

## Fresh Insights

# When the problem doubles: a call for proactive action

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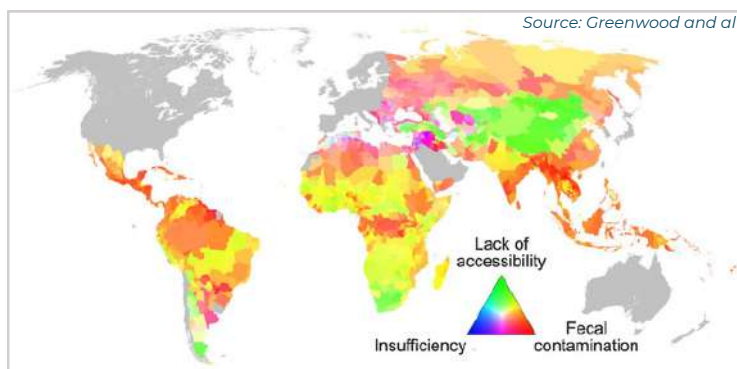
In 2020, it was estimated that over 2 billion people lacked access to safely managed drinking water services. However, new research, shows this number may be far higher. A groundbreaking study by Greenwood and al.\*, published in 2024 by *Science*, using advanced geospatial modeling and water quality tests has found that it is actually 4.4 billion people – more than half of the global population – that lives without reliable access to safe drinking water.

## New insights into an old problem

This updated figure shed light on the significant data gap, especially in low- and middle-income countries, where collecting trustworthy information can be difficult. By combining geospatial data and water quality tests, the study provides a more accurate understanding of the global water crisis.

Thanks to these diverse data sources, researchers were able to supplement existing Joint Monitoring programme (JMP) datasets.

**Key findings show that water quality – especially contamination from fecal matter – is the most significant barrier to access safe drinking water.**



Relative contribution of subcomponents limiting use of Safely Managed Drinking Water Services (SMDWS)

## A turning point for the water sector?

With less than five years left to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 6 - ensuring water and sanitation for all by 2030 - the water sector must confront a critical question: **are our current strategies efficient enough?**

Historically, the focus has been on infrastructure-based solutions, assuming that improved systems, such as piped networks, inherently ensure safety. However, in many developing contexts, these systems often fail to provide water of sufficient quality in a continuous manner, and do not adequately serve rural communities.

The challenge is twofold:

- **Ensuring safety at the point of use:** delivering safe water for the 50–100 liters per person per day needed to meet basic human needs remains a significant hurdle.
- **Adapting solutions to local realities:** many communities rely on multiple water sources, driven by availability and seasonal fluctuations.

**To make meaningful progress, it is high time we rethink these assumptions and focus on targeted investments that prioritize water quality and adaptability to local contexts.**



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## 1001fontaines strategic reflections in 2025

At 1001fontaines\*, we are committed to confronting the magnitude of this crisis with innovative and actionable strategies. **While our services currently reach 1.3 million people in Cambodia, Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Madagascar, we recognize the need to do more.** To maximize our contribution towards SDG 6, we are conducting a strategic reassessment in 2025.

Our approach focuses on delivering WHO-standard safe drinking water through local production and distribution of affordable 20-liter reusable bottled water—a direct response to the sector’s most critical challenge: water quality. Our key priorities moving forward include:

- **Strengthening evidence:** collaborating with academic institutions to validate the sustainability and scalability of our approach; sharing data and insights to inspire sector-wide innovation;
- **Developing a targeted development strategy:** leveraging lessons learned and new data to identify contexts where our model can contribute to improve safe drinking water coverage, and investing in making it happen;
- **Driving systemic change:** updating our vision to align with the magnitude of the problem by unlocking catalytic collaborations with peers, institutions, and governments.

**2025 marks a turning point in our journey. Stay tuned as we roll out innovative strategies, engage with new partners, and drive lasting change to progress toward universal access to safe drinking water.**



## For more information:

**\*Read the full study:** Greenwood, E. E., Lauber, T., van den Hoogen, J., Donmez, A., Bain, R. E. S., Johnston, R., ... Julian, T. R. (2024). Mapping safe drinking water use in low- and middle-income countries. *Science*, 385(6710), 784-790. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.adh9578>

**\*1001fontaines** 1001fontaines is a non-profit organization that has been committed for over 20 years to provide access to safe drinking water for underserved communities worldwide.

Through the set-up of resilient water purification infrastructures and the delivery of reusable 20-liter bottles, it offers affordable, convenient, and sustainable solutions. The 1001fontaines approach is based on strengthening local capacities and ensuring all its in-country partners achieve financial viability.

1001fontaines fosters long-lasting behavior change, resulting in more than one million people benefitting today from these solutions across four countries: Cambodia, Vietnam, Bangladesh, and Madagascar. Comment end

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