

WATER, CRUCIAL FOR ACHIEVING SDGs IN REVIEW AT THE UN HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM (HLPF) 2019



POLICY BRIEF

This document summarizes key messages from three regional evaluations developed to support the consideration of water as a key crosscutting issue to achieve the SDGs under review at the 2019 UN HLPF. The objective is to inform intergovernmental discussions by highlighting SDG 6 interlinkages with other SDGs based on regional policy papers in Africa, the Arab region, and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).



SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation provides a unique opportunity to accelerate progress on the 2030 Agenda due to the central role of water in advancing human rights, reducing poverty and inequality, and enabling peace, justice and sustainability. Mainstreaming water in the national and subnational planning of other sectors is critical for increasing policy coherence and effectiveness, for optimizing the use of limited resources available to implement the 2030 Agenda, and for integrating strategies to end poverty.



[SDG 4 + SDG 6] Ensuring inclusive access to education and improving educational outcomes through water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

- Clean water and safe sanitation are critical for children's health and well-being, and therefore their ability to attain quality education.
- Universal and equitable access to WASH infrastructure in schools reduces absenteeism of both educators and students, reduces the transmission of diseases, and favors inclusion and dignity, improving enrollment and educational outcomes.
- Eliminating WASH-related obstacles to attaining and providing education is particularly important for girls and women, and for water-scarce regions. Menstrual Hygiene Management is key to reducing girls' absenteeism and early drop-out, and is crucial to include in school sanitation planning.

SDG 4 directly references SDG 6: "inclusive and equitable quality education cannot be achieved without adequate WASH facilities in schools." Recognizing the importance of WASH for education, indicator 4.A.1 measures the proportion of schools with access to WASH services. In 2016, only 69%, 66%, and 53% of the world's schools had basic drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene services,

respectively. With global population growth and economic development, the demand for education, and hence for adequate WASH in schools, will increase, particularly in Africa and Asia.

Case Study Increasing WASH services in schools may increase enrollment; for example, Egypt increased rural female enrollment by improving school WASH facilities. Also, increasing enrollment may further strain inadequate WASH services in schools. 14 million children were unenrolled in 2016 in LAC, where 16%, 8%, and 20% of school facilities did not have access to basic drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities, respectively.

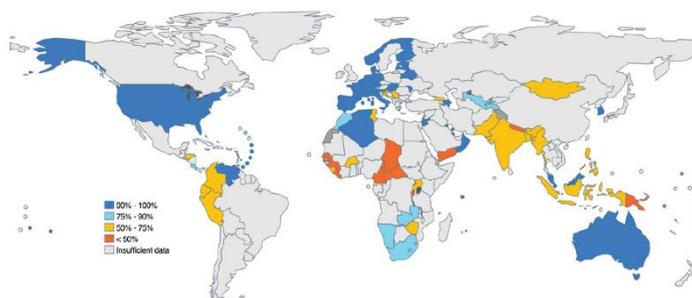


Figure 1: Global coverage of safe drinking water services in schools in 2016 (Source: WHO and UNICEF, 2017)

Policy Recommendations

1. No school should be built or in operation without basic water and sanitation services, including regular maintenance funding as part of its recurrent budget. Services should be sufficient for the needs of all current and projected students, educators and staff. Update building codes accordingly, and require regular building and health inspections and Menstrual Hygiene Management to achieve SDGs 6, 4.5, and 4.A.
2. Require water education as a compulsory subject in school curricula for SDG 4.7.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- Increase data and monitoring on the existence, absence, characteristics, and condition of WASH infrastructure in schools, and identify data gaps in current and projected access and reliability. Remove administrative obstacles and allocate technical and financial capacities to reduce these gaps, especially in Least Developed Countries (LDCs), for vulnerable populations, and for regions with armed conflicts and/or refugee fluxes.
- Support education and research in innovative water resources management and WASH infrastructure.



[SDG 8 + SDG 6] Sustaining inclusive and productive economic growth and employment through water

- Three out of four jobs are water-dependent; reliable water supplies are necessary for sustaining economic growth and job security.
- Agriculture, which employs approximately 30% of the global workforce, accounts for 69% of annual global water withdrawals. Agriculture accounted for 60% of all jobs in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2014 and is the primary employment sector in most LDCs, where millions of small-holder farmers rely on water for irrigation and livestock for their livelihoods.
- The global water demand is projected to increase by 55% by 2050 due to economic and population growth, and the associated changes in industrial, agricultural, and lifestyle demands, despite innovation and adoption of water-efficient technologies. All water uses can pollute water resources and can therefore limit water availability.
- Access to adequate WASH infrastructure in the workplace and in homes is critical for full and productive employment. Increased productivity yields increased income, skills and experience acquisition, and the well-being of employees, further stimulating and sustaining economic growth.

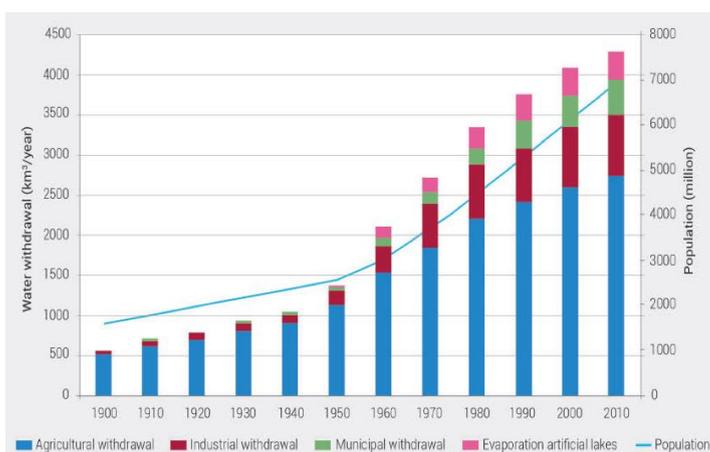


Figure 2: Water withdrawal and global population over time in agriculture, industry and municipalities, 1900-2010 (Source: UN-Water SDG 6 Synthesis Report 2018)

Case Study The loss of productivity due to illnesses caused by lack of sanitation and poor hygiene practices is estimated to cost many countries up to 5% of GDP. In Africa, preventable diseases from poor sanitation and hygiene are the leading cause of occupational deaths (27.8%), while the economic gains in GDP from achieving universal WASH access range from 23% in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to 12% in Madagascar.

Case Study The adequate use of water resources contributes to sustainable economic growth and green jobs, providing an opportunity to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation. Arab states including Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan have set objectives for creating green and water-related jobs known to generate a significant multiplier effect on job creation in other sectors.

Policy Recommendations

1. Ensure adequate WASH access in all workplaces and single-sex WASH services where applicable, bridging SDGs 8.5 and 8.8 with SDG 6.
2. Allocate adequate public and private investment in water resources management and efficient use across all sectors, and include these as priorities in national development plans as pre-requisites for achieving SDG 8. Among other activities, water resources management should include water conservation, contamination limits, improved technologies and sustainable practices.
3. Improve the accessibility, collection and reliability of disaggregated water use and economic-related data for all socioeconomic activities to support policy and decision-making (SDG indicators 8.3.1, 8.5.1, 8.5.2).
4. Foster economic growth and job creation in sectors that do not entail environmental degradation, as outlined in SDGs 8.2, 8.4, and 8.9. For example, areas rich in water resources may benefit from developing sustainable tourism.



[SDG 10 + SDG 6] Reducing inequalities through accelerated and inclusive action on SDG 6

- Generally, marginalized populations incur greater relative costs to access lower quality and less reliable WASH, and are more susceptible to the preventable impacts of pollution and natural disasters.
- Disparities in WASH access persist within and across countries, such as between rural and urban areas. In 2017, 2.2 billion people lacked a safely managed drinking water service. 56% of the global population were without safely managed sanitation services, and nearly three-quarters of the population in LDCs lacked handwashing facilities with soap and water. 673 million people relied on open defecation, most of whom reside in Central and Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

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- Allocating accessible and reliable clean water services reduces the risk of violence incurred during water retrieval, and makes more time available for educational and income-generating activities, especially for women.
- Current investments are insufficient to achieve universal WASH access and to reduce related inequalities, especially in LDCs.

SDG 10 is devoted to reducing inequalities related to income, gender, ethnicity, locality, disability, language, sexual orientation, migration, and other types, within and across countries. These inequalities are evident in the distribution and affordability of WASH access and quality.

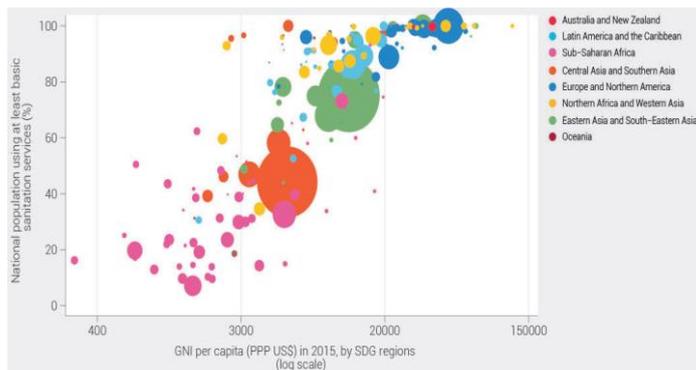


Figure 3: Access to basic sanitation and gross national income (GNI) per capita by Human Development Index (HDI) group; circle size is proportional to population (Source: UN-Water SDG 6 Synthesis Report 2018)

Case Study Globally, rural populations have less access to improved WASH facilities. Angola, which has a relatively high coverage of basic water services compared to other sub-Saharan African countries, has a 40% coverage gap between urban and rural areas and a 65% gap between the richest and poorest. WASH access for indigenous communities in LAC is often inequitable; for example, 33% of indigenous Guatemalans have access to improved sanitation, compared to 70% of non-indigenous Guatemalans.

Policy Recommendations

1. Improve disaggregated data acquisition and reduce spatial and socioeconomic inequities in the provision and quality of WASH services, lowering the disproportionate impact of inadequate WASH services on vulnerable populations, including those affected by conflict, displacement, and migration.
2. Improve water quality, supply systems, and use-efficiency to increase distributable water availability.
3. Engage women, vulnerable populations and other often underrepresented populations in WASH services and water resources decision-making, contributing to SDG 10.2.

4. Identify water resources and WASH access, investment, and governance gaps to target the vulnerable populations; prioritize elimination of these gaps with earmarked policies and funds.



[SDG 13 + SDG 6] Combatting climate change and its impacts through water resources protection and management

- Climate change unevenly changes the distribution of water resources and the frequency of extreme water-related weather events within and across countries, increasing the risk of social and economic instability.
- Nearly two-thirds of the world's population experiences severe water scarcity during at least one month of the year; this number is projected to increase as populations and their demands for water grow, and the effects of climate change intensify. The water stress level is above 70% in at least 22 countries, mostly in Northern Africa and Western, Central, and Southern Asia. By 2025, 32% of Africa's population is estimated to be living in water-stressed countries.
- Climate change's impacts to water availability disproportionately affects employment in certain sectors, such as agriculture. Every Celsius degree of warming is estimated to reduce agricultural productivity by 5%, and reduce land suitable for agriculture, especially in tropical regions with food insecurity. Globally, climate change is estimated to put 45% of GDP and 40% of grain production at risk by 2050.
- By 2050, two billion people may be vulnerable to floods due to rising populations in flood-prone lands, deforestation, loss of wetlands, and rising sea levels.
- Major droughts are found to reduce average per capita GDP growth by 0.5%. Although droughts account for less than 20% of natural disaster occurrences in Africa, they represent more than 95% of the death toll caused by natural disasters therein.

Progress on SDG 6 supports the climate change mitigation and adaptation objectives of SDG 13, while SDG 13 recognizes the effects that climate change has on global water resources. SDG 6.4.1 and 6.4.2 require reducing the number of people suffering from water scarcity by increasing water use efficiency across all sectors and managing freshwater withdrawals. Furthermore, SDG 6.6 demands water-related ecosystem protection and restoration.

Case Study Countries with high water stress, such as those in the Middle East, experience significant refugee fluxes, adding pressure to water demands in areas where existing resources are often poorly managed and overexploited. Given climate change projections, water scarcity in arid and semi-arid regions is estimated to displace up to 700 million people by 2030.

INFORMATION

For more information and to access the complete Regional Policy Papers, visit: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/water/wwap/water-and-agenda-2030/>

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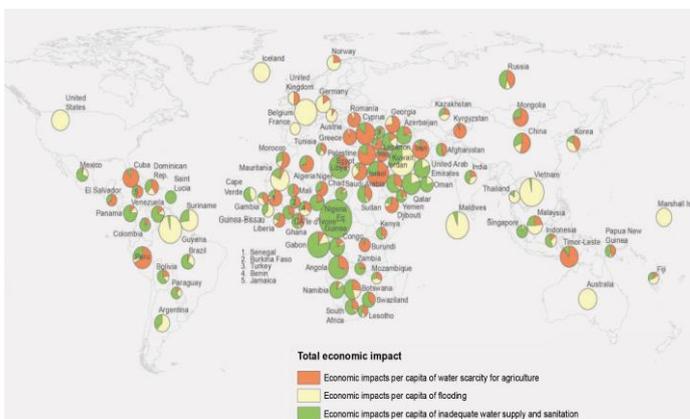


Figure 4: Relative economic impact of water insecurity (Source: UN-Water SDG 6 Synthesis Report 2018)

Policy Recommendations

1. Implement climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, including climate-resilient water infrastructure, water use-efficiency and resources management, infrastructure vulnerability assessments, inclusive emergency response planning, and natural disaster early warning systems.
2. Assess water reserve impacts from climate change and include these impacts and water reserve projections in national climate change mitigation and adaptation plans under SDG 13.2.
3. Reduce preventable costs associated with cleaning water when these resources become contaminated, by reducing contamination and reusing wastewater.



[SDG 16 + SDG 6] Promoting just and peaceful societies and accountable and inclusive institutions with effective water governance

- Effective and inclusive water governance can promote economic and social integration and development, accountable and effective institutional capacities, and participatory processes, reducing the risk of instability.
- Cooperative transboundary water resource management espouses peace. Over 150 countries have territory in one or more transboundary water basins and some resources are distributed across several countries, increasing the complexity of their management. In 2017, only 59% of transboundary basins held cooperation arrangements.
- The implementation of the human rights to water and sanitation contribute to equality, nondiscrimination, peace, justice and inclusive institutions.
- The Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace (GHLPWP) urges the use of water as an instrument of peace and the prevention of water-related conflicts using four instruments: legal foundations, institutions, finance and political support.

Case Study Effective transboundary water management

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for Arab states, such as the Arab Strategy for Water Security and the Disi Aquifer transboundary management agreement between Jordan and Saudi Arabia, are critical for stability in the Arab region, since 67% of the region's water resources cross at least one international border.

Policy Recommendations

1. Reform national and subnational legal and policy frameworks to operationalize the human rights to water and sanitation and to leverage water for peace using GHLPWP recommendations.
2. Increase participation, representativeness, transparency and accountability in water-related decision-making, progressing on SDGs 16.7 and 16.B.
3. Improve intra- and international water governance through SDGs 6.5, 6.A, 6.B and 16.6. Develop and operationalize transboundary water resource management agreements that include knowledge transfer, capacity-building, data monitoring and conservation plans, including through cooperation frameworks such as the Water Convention.
4. Foresee and address changes to water demand and supply caused by population growth, displacement, conflict and climate change.



[SDG 17 + SDG 6] Facilitating SDG 6 achievement through strengthened Means of Implementation (MOIs)

- Financial resources are inadequate to achieve SDG 6. In 2015, more than 80% of countries reported insufficient financing to achieve national WASH targets.
- Global costs to achieve SDG 6 are increasing with aging infrastructure, climate change and increasing population. More efficient use of existing resources and new financing sources are needed.

Case Study SDG 6 provides a platform for multi-stakeholder partnerships due to its interconnectivity with other SDGs. Coordination mechanisms, such as the Pan-African Monitoring and Reporting System and Brazil's National Water Resources Information System, respond directly to SDG 17 by sharing financial and technical resources and data for innovative water projects and strengthened monitoring capacities.

Policy Recommendations

1. Attract and mobilize new and greater domestic and international sources of blended finance and public and private funding for water-related sectors (SDGs 17.1 and 17.3). Optimize the use of funds and identify future financing needs and strategies.
2. Improve the coherence and coordination of water-related policies across different sectors to use resources more efficiently and effectively.

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