



# Kenya loses almost half of its drinkable water to leaks





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**Lost water could be used to improve access to 42 per cent of Kenyans**



BY BRIAN OKINDA

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enya loses up to 430,000 cubic metres (430 million litres) of water through leaks, burst pipes, theft or meter inaccuracies (so-called non-revenue water) every year.

In monetary terms, this translates to losses of clean water worth Sh12.2 billion, according to research on the country's water resources, conducted by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

"Kenya loses more than 42 per cent of its drinkable water to non-revenue water, compared to Japan whose vigilance sees it lose only three per cent of its water resources through (non-revenue water) waste," says Isaac Kimani from the Ministry of Water and Sanitation.

Non-revenue water is potable (drinkable) water distributed by water service providers, but is lost or wasted before reaching the consumer or intended user, often without notice.

The lost water earns no revenue, thus affecting the sustainability and economic viability of a country's water resources and utilities. According to Mr Kimani, the losses run in excess of Sh700,000 per year from a single seepage.

This goes on as 42 per cent of Kenyans lack access to improved potable water, while 70 per cent still depend on unimproved sanitation solutions.

In countries with proper water management practices, including protecting the water ecosystem, curbing wastage, treating waste water and ensuring quality of drinking water, there is extensive, near-sustainable access to potable water supply and sanitation. Such countries also have some of the lowest levels of non-revenue water.

#### **LOWEST NON-REVENUE WATER**

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In Kenya, Nyeri County has the lowest non-revenue water, with 18 to 22 per cent of its water losses ascribed to leaks, theft or meter inaccuracies, but this is still high.

"It would be ideal if we could reduce the amount of water lost to 20 per cent or less in all counties, since it is difficult to get to zero," notes Masahito Miyagawa, who is in charge of water resources and environment at JICA.

Fewer losses would help the country make use of most of its water resources and facilitate augmentation of existing measures to develop and sustain water resources, such as the protection of water towers.

Losses of 20 per cent or less would bring down cost of water losses to Sh6 billion or less.

As populations grow, demand for water is also growing, but water scarcity, calls for stricter measures to conserve the valuable resource and its sources.

Ecosystem degradation is one of the leading causes of water resource management challenges. In Embu County, for instance, the bulk of water comes from the Mt Kenya Escarpment, which has not been spared by loggers and charcoal dealers.

To make matters worse, water conveyance pipes supplying water to drier neighbours like Tharaka Nithi, are taken over midway by people using the water for irrigation, according to Hamilton Karugendo, the managing director of Embu Water and Sewerage Company (EWASCO).

“Farming is good, but there are people who use devious means, diverting the county’s potable water to irrigate their farms, leaving other farmers and the community at large without water,” says Mr Karugendo.

After the farmers have had their fill, the water flows to waste, since the damaged pipes remain unrepaired. If not noticed on time, water losses are incurred and revenue is lost.

To mitigate the effects of non-revenue water, the county is looking to invest in more water pans and earth dams to collect storm water in the rainy season for domestic use and for irrigation, to lessen the pressure mounted on potable water resources.

“But even as we encourage harvesting of rainwater and storing it in earthen pans, dams and ponds, we should not disregard the value of addressing the challenge posed by non-revenue water,” says Mr Karugendo.

The Kenya Water Institute and JICA have been training water service providers on identifying locations where water losses occur, pinpointing the problem and instigating control measures to minimise non-revenue water.

The training focuses on building capacity and setting up support and reduction frameworks to ensure better access to clean water for health, food security and energy.

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