

Note: Ban Ki Moon wrong on water MDG

by Stephen Howes and Jonathan Pryke

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Earlier this year the UN Secretary General (SG) reminded us in his preface to this [report](#) of the MDG target for drinking water: “reducing by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water”. And then he proudly announced “that, as of 2010, the target for drinking water has been met.”

Unfortunately, this is wrong or, at best, misleading. As Roger Harrabin explains [here](#), there is no reliable data on safe drinking water. The UN [report](#) [pdf] for which the SG wrote the preface shows that it is in fact the proportion of people without *improved* water supply which has fallen in half. *Improved* and *safe* are very different. As a recent Global Water Forum [post](#) explains, water is often piped but untreated.

The UN report doesn't hide the fact that it is measuring changes in improved rather than safe water. Why it still talks about meeting a safe water target, and gives the SG a misleading preface to sign is a mystery. And water is not the only MDG to be plagued by data problems, as recently argued in [this](#) Devpolicy post, progress towards the health MDGs is also immeasurable.

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