

Water Contamination and Realization of Millennium Development Goal (MDG) in Bangladesh: Where are we?

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The 2008 UNICEF-WHO report showed Bangladesh as the only country in Asia, which cannot reach the MDG target for drinking water supply. An estimated 35 to 77 million people of its more than 144 million populations at risk of exposure to drinking arsenic contaminated ground/ tube-well water. The country is over-burdened with poverty, health, water and climate related disasters and other problems. This paper discusses the water quality problems and its mitigation scopes in the arsenic contaminated various hydrological conditions.

Groundwater has been regarded as the safest source of drinking water. More than 90% of its population drinks ground water. Arsenic contamination of groundwater was detected in early 1990s. Drinking of tube-well/ground water was heavily promoted and the water quality problem was not monitored, addressed or communicated among the populations until recently. Availability and quality of surface water has been severely challenged by lack of its proper management at national and international levels. Rainwater is available for a few months. The government and its development partner's developed/promoted various arsenic mitigation technologies for water supply. But most of the technologies showed questionable performance, were not affordable and/or not acceptable. The risks for exposure to microbiological contamination have also increased. The high and increasing salinity concentrations in groundwater and surface water in some areas have hampered the arsenic mitigation options. The situations have been further complicated by the lack of proper recognition of the water quality challenges and its mitigation by the national and international development partners.

Development and promotion of sound science and information based policies and appropriate technologies are urgently recommended for realization of safe drinking water supply and related all the eight MDGs.