves that they can sell elsewhere. Or they cut short the supply of water to areas so that they can sell water from the area they have damaged. Connecting of water illegally also causes a shortage of water to those who are legally connected to water meters. This is done by people who want to make a quick buck.
- Leaking pipes, which lose most of the water flowing to various towns.
- Stalled water projects. Many of these projects are self-help and politically instigated. Many end up being mismanaged or stall (for example, a member of Parliament who started a project may not be re-elected to Parliament).
- Diversion of water from streams to benefit a few is common, especially in rural areas.
- Uncoordinated laws affecting water issues. This, however, might improve with recent completion of an amended draft of the Water Act for perusal by stakeholders. The document should provide links with other laws such as those governing the environment.

There are other peculiar problems affecting the distribution or even the availability of water in Kenya. It is no longer uncommon to see Kenyans carrying a bottle of spring water bought from a supermarket because though they have running water in their taps, it is not clean enough to drink. There have been too many cases of typhoid infection, some fatal due to drinking of untreated water. Many people have started boiling water. Even drinking juice in hotels can cause typhoid if it is not pure juice and was diluted with water. Using ice cubes to cool a soda is also dangerous. There are some areas where the water supply line and the sewerage system run parallel to each other and in such areas, contamination of the clean water happens often exposing its drinkers to various ailments such as diarrhea and dysentery, which could be fatal. Sometimes, when such problems are discovered, the water department may disconnect the water until the problem is resolved.

The situation gets worse, however. A report made about a year ago by the Baltimore-based John Hopkins School of Public Health says that Kenya is among five countries likely to run short of water in the next 25 years. The other four are Nigeria, Ethiopia, India and Peru.

The report titled "Solutions for a Water-Short World" says Kenya's water per capita will halve by 2025 as a result of a doubling in population. It indicates that in 1995, when the population was 27.2 million, the water per capita was 1,112 cubic meters. But by 2025, the report predicts available water per capita will decrease to 602 cubic meters, while the population is expected to have surpassed the 50 million mark.

The report had predicted that by 1999, the annual demand for water in Kenya would have doubled that of 1990.

The study, however, cites as one of the reasons for the water shortage the fact that potential water resources available nationally are abundant but under-exploited. It established that Kenya has a total water potential of some 20.29 billion cubic meters against the projected demands of about 2.3 billion cubic meters in the year 2000 and 3.56 cubic meters in 2010. The potentially available water was determined by cumulating the surface water resources from the perennial river systems and the ground water resources from boreholes and wells.

An expert in the report says that even by 2010, Kenya will be using only 28 percent of her total water potential to meet all her domestic, industrial, agricultural and other needs. "At the national scale we have too much water. The big problem is at the local level as a result of seasonal variations and spatial

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distribution of the resources.”

The report indicates that the greater challenge for the Government is in redistributing the water from the more endowed areas to the deficit-hit zones.

The strategies to achieve this objective include intensification of water conservation activities in order to reduce deficits in the arid and semi-arid zones (popularly known as Asals of the country). The projections of the Water Master Plan of 1992 are yet to be carried out. In the Plan, it is proposed that a watering point for every 25 square kilometers of bushland or grasslands in the Asals be established. This amounts to about 560 boreholes or wells distributed throughout the country. It also proposes the formulation of a consolidated policy for the management of land, water and forests.

The perennial water shortages also can be curbed by the government harvesting water during the rainy season and then releasing it for use during the dry season.

The privatization of water services is among several far-reaching reform measures the government is proposing in a bid to improve local authorities' service delivery and finances. One town, Nyeri, has already successfully implemented it. A private company in which the municipality owned shares was managing that service and revenues have doubled as a result.

In order to arrest the current water crisis among informal settlements in Kenya, Mr. Fredrick Donde, an assistant Director in the Ministry of Water Resources says that the legal status of slums be acknowledged since their non-recognition is one of the major constraints in accessing social amenities. “There is an urgent need to develop a national policy on slums and squatter settlements in order to focus special attention to the unique sectoral and cross-cutting problems prevailing in slums,” he said.