

# Water: the path to Agenda 2030 implementation



Water is essential for our basic human needs. It plays a critical role in maintaining healthy ecosystems, in the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, and is crucial for economic development. Water must therefore be at the centre of any strategy to achieve Agenda 2030.

All the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs, are linked to water. The 2030 Agenda recognizes that social development and economic prosperity depend on the sustainable management of freshwater resources and ecosystems and it highlights the integrated nature of the SDGs. It is therefore important to consider how water contributes to all the goals. When looking for solutions, one goal cannot be tackled without taking into consideration how the others are affected.

In 2018, the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) performs an analysis of the progress on SDG 6, *Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all*. SDGs 7, 11, 12, 15 and 17 are also being reviewed. In this policy brief, SIWI shares its view on the status of these SDGs from a water perspective and offers policy recommendations to reach the goals in a water wise way.

Among other sources, we draw on the conclusions found in the *SDG 6 Synthesis Report 2018 on Water and Sanitation* and the Open Letter to the HLPF that SIWI initiated with input from partner organisations.

## Recommendations

- Be transparent! Good water governance is key to achieving all SDGs and requires effective and accountable institutions.
- Invest in sanitation and human health to fight poverty. Such investments pay for themselves four times over. The current trend of declining international development support must be reversed.
- Involve disadvantaged groups in decision-making processes. As competition for scarce resources grow fiercer, a human-rights based approach is vital. The ethical implications of the growing water challenges must be discussed, with the role of governance as a central part of the solution.
- Implement resilience and a source-to-sea approaches in both urban and rural planning. Cities can serve as a lab of what countries can do regarding water management.
- Protect essential water-related ecosystems from further deterioration and overexploitation. Water management should systematically address forest and landscape degradation and incorporate appropriate forest management as natural infrastructure.
- Boost sustainable productivity. Today's production and consumption patterns are not sustainable; companies need to search for more water efficient solutions. Agriculture and food value chains must also improve the productivity and nutritional value per unit of water consumed.
- Cooperate! Negotiation and water diplomacy are increasingly important skills, not least for countries that share rivers or other water basins.

## The current state

The following outlines how wise water management can enable the implementation of the SDGs being reviewed at the 2018 HLPE.

### **Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (SDG 6.1 and 6.2)**

Though great strides have been made in recent years, the world is not on track to reach the targets under SDG 6. Globally, 3 in 10 people still don't have access to safe, readily available water at home; 6 in 10 lack safely managed sanitation. 69 countries are not on track for achieving a basic water coverage for all in 2030, and 89 will not reach the sanitation goals.

### **Water Quality and Wastewater, Use and Scarcity, Ecosystems (SDG 6.3, 6.4, 6.6)**

Today, only some 20 per cent of the global population's sewage undergoes some form of treatment before being discharged. Growing populations, soaring demand, unsustainable production and consumption practices, and mounting environmental challenges all combine to exert worsening pressure on the world's water resources and ecosystem services.

**Water Resources Management (SDG 6.5)** | Good water governance is essential to reaching any of the targets under SDG 6. The concept of integrated water resources management (IWRM) is embedded in SDG 6.5 and is increasingly accepted. Even though many countries have now espoused IWRM policies and adopted official legislation on paper, policies are often not put into practice. With growing populations and water demands, international cooperation on IWRM policies will be increasingly important. Nevertheless, most transboundary basins still lack cooperative governance frameworks and institutional mechanisms.

**International Cooperation, Capacity Building and Participation (SDG 6.a and 6.b)** | Strong institutions and governance are key to the achievement of SDG 6 and in line with SDG 16 and 17. It is important to strengthen regulatory functions and increase accountability and transparency in water management. Water scarcity and fiercer competition for resources will hurt already vulnerable groups the most. Inclusion and empowerment are needed to combat rising inequality.

**Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7)** | Since present water and energy systems are highly interdependent, water scarcity and variability are already increasing the vulnerability of energy systems. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that energy and water systems tend to be developed, managed, and regulated independently both on the national and international level. Future water and energy policy and governance will have to address this uncertainty.

**Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11)** | By 2040, it is estimated that nearly 60 per cent of the world's population will be living in cities. Water plays a critical role in enabling resilient urban development. Nearly all the targets in SDG 11 require direct or indirect access to safe, clean and affordable water for humans and ecosystems, and proper treatment and reuse of wastewater.

**Sustainable Consumption and Production (SDG 12)** | Water is a key factor for various global supply chains and the demand from all water-using sectors is projected to increase. Nearly half of the targets in SDG 12 require improved management and governance of water resources and wastewater treatment.



**Life on Land (SDG 15)** | Water and food security can only be achieved if the restoration of multi-functional landscapes and forest management contributing to SDG 15 extend their priorities beyond conventional multi-stakeholder benefits, forest products, biodiversity and carbon storage, and more centrally include water considerations. This is also a precondition for the resilience of the ecosystem services supporting human societies.

**Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17)** | The SDGs can only be reached through partnerships and joint efforts across geographical and societal boundaries. Not least is it important that disadvantaged groups are better represented in decision-making processes. Through the Agenda 2030 process, the UN can provide even greater leadership, guidance and facilitate dialogues between member states and other stakeholders.

## Guiding principles

**Sustainable water governance** is a prerequisite for providing water resources and services for all people, uses and sectors. This will become crucial as demand for water increases. Water must be more highly valued than it is today so that it is used more responsibly and efficiently in all sectors. An important aspect of this is to ensure that decision-making is done in a transparent, accountable and inclusive manner, engaging all stakeholders, water users and consumers.

**Financing** will be a key concern in years to come. Improved, and innovative financial mechanisms will be necessary to help fill funding gaps. The estimated costs for just achieving the 2030 targets for water and sanitation service delivery requires a threefold increase in existing levels of investment. At the same time, relevant international aid commitments have decreased alarmingly. For example, in Sub-Saharan Africa, one of the regions with the greatest needs, aid commitments dropped by more than 50 per cent between 2012 and 2015.

**Resilience** is a cornerstone of good water governance. Societies must be able to cope with current and future stresses on freshwater resources that are exacerbated by climate change. The current trend of overexploitation, water pollution, flow modification, and degradation of habitats due to our development patterns is a threat to many ecosystem services on which we depend. The need to adapt to climate change increases these challenges, calling for resilient infrastructure, planning and governance.

**Source-to-Sea** approaches are important to achieving sustainability in water systems and recognizing the intrinsic link between development activities and their impacts – some of which may occur far downstream. It aims to strengthen coordinated governance of natural resources, acknowledging the continuity of water-related flows – including sediments and pollutants – from land, coasts and seas.

**Leaving no one behind**, as the key guiding principle of the 2030 Agenda, is extremely relevant to water as access to water is very unequally available, accessible and distributed. For example, women and young people continue to bear the burden of the chores for collecting water yet are underrepresented in

water management and suffer most from lacking services. Indigenous groups, people with disabilities and populations in fragile countries are also more likely to lack basic sanitation and access to safe drinking water. As pressure on water resources increases, these inequalities will be of even higher concern.

**Understanding the benefits** of a water-centred approach is key to its implementation. Inadequate access to clean water endangers public health, compromises livelihoods, and limits the potential for economic development. Unsafe water supplies and insufficient sanitation annually cost sub-Saharan African nations over 4 per cent of GDP in health damages and lost economic production.

**Water security and international cooperation** will be increasingly important as a growing world population will have to share a finite and already overexploited resource. With 40 per cent of the world's population living in shared basins, and transboundary rivers supplying approximately 60 per cent of total global river flow, water should play a central role in international cooperation and conflict prevention.

## About SIWI

Stockholm International Water Institute, SIWI, seeks to strengthen water governance for a just, prosperous and sustainable future. Areas of expertise include transboundary water management, Source-to-Sea management and capacity-building for improved water governance in both the public and the private sectors.

Several flagship programmes and partnerships are also hosted by SIWI, including the UNDP-SIWI Water Governance Facility, International Centre for Water Cooperation (ICWC), the Shared Waters Partnership, the Action Platform for Source-to-Sea Management (S2S Platform), and the Alliance for Global Water Adaptation (AGWA).