

## **The World Water Council input to the thematic review of the 2021 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)**

Water, present in all forms of life, governs their survival. Its cross-cutting nature is apparent in each of the 17 sustainable development goals of the 2030 Agenda. Without putting water at the center of all efforts and treating water security and sanitation as a global priority this ambitious Agenda, already compromised, will certainly not be achieved before its due.

COVID-19 pandemic has put the planet on hold, triggering unprecedented human, economic and social crisis. This scourge, which has pushed nearly 9% of the world's population into extreme poverty, should nevertheless be seized as an opportunity to rethink our vision of the world in various fields and our way of life.

In the area of water, the pandemic showed that regardless of the level of development achieved by countries, the most effective basic prevention measures against transmission of pathogens, simply but necessarily involved frequent hand washing with soap and water.

It has almost miraculously spared the poorest populations, particularly those in Africa for whom access to water, especially in rural areas, is still an unattainable luxury. We must imagine the consequences if it was not the case. This episode has shown that it can happen, again, at anytime and anywhere widespreading fastly everywhere.

In this regard, political decision-makers, but also those responsible for world finances, must recognize the crucial importance of sufficient and universal access to water to guarantee health or a minimum of security for the most vulnerable.

The global economic downturn caused by COVID-19 is probably inevitable. But even if temporary, it should not lead to a further narrowing of development aid for countries, which are more than ever, in an urgent need for it. The general downward trend in development aid - by 30% between 2017 and 2018 (from 400 billion dollars to 270 billion USD) must be reversed. International, public-private, and other partnerships have an important role to play, but they should not be used as an excuse to abandon or substitute development aid.

Emphasis should also be placed on the need for many developing countries to have reliable and regularly updated data. This allows them to have the most objective picture of their situation, but also to make a rational assessment of the progress made in implementation of various development programs. The mobilization of their own resources together with knowledgeable financial partners is desirable to make sure that the improved knowledge is included, in whatever form, into projects to be financed.

COVID-19 taught us several lessons. The first one that whatever was our level of development, we were taken by surprise. A few whistleblowers, speaking out more strongly since the Ebola episode in 2014, had not been heard. Avian flu, swine flu, Ebola, each time, we had managed to escape. With COVID-19 it became clear that viruses have learned, humans not. But by now we should have learned and understood, or we must learn to anticipate, otherwise we risk of being hit even harder next time. For which one there will be no excuse.

## ➤ SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 2: Zero Hunger

The world's population continues to grow. The Earth is now home to 7.8 billion people (6.1 billion in 2000) and the threshold of 8 billion is likely to be crossed in the first months of 2023. Feeding this population will require a substantial increase in agricultural production.

Today, around the world, 70% of freshwater is used for irrigation in agriculture. In this context of growing population and climate change, the demand for water will increase. What will become of the populations with already barely average water supplies that do not allow them to produce enough to feed themselves, if nothing or not enough is done?

## ➤ SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 3: Good health and well-being

COVID-19 has shown that it can strike anyone. Yet it is estimated that an additional 9 to 12 liters per capita per day are needed for handwashing during COVID-19 pandemic. What happens to those who do not have access to adequate water and sanitation under normal circumstances?

For the record let us also recall, because it is often omitted, that what is internationally and commonly understood under the term of "access to water" is merely basic access to water meaning at least 20 liters per day per person available within one kilometer of walking distance.

In this regard, how can water-related diseases be prevented and/or controlled efficiently when less than half of the world's health facilities are without soap and water? To date, more than 2 billion people still do not have access to an improved drinking water source, more than 4 billion people do not have access to adequate sanitation and 2 billion people do not have access to basic sanitation.

The post COVID-19 resilience must be based on the availability of water in sufficient quantity and quality within the framework of the implementation of water and public health strategies supported by international and national budgets on the one hand but also sufficiently supported, on the other hand, by coherent and targeted development aid and responsible partnerships.

## ➤ SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 13 : Climate action

Water and climate are closely related - "Climate is Water", but "Water is also Climate".

Climate change can make water either scarce or overabundant in often unpredictable manner - models are not yet sufficiently developed at the local level.

The control of the negative effects of climate change will therefore require in any case the management of water-related risks in flood or drought context. Climate funds, currently underfunded given the initial forecasts or promises, have a very important role to play in controlling this water-climate duality.

However, and this is as much the responsibility of the states as that of the financial partners, access to their resources must be increasingly fostered, or even simplified, for the neediest structures and the most deprived in terms of drafting requests, project proposals, and applications for grants. They often lack the human resources and technical capacity to meet the sophisticated requirements of donors.