When you know better, you do better: using data to expand and improve water and sanitation services in low- and middle-income countries

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Abstract:
More than 2.4 billion people lack basic sanitation and 663 million lack a basic water source. Global burden of disease estimates suggest that 842,000 deaths were caused in 2012 by inadequate drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene (WaSH). Because of the importance to human health and development, water and sanitation are reflected in international policy -- most recently the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) released in September 2015. The SDGs call for universal access to water and sanitation and improvements in service levels (such as improving from community-based handpumps to safe, continuous piped water at home). Achieving universal access and improving service levels requires improvements in service delivery which should be continuous, cost-effective, and efficient, while ensuring vulnerable and disadvantaged populations are not left behind. However, there is limited evidence on which approaches work best in low-resource settings. Relevant and reliable data fit-for-purpose can be used to identify improvement opportunities. Effective use of data fit-for-purpose requires the use of standard operational definitions, the use of novel analytical approaches, and a commitment to learning from success and failure. In this seminar, a series of case studies will be presented from ongoing research that addresses SDG-related water and sanitation service delivery challenges and opportunities to achieve data fit-for-purpose in low-resource settings. These studies explore the status of WaSH in health care facilities, determinants of functional rural water supply systems, and compare country performance in realizing universal water and sanitation. Our current research will provide practitioners, finance ministers, policy makers, and external support agencies with evidence to inform investments and programmatic decision-making and can also be used to identify aspects of water and sanitation service delivery in need of targeted improvement.