



TARGETING WATER IN THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

14 March 2014

10.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.
World Meteorological Organization
Room A"Obasi"

BACKGROUND NOTE

The Post-2015 Development Agenda Process

In June 2012, Member States of the United Nations assembled in Rio de Janeiro for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, more commonly known as Rio+20. The goal of the conference was to advance the world's sustainable development agenda through reducing poverty, increasing social equity and protecting the environment. One of the main outcomes of Rio+20, "[The future we want](#)", was a political document that outlined the priorities of the global community for the coming decades with regard to the sustainable development agenda.

Another principal outcome of Rio+20 was the decision by Member States to launch a process to develop a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that will build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These goals will aim to:

- address and incorporate in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development and their interlinkages
- serve as a driver for implementation and mainstreaming of sustainable development
- not divert focus or effort from the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals
- be aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries
- address and be focused on priority areas for the achievement of sustainable development.

The Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals was established in January 2013, by decision 67/555 of the General Assembly, to prepare a proposal on SDGs. From March 2013 to February 2014 the Group conducted a total of eight stocktaking sessions on the various themes identified in the Rio+20 outcome document.

The Open Working Group then started its identification of SDGs and accompanying targets in March 2014 and is expected to complete its work by September 2014. The final phase of the intergovernmental work will take place from September 2014 and will culminate in a Summit in September 2015 for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda. As a basis for the current discussions, the co-chairs of the Open Working Group have submitted to Member States a document with 19 focus areas, including one on water and sanitation.

The Post-2015 Development Agenda and Water

Within the framework of the Post-2015 Development Agenda process, the theme of water has been thoroughly discussed and deliberated upon since Rio+20. These discussions started during the United Nations' World We

Want [Thematic Consultation on Water](#) that ran from November 2012 to March 2013, facilitated under the umbrella of UN-Water. The discussion on water culminated on World Water Day in March 2013 with recognition of the [outcomes](#) of the consultation as well as a full [summary](#) of the consultation.

The Open Working Group held meetings specifically on water in May 2013 during its [third session](#), during which Member States were given the opportunity to express their views on the place of water in the Post-2015 agenda.

[UN-Water](#) is the coordinating mechanism in the United Nations system that facilitates interactions between the 31 different United Nations agencies that address water issues, as well as 34 partners. In February 2014, UN-Water presented "[A Post-2015 Global Goal for Water: Synthesis of key findings and recommendations from UN-Water](#)," prepared on the basis of a broad technical consultation process among UN-Water Members and Partners, as well as a range of other stakeholders. The UN-Water advice proposes a set of potential targets and indicators to support a dedicated global goal for water.

On 18–19 February 2014, the President of the General Assembly held a [Debate on Water, Sanitation and Sustainable Energy in the Post-2015 Development Agenda](#). The objective of the debate was to explore the challenges of these different thematic areas in achieving the MDGs and how they can be addressed in an integrated manner while looking at how means of implementation and different approaches, such as through ecosystems, science/technology, conservation and sustainable use, can be utilized to catalyze action within these areas. The main outcomes of the debate focused on the desirability of dedicated water and energy goals, but also including cross-cutting targets that reflect the nexus between these issues.

A dedicated goal on water, with possible targets on drinking water, sanitation and hygiene; water resources management; and wastewater pollution and water quality seemed to have wide support in the General Assembly President's debate. In addition, many events in 2013 and 2014, such as the Budapest Water Summit held in October 2013, have underlined the importance of water for the Post-2015 Development Agenda and discussed elements of a potential goal on water.

Why is Water Important?

The centrality of water for life is unmistakable. Water is critical for food and energy security, health and economic growth. It is a key pre-condition to development and poverty reduction, underpins sustainable development, adaptation and resilience to climate change and environmental sustainability and ecosystem services. Water has no substitute or replacement, which therefore makes it a limiting factor for ... everything.

Water resources are not simply impacted by other problems such as climate change, energy, food supplies and prices and financial markets. But also, if a water crisis occurs, it immediately precipitates crises in those other areas as well. Water can be a potential solution to bring stability to these other sectors. It is the only medium through which major global crises (food, energy, health, climate change, environmental degradation and economy) can be jointly addressed. Water is a means to almost everything, but not an end in itself.

Many consider that a global water crisis is already emerging. In the twentieth century, water use outpaced population growth by a factor of two. Ultimately, water supply and demand will be dictated by global-scale changes in population and economic development. As noted by the United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, "pressures on freshwater are rising – from the expanding needs of agriculture, food production and energy consumption to pollution and the weaknesses of water management. Climate change is a real and growing threat. Without good planning and adaptation, hundreds of millions of people are at risk of hunger, disease, energy shortages and poverty".¹ Water crises continue to be perceived as the third most important global risk.²

Water is inextricably linked to sustainable development and therefore must be considered with corresponding importance during the development of the future Sustainable Development Goals.

¹ World Water Assessment Programme. 2012. [The United Nations World Water Development Report 4: Managing Water under Uncertainty and Risk](#). Paris, UNESCO.

² World Economic Forum. [Global Risks 2014](#), Ninth Edition.