
The World Water Council input to the 2019 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

The 2019 meeting of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, will have the theme “*Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality*”. The set of goals to be reviewed in depth will be the following:

- **Goal 4.** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,
- **Goal 8.** Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all,
- **Goal 10.** Reduce inequality within and among countries,
- **Goal 13.** Make urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts,
- **Goal 16.** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels,
- **Goal 17.** Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development,

The following document condenses the inputs and outcomes provided by the 430 organizations leading different Themes, Topics and Sessions of the 8th World Water Forum’s Thematic Process. These contributions showcase the views and guidance of the global water community on aspects related to the SDGs being reviewed by the 2019 HLPF and the 2030 Agenda in general.

The identification of progress, gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges in achieving the SDGs; and, or in relation to the theme within the area under the purview of your intergovernmental body.

SDG 4, 10 and 16. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all; reduce inequality within and among countries; and, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

- In water resource management, soft measures are sometimes as important as hard measures when it comes to sustainability of infrastructure projects. Investments in water infrastructure rarely include a pre-defined percentage for training and education, causing capacity deficit. Inequalities in access to science and technology should be corrected through capacity building.
- Adequate technologies are available for water resources management but often unknown by all actors and end-users. Indeed, integrating these technologies and other social innovations into everyday business presents a challenge for many organizations, especially in developing countries. At the same time, it enables developing countries to leapfrog over the historical development pathways into modernity more quickly. Unfortunately, however, benefits from this technological progress are unequally shared. This gap should be addressed at all levels (global, regional and local).
- While today more space is offered for contributions from different actors, such as local actors, women and youth, their participation in water-related decision-making processes still needs to be improved. Civil society has a key role in empowering individuals and communities.
- Information sharing and open access to knowledge enable integrated approaches for better coordination, communication and planning including transparency and cross-sectoral cooperation.

SDG 13. Make urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

- Climate change impacts water resources first and foremost increasing the intensity and frequency of natural disasters and water-related crises, including unpredictable rainfall and floods, water shortages and drought. This puts progress towards the SDGs at risk. Indeed, water connects sectors – from energy and forests to agriculture and tourism, water has a critical role to play in both mitigation and adaptation.
- Investment in water resource management is investment in climate resilience. However, access to climate finance for projects in the water sector is limited due to the complexity of the institutional and procedural landscape. The global financial system contains plenty of capital seeking investment opportunities, but challenges remain on how to make these funds available and how to scale them up. In order to be bankable, projects need to meet the quality requirements of funding institutions which entails a focus on capacity building for all potential applicants, facilitating access to climate finance also for non-State actors (e.g. cities, private sector, basin organizations).
- Different complimentary approaches exist between green and grey infrastructures, soft and hard solutions, nature-based solutions and classic engineered systems. At present, green measures

are more difficult to quantify against grey measures because of limited data, knowledge and methodologies.

- Miscommunication between the scientific community and decision makers is becoming a growing concern. On one hand decision makers' needs are not well communicated to the research community and on the other scientific findings are not made readily available to policy-makers.
- Finally, the linkage between water and mitigation is often under-recognized, even if it offers valuable opportunities for resource recovery and GHG emission reductions. Governments tend to focus on sectors other than water to reduce GHG emissions but reducing GHG emissions depends deeply on the assumption that there will be a sufficient supply of adequate quality water.

Emerging issues likely to affect inclusiveness and equality at various levels.

- Access to clean water and improved sanitation is key to women's empowerment and poverty alleviation. Indeed, it can change completely their lives, impacting on wider development, allowing girls to go to school, women to find employment, and improves health, dignity and independence.
- The issue of capacity in the water sector is an essential cross-cutting topic. This includes (1) enhancing education, capacity building and awareness raising, (2) reinforcing the science-policy interface, (3) improving monitoring tools, and (4) encouraging effective international cooperation.
- Building capacity is essential at all levels. Enhancing capacities and competencies of local governments and building on traditional knowledge is also crucial to ensure sustainable water and sanitation services. By strengthening water education, it is possible to raise awareness about how to better manage water resources.

An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of "ensuring that no one is left behind" at the global, regional and national levels.

- The MDGs sought to bring water and sanitation access to half of the world's unserved population. While it's generally accepted that the goal on water was reached, the SDGs now aim for total coverage, which in many cases addresses the more difficult situations or those already left behind. Therefore, exponential effort will need to be expended to achieve Goal 7 by 2030. In addition, the MDG target on sanitation was not reached and has direct consequences on public health and mortality, as well as on the environment. This will require even more effort, but the benefits will also be greater.
- Solving water related issues is a primary requirement for other development actions, sharing prosperity and sustainability. At the global level, access to safe water and sanitation is indispensable to everybody, everywhere and all the time. Water, Sanitation, Hygiene, water scarcity, and pollution have become systemic global risks with substantive impacts on people's lives.
- Water plays a critical role for sustainable development. From food and energy security to human and environmental health, water contributes to improvements in social well-being and inclusive growth, affecting the livelihoods of billions. Therefore, providing access to water and

sanitation is essential for guaranteeing well-being and ending poverty. However, even today, many people still lack adequate access to safe water and sanitation facilities. Besides, our current pathway of development puts considerable pressure on water resources – agriculture, energy, industry and cities all affect the quality, availability and accessibility of water. Rapid urbanization is also often accompanied by a worsening social gap: water must be affordable, and its associated services equitably provided. Access to drinking water of adequate quality and quantity along with safe sanitation is a shared responsibility and a human right, a prerequisite for anyone's dignity. The rural poor, women, youth and children, the aged and the disabled are most affected.

- Water governance encompasses the political, institutional and administrative rules, practices, and processes (formal and informal) through which decisions are taken and implemented, stakeholders can articulate their interests and have their concerns considered, and decision-makers are held accountable for water resources management and water service delivery. Water governance is a means to an end that should deliver beneficial outcomes for society, the economy and the environment.

Areas where political guidance by the High-Level Political Forum is required and policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress in empowering people, ensuring inclusiveness and equality, and achieving SDGs.

It is necessary that the high-level political forum addresses the pivotal role water is playing throughout the entire SDGs Agenda and not solely approached through the SDG6. Similarly, the current situation calls for strong recognition of the integrated nature of climate change and water from all levels of decision-making, from local to global.

SDG 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

- Education and training on water are not costs but investments. Education is the real key for large-scale systemic change. International partnerships for closing capacity gaps should be long term and continuous collaborative projects.
- International cooperation and capacity building are key factors to address the water and climate relationship, as well as sharing knowledge on innovative technologies.

SDG 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries.

- Water allocation must be done in a more equitable and inclusive way that can drive social and economic development.
- Address the human right to water for all, with special attention to the invisible realities, prioritizing investments (financing, capacity building, sustainable systems) to benefit the poorest and effectively including local actors and vulnerable groups in the decision-making process.
- Realize the human right to sanitation for all, considering the whole sanitation chain, using building blocks for achieving equitable and inclusive progress.

- Consider Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and public health issues as one, strengthening sectorial integration, improving life quality through actions of education (capacity building at multiple levels), sustainable infrastructural investments, services monitoring and local empowerment.

SDG 13. Make urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

- Enhance the strong synergies that exist between the water-related SDGs and the Paris Agreement as well as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. In order to be able to achieve the targets, investment in water infrastructure and governance (integrity, transparency and accountability) will be crucial. At the same time, an enabling and integrated environment needs to be created from national to sub-national levels. These are key factors to mobilize additional financing tools, including domestic and climate finance.
- Since investment in water resource management is investment in climate resilience, develop bankable projects situated within broader strategic investment pathways that enhance resilience and reduce risks.
- Adaptation measures should include both green and grey infrastructure, including no-regret Nature-Based Solutions.
- Effective mitigation strategies based on water and land management are essential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and respond to water security threats caused by climate change, including green infrastructure, water re-use, and nature-based solutions.
- There must be a better dialogue between policy makers and the scientific community on climate impacts and vulnerability assessments.
- Integrating and harmonizing different governance levels will be key in recognizing and enabling action on the ground. This harmonization exercise will also improve the currently inadequate monitoring of hydroclimatic risks.

SDG 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all level.

- Modern legislation and regulation are essential to enable just and strong water institutions, allowing practitioners to do their work in an effective and responsive manner.
- There is a need for financial support to institutions that are responsible for governance and its implementation, otherwise most of the work will not be done.
- We need to build capacity at different levels, from government to grassroots, to adapt to new situations and new thinking.
- Inclusive collaboration between stakeholders is essential to reach the SDGs.
- Accountability and integrity are key to improving the water sector. This requires significantly increasing investments for building the required capacities of governmental agencies, operators and civil society organizations.
- Water is a key instrument for cooperation and, in the longer term, for peace. Water cooperation and improved transboundary water management helps in reducing and avoiding conflicts