More than 50% of city populations may occupy unplanned settlements or slums. Few of them enjoy piped water; many rely on expensive water sellers (vendors).

People living in wealthier areas and business districts have piped, often highly-subsidised water. Many people in unplanned settlements and slums may have access to shallow self-supply wells which provide them with convenient, accessible water. However, this water is often contaminated with human and other waste.

There may be an accessible reservoir of groundwater beneath cities, including in the poorer neighbourhoods. Urban authorities and planners should not necessarily close down these water sources, but rather:

- Monitor their water quality in a systematic way
- Promote household water treatment to water users who are exposed to faecal contamination risks
- Water users can and should treat water at home to make it safe.