

# Papua New Guinea ranks last for access to clean water

By Carla Kweifio-Okai, The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff on 03.25.16

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Children fetch drinking water at a pump well in Myanmar, Aug 5, 2015. World Water Day is held every year on March 22. It is a day for understanding problems related to water. A group called WaterAid said that Papua New Guinea is the hardest place in the world to get clean water. Photo: AP/Khin Maung Win. BOTTOM: A vendor delivers water to residents in Papua New Guinea. Tom Greenwood/WaterAid

Papua New Guinea has the worst access to clean water in the world. Sixty percent of the South Pacific country's population live without a safe water supply. This figure comes from a report released on World Water Day 2016.



World Water Day is held every March 22. It is an opportunity for the world to focus on water related problems. This year, a report by the charity WaterAid focused on the problem of water access, or how easy it is for people to get safe drinking water.

WaterAid's report ranked countries based on the percentage of households with access to clean water. The five countries ranked lowest for this were Equatorial Guinea (Central Africa), Angola (Southern Africa), Chad (Central Africa), Mozambique (Southeastern Africa) and Papua New Guinea.

Globally, 650 million people live without an "improved" source of drinking water. "Improved" sources of water include protected wells, rainwater or water piped into households. "Unimproved" sources include rivers and ponds.

### **Water Delivery Is The Problem**

WaterAid also ranked countries by the total number of people without access to safe water. India (Southeast Asia), where 75.8 million people have no access to safe water, was ranked last. The next three lowest countries were China (Eastern Asia), Nigeria (Western Africa) and Ethiopia (Eastern Africa).

Henry Northover is the head of policy for WaterAid. He said the global water crisis was not based on a limited supply of water. Instead, he said it was based on not being able to deliver water to people.

"This is not always an issue of scarcity – by and large we are dealing with a distributional crisis. It is fixable with clear and coherent government policies, and with the focused support of international agencies," Northover said.

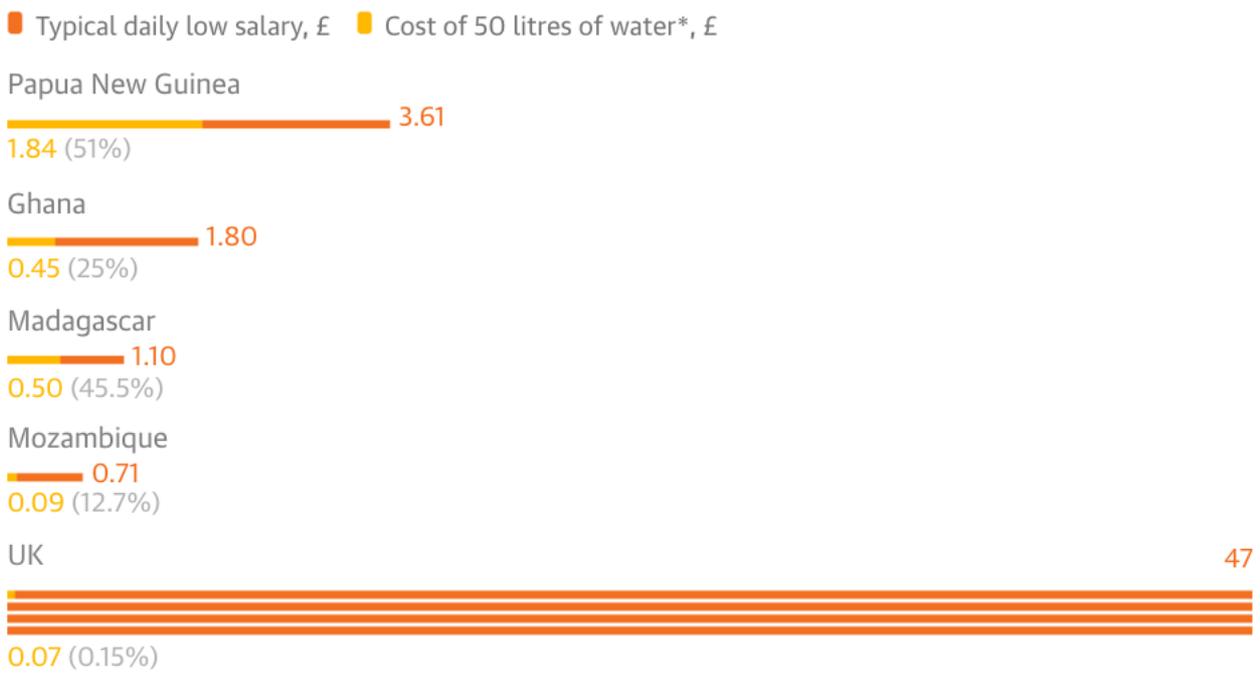
## Poor Often Pay The Most For Water

WaterAid's report also detailed the high costs of water access and why the poorest communities often pay the most for water. When there is no public access to clean water, people are forced to buy their water from other sources. Street merchants, tanker trucks and other informal delivery services sell water in these places. None sell their water cheaply.

Port Moresby is the capital of Papua New Guinea. There, the average cost for 50 litres (13.2 gallons) of water from a delivery service is £1.84 (\$2.61). That is half the daily salary of some workers. In the U.K., which has piped water, the same amount of water costs only £0.07 (\$0.10).

The following chart shows how much of a daily salary is spent on water in four countries. Three are countries without public water access, the other is the U.K.:

### The cost of water



\*The WHO specifies 50 litres per person per day as the recommended 'intermediate' quantity needed to maintain health, hygiene and for all domestic uses. Source: WaterAid

## Billions More People Have Access To Clean Water

Northover made this point even clearer by putting it into words. He said that if you live in a country without public water access, you pay more for water "than if you were living in Manhattan."

WaterAid's report was not all bad news. It also showed that efforts to make clean water more available have worked, with 2.6 billion people gaining access since 1990. Cambodia (Southeast Asia) is the country with the greatest improvement in this area. It is followed by Mali (Western Africa), Laos (Southeast Asia) and Ethiopia (Eastern Africa):

### **Increasing access to safe water**

| Country       | Increase between 2000 and 2015 (percentage points) | Percentage of population with access to safe water in 2015 |
|---------------|--|--|
| Cambodia      | 33.9   | 75.5   |
| Mali          | 30.4   | 77.0   |
| Laos          | 30.2   | 75.7   |
| Ethiopia      | 28.4   | 57.3   |
| Malawi        | 27.7   | 90.2   |
| Guinea-Bissau | 27.2   | 79.3   |
| Afghanistan   | 25.0   | 55.3   |
| Paraguay      | 24.6   | 98.0   |
| Uganda        | 22.6   | 79.0   |
| Burkina Faso  | 22.4   | 82.3   |

Various programs have been credited for this progress. Two of these are corporate and governmental partnerships to distribute water, and reduced prices for communities that buy water.

### **Still More Work To Do**

In 2001, the United Nations set a series of millennium development goals (MDGs) to improve life for those living in poverty. One MDG was to cut in half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water by 2015. This MDG was achieved, but WaterAid's Northover believes there is still more work to do.

"The MDG target was met, but that was largely due to progress made in China and Southeast Asia," Northover noted.

"We know it's still achievable," Northover said of increasing water access for more people. "Many countries have proved it's possible." But rather than celebrating success in one country or one region, he wants "water access to be a global priority."

**Quiz**

- 1 Look at the bars in the graph "The cost of water." Which of the following statements is accurate?
- (A) The longer the yellow bar, the higher the price of water.
  - (B) The shorter the yellow bar, the less water people consume.
  - (C) The shorter the orange bar, the lower the price of water.
  - (D) The longer the orange bar, the more a person's salary is spent on water.
- 2 According to the section "Still More Work To Do," which inference can be made about worldwide access to water?
- (A) Water access has improved equally across the globe.
  - (B) Water access is no longer considered a global issue.
  - (C) Access to clean water is the major global achievement of the 20th century.
  - (D) Access to clean water is still a major problem for some regions of the world.
- 3 Read the excerpt below.

*Sixty percent of the South Pacific country's population live without a safe water supply. This figure comes from a report released on World Water Day 2016.*

Which word would BEST replace "figure" in the second sentence of the excerpt?

- (A) idea
- (B) number
- (C) theory
- (D) conclusion

4 Read the selection below.

*When there is no public access to clean water, people are forced to buy their water from other sources. Street merchants, tanker trucks and other informal delivery services sell water in these places.*

What does the phrase "informal" show about the delivery services in the second sentence?

- (A) They usually cheat people.
- (B) They make a lot of money.
- (C) They are unofficial businesses.
- (D) They provide an important service.