Federal Ministry
for the Environment, Nature Conservation
and Nuclear Safety

WATER DIALOGUES FOR RESULTS

Accelerating cross-sectoral
SDG 6 implementation | BONN 2021

FROM DIALOGUES TO RESULTS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACCELERATING CROSS-SECTORAL SDG 6 IMPLEMENTATION

Water[1] is a key enabler and solution addressing multiple global challenges from climate change to global health and nutrition, while supporting other sectors to progress. Without water, success is impossible. The water-related Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda are as ambitious as they are vitally important. If we fail to reach them, we are not only endangering the success of many other SDGs and global agendas and missing an UN deadline, but we put our future at risk. We, the global community of UN Member States, multilateral organizations, Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS), and international actors are at a decisive point if we want to successfully reach the water-related Goals and targets and achieve sustainable development by 2030.

From the SDG 6 Synthesis Report 2018 on Water and Sanitation, the UN World Water Development Reports (2015-2021), the World Risk Report of the World Economic Forum, to the Ministerial Declaration of the Eighth World Water Forum 2018, the declaration of the High-Level Political Forum and the statements from various international and regional conferences and bodies: Over the last years, many fora have identified challenges, formulated recommendations and acknowledged the need for action to achieve the water-related Goals and targets. Still, the global community has not achieved decisive progress.

This inadequate level of progress is especially worrying when considering the highly cross-sectoral character of the water Goal - SDG 6. The implications that its (non-)achievement will have for almost all other SDGs, as well as for the global ability to deal with climate change, biodiversity loss and disasters (e.g. Paris Agreement, Sendai Framework), is daunting. Increasing urbanization (e.g. New Urban Agenda), a growing population together with current challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic, migration and increasing loss of ecosystems and biodiversity (e.g. Convention on Biological Diversity, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, Convention to Combat Desertification), underline the urgency for cross-sectoral action. The term SDG 6+ is intended to reflect this cross-sectoral nature, going further than SDG 6 alone by considering all Goals and targets linked to water within the 2030 Agenda and beyond.

The Need for Accelerated Progress

Water and climate change are intractably interlinked: As rising temperatures spur the hydrological cycle, climate change will directly affect all aspects of society, ecosystems and economies, through changing water availability and quality, hydrological variability and extremes such as floods and droughts. We need adaptive solutions for the over four billion people experiencing severe water scarcity for at least one month a year, for the threatened freshwater ecosystems and for urban areas, which are more and more affected by disasters.[2] Approaches to increase urban resilience must be implemented in order to endow cities with sustainable resource management solutions to prevent the occurrence of "Day zeroes"[3]. At the same time, rural areas should not be forgotten: Increasing insecurity of availability of water resources and variable precipitation patterns impact often already pre-

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1   Within the document the terms 'water' and 'water sector' are used interchangeably. Both versions encompass the whole water cycle and all targets of SDG 6 referring to drinking water, sanitation, used water, hygiene and water resources (freshwater and groundwater).

2   UNICEF: Water scarcity. https://www.unicef.org/wash/water-scarcity

3   A shorthand reference for the day when the water level of the major sources supplying the population fall below a critical limit, which will increasingly happen in several regions.

carious living conditions and often results in migration. The potential of freshwater ecosystems (e.g. peatlands for mitigation) has not been widely discussed, nor are the opportunities of nature-based solutions fully exhausted.

Safely managed drinking water and sanitation, enshrined as Human Rights and key for healthy development, are still a distant goal, especially for people living in low-income urban and rural areas and marginalized groups. Services are hampered by insufficient investments, limited or no infrastructure maintenance and a lack of long-term financing concepts. Often, women and children bear the brunt of those missing services. Nearly three-quarter of the population of Least Developed Countries are lacking handwashing facilities with soap and water. Increasing negative implications on health and nutrition security are evident considering the current population and urban growth rates. The ambition of the 2030 Agenda to "leave no one behind" has in many cases not been translated into corresponding policies, budget allocation and action on the ground. A fourfold increase in the current rate of progress is needed.[4]

Since the 1990s, water pollution has worsened in almost all rivers. While in some regions strong laws and regulations led to improvements, still about 80% of domestically and industrially used water[5] runs into inland water bodies and the seas untreated.[6] Water use for food production by agriculture, industrial and excavating industries are major drivers of environmental degradation, including depletion of aquifers, reduction of river flows, degradation of wildlife habitats, and biodiversity.[7] The impact on essential natural ecosystems, which are the key safeguards and important providers of ecosystem services for good quantity and quality of freshwater as well as biodiversity, is devastating. Between 1970 and 2015, the world lost 35% of its wetlands and 85% of its freshwater species diversity.[8] Used water and fecal sludge remain undervalued, neglecting their importance as sources of water, energy, nutrients or other recoverable by-products, e.g. in agriculture.

Freshwater is the backbone of economic and environmental value creation and therefore requires close cooperation within and between basins, along supply chains, as well as within and among sectors and countries. With increasing scarcity, the shared and transboundary management of water resources is becoming indispensable. Circular economy plays an important role in this regard, having positive effects on water quality by balancing economic development and the protection of natural resources.

4   Core Messages UN-Water SDG 6 Status Report 2021

5   In line with the circular economy approach, wastewater can become a source of valuable materials and economic profit if its treatment focuses on the recovery of water, energy and nutrients. In this sense, we should no longer speak of wastewater but 'used water'. This also includes fecal sludge, which is a significant part of the sanitation chain, especially in low-income countries. While it poses a threat to groundwater, it holds high potential for re-use in a circular economy.

6   UNESCO (2017): The United Nations World Water Development Report 2017. Wastewater. The Untapped Resource. Executive Summary. Paris: UNESCO. p.3. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247552

7   WWDR (2021): Valuing Water (p. 68)

8   United Nations Climate Change News (2018): Wetlands Disappearing Three Times Faster than Forests. https://unfccc.int/news/wetlands-disappearing-three-times-faster-than-forests

A Decade and More Action on Water

In 2016 the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a resolution declaring the period of 2018-2028 as the International Decade for Action, "Water for Sustainable Development", 2018-2028 (Water Action Decade). With the Decade the global community wants to accelerate action to achieve internationally agreed water-related Goals and targets, including those of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Considering that the Water Action Decade seeks to improve cooperation, partnership and capacity development, Member States and the UN will need to respond in a coordinated and effective manner in preparation of its Midterm Review in 2023 – taking stock of the progress made, with only seven years to go until 2030.

Preparing for this Midterm Review and answering the call of the UN Secretary-General for transformative economic, social and environmental solutions, UN-Water formulated the "SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework" in 2020. It provides the global community with an in-depth analysis and framework for effective and successful implementation of the water-related Goals and targets at hand. The five accelerators guide the way forward: We need to optimize financing; improve data and information; develop capacity; innovate; and enhance governance. Now, these accelerators need to be filled with action by all actors and together with other sectors.

Recommendations towards the Water Decade Midterm Review 2023

This document builds on the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework and the Water Action Decade. It considers the recommendations and findings of the UN-Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative on SDG 6, the UN-Water SDG 6 Synthesis Report on Water and Sanitation 2018, the World Water Development Reports (WWDR), the UN-Water policy brief on water and climate, the World Water Assessment Program's (WWAP) policy briefs on the interlinkages between SDG 6 and the entire 2030 Agenda, and takes into account the outcomes of the High-Level Panel on Water and the Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace, among others.

The policy messages presented below support the translation of these ambitions into concrete cross-sectoral solutions and action-oriented policies, programming and interventions on the ground. Based on the experiences of countries, the MGoS and other actors over the past years, these messages identify what works in order to deliver fast, yet sustainable results towards the water-related Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda and beyond. The aim is to overcome "business as usual" approaches and silo mentalities and to propose cross-sectoral approaches in line with the commitment of the 2030 Agenda. The messages are meant to be used as a basis for action and initiation of SDG6+ dialogues among different levels of actors from local to global levels and between water and related sectors. The messages are addressed to local entities and service providers, national governments and decision-makers as well as multilateral actors and to the UN system and its various organizations engaged in water management.

We explicitly recognize the importance and critical role of MGoS to be involved as key actors to achieve the water-related Goals and targets and translate the messages below into actions. Governments, multilateral actors and the UN have to create enabling environments, channels and support

structures to involve MGoS. Without their contribution we will not reach the water-related Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.

The messages take the lack of momentous progress in reaching SDG 6 to heart and try to ignite discussions on unconventional and cross-sectoral solutions, to provide transformational input into the preparation process and the deliberations during the Midterm Review of the Water Action Decade in 2023.

Change must happen at all levels and with joint hands if we want to succeed!

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACCELERATING CROSS-SECTORAL SDG 6 IMPLEMENTATION

1.

FINANCING FOR ACCELERATION

A new paradigm: Governments, national and international financial institutions and multilateral actors need to improve targeting and effective use of existing funding, mobilize domestic resources, and attract additional investment from private and public sources.

Water resources as well as safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) are essential services with diverse co-benefits for other sectors, such as e.g. agriculture, health, energy. They create substantial positive impacts on both public health and the environment e.g. as reflected in the "One Health" approach[9], which in turn generate benefits for the economy. For every dollar invested, there is a US$ 5.5 return for improved sanitation and US$ 2.0 for improved drinking water.[10] Yet the investment gap for water and sanitation infrastructure is huge, with US$ 114 billion in capital investment (excluding maintenance) needed annually to close the gap for SDG 6.1.1 and 6.2.1 alone.[11] The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that between 30 and 50% of infrastructure funding is lost to inefficiencies, while estimates in terms of losses due to corruption range from 10 to 30% of expenditure in the water and sanitation sectors[12]. The investment gap, when it comes to sustainable water resource management, cannot even be estimated.

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9   The health of animals, people, plants and the environment are interconnected. One Health is an integrated approach that recognizes this fundamental relationship and ensures that specialists in multiple sectors work together to tackle health threats to animals, humans, plants and the environment. The global impact and response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a human health crisis caused by a virus passed from animals, highlights the need for coordinated action across sectors to protect health and prevent disruption to food systems e.g. https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/one-health; https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/basics/index.html

10   United Nations: Global issues – Water. https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/water

11   World Bank (2015): https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/water/publication/the-costs-of-meeting-the-2030-sustainable-development-goal-targets-on-drinking-water-sanitation-and-hygiene / World Economic Forum (2020): This is what we need to prevent another pandemic. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/11/covid-19-prioritise-access-to-water-and-sanitation/

12   See Well Spent: How Strong Infrastructure Governance Can End Waste in Public Investment, IMF 2020; https://publications.iadb.org/en/beyond-leakages-quantifying-effects-corruption-water-and-sanitation-sector-latin-america-and

The scope and ambition of the 2030 Agenda demands more than traditional public finance and Official Development Assistance (ODA), and requires collective efforts from governments, banks, the private sector, philanthropy and the civil society.

Currently, many grants, national investments or other funding flows are channeled into centralized urban systems or large-scale water resource investments in the form of subsidies, thus generally benefitting population groups who are not most in need. Mobilizing additional private funding will free up ODA budget for last-mile investments and for sectors that are unable to attract private capital. Often, projects fail after only a couple of years, as the necessary resources and corresponding plans for management, maintenance and monitoring are not considered in the project design and budgetary plan.[13] Also, capacities to absorb funds and implement funded projects are insufficient.

Going forward, a financing paradigm shift is needed: Governments, national and international financial institutions and multilateral actors need to improve planning, targeting and the effective use of existing funding, establish sound policies and regulations and strong institutions to support and mobilize domestic actors and resources, improve utility performance and develop bankable projects, and attract additional investment from private and public sources.

Fixing the 'leaking bucket' (water sector) into which we pour 'water' (funds) should be a priority, for example, through better transparency and targeting of subsidies that are equitable and efficient, as well as a focus on impact-generating investments. The vicious circle of build, neglect, rebuild/repair must be replaced by a stronger focus on sector performance and sustainability. The receipt of grant funding and financing should be tied to measurable outcomes. Results-based financing or payments based on performance are innovative instruments to improve (corporate) governance as well as cost-effective service delivery and resource management, ensuring no one is left behind.

Water sector actors can, in cooperation with the national and other levels of government, improve their own funding base, which is mostly based on taxes, tariffs and transfers (3Ts). Mobilizing domestic resources can reduce foreign exchange risks and reduce dependency on foreign aid, which has been decreasing in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the leaks in the 'bucket' caused by a lack of transparency and integrity as well as financial mismanagement need to be closed. The starting point of an effective use of existing finances, including the reduction of inefficiencies and corruption, is building strong and capable institutions with sound procurement and infrastructure development capacity. Additionally, in sectors with well-functioning regulatory and legal frameworks, giving more space to private financiers can bring new investments and support professionalization of management.

Water resources have largely been overlooked in favor of financing WASH, which has, in many instances, led to exorbitantly low payments for water use through inefficient subsidies, especially by the agriculture, energy and mining sectors. These financial resources through charges for water abstraction as well as fines for pollution need to be enforced and reinvested into sustainable water management. Considering the increasing impacts of climate change, the pollution of surface water and diminishing groundwater resources, better regulation and monitoring is needed. This will also

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13   World Bank (2019): https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/water/publication/smarter-subsidies-for-water-supply-and-sanitation

improve eligibility for e.g. existing climate funds. Despite water being a central theme in climate adaptation, the water sector has often failed to account for its impact to increase climate resilience and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In order to attract additional investments from all sources, mutual understanding between finance and water actors must be increased. Grants should be used only where no other funding is feasible, e.g. for last-mile infrastructure, whereas private capital must flow into bankable segments and projects (e.g. through blended finance). ODA remains crucial in complementing domestic resources and can be used to mobilize private investment both nationally and internationally. The transition from subsidies and grants to financing through loans (which must be repaid) is very difficult for the water sector. Most utilities and other water users, such as farmers, as well as river basin organizations, do not have credit ratings, which make shadow credit ratings necessary.

Private companies that depend on water as a resource are increasingly adopting water stewardship approaches, which are another potential source for investments for the water sector and must quickly become the norm. Water security is important to maintain production sites and commercial operations. Companies are investing in water security 'beyond their backyards', not only because of their 'social license to operate', but also to reduce location risks and save costs. A high demand for water risk assessments and standardized risk tools also exists beyond the immediate water sector: Financial institutions, private companies, insurance companies and commercial and non-commercial investors are interested in analyzing water risks in order to better predict payment defaults or production risks from a lack of water security. CFOs and CEOs are more frequently examining which of their assets are particularly exposed to water risks, and which of their investments reduce water security.

In view of the persisting challenges in financing,

The immediate role of local and regional governments, service providers and water management rganizations is to

▶ build and foster innovative finance models and share lessons from climate financing.

▶ strongly focus on maintenance and repair, since adequate and timely maintenance ensures service provision and prevents (much more expensive) new investments, which is especially important in rural areas.

▶ consider lifecycle costing for any new infrastructure investments, to ensure long term-savings and appropriate, multi-use operational assets.

For the mid-term perspective, local and regional governments and their service providers can

▶ embed the necessary transitions in the policies, budgets, institutions and regulatory frameworks of cities and local authorities.

▶ improve institutional and regulatory capacity to make more effective and efficient use of finances as well as including finances coming in from other sectors (e.g. agriculture) e.g. from water abstractions.

The immediate role of national governments is to

▸ improve the enabling environment for investments in sustainable water-related infrastructure and services by guaranteeing that regulatory, institutional and policy arrangements are stable while protecting the public interest and allocate funds to deliver services to the most vulnerable members of society, including those living in informal settlements and remote areas.

▸ consider interdependencies and co-benefits between water and other sectors in investment planning (e.g. to secure energy supply for water infrastructure, securing WASH services for health and education infrastructure, water supply for food production, etc.).

▸ ensure that money follows mandate, with investment and support reaching all government levels and that the sector's project planning is based on a corresponding budgetary plan through intensifying dialogue between line ministries (e.g. the finance ministry, planning ministry).

For the mid-term perspective, national governments can

▸ advocate together with MGoS for the catalytic effect of investments in water in other areas, such as health, education, agriculture and job creation.

▸ create enabling conditions for national financial institutions to promote short- to medium-term investments in last-mile infrastructure. To ensure marginalized communities are not neglected, governments should disburse at least 10- to 15 % of their water sector funding as earmarked grants towards expanding access to under- and unserved population groups (e.g. through national poverty funds or respective budgeting).

▸ improve the institutional, regulatory and accountability frameworks of the sector in close cooperation with neighbouring sectors (e.g. agriculture, environment, energy), for example, by reforming subsidies and adjust tariff structures to reflect costs while maintaining affordability (e.g. through more transparent and better-targeted (cross-)subsidies within the water sector or between sectors).

The immediate role of multilateral actors is to

▶ strengthen institutional capacity in partner countries by promoting transparency, participation and accountability as a means towards improving bankability.

▶ strive to foster private and public investment, support risk-mitigation measures to enable private funding, support new concepts by funding feasibility studies and proof-of-concept measures to increase the number of bankable projects also in countries without credit ratings in the water sector.

▶ ensure that grant funding is targeting rights-holders and vulnerable groups who manage and protect water resources and biodiversity, as well as citizens living in informal settlements.

▶ make greater use of results-based financing mechanisms by linking the disbursement of funds to concrete performance improvements that allow increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the use of funds.

For the mid-term perspective, multilateral actors can

▶ strive towards donor institutions granting developmental loans in partner countries' local currencies and foster the cooperation of well-managed water companies with local banks so that water utilities can benefit from better loan conditions.

▶ offer multilateral funding mechanisms, including those for climate financing, that are more flexible to allow national and sub-national entities to access funds according to their needs, and consider longer funding streams to improve the quality and longevity of ongoing projects over a longer period of time.

▶ support Water Operator Partnerships as an innovative capacity development mechanism that can support sustainable improvements in financial, managerial and operational processes to enhance utilities' creditworthiness, as well as entrepreneurship in the water sector to create funding pipelines.

The immediate role of the UN system is to

▶ incorporate sustainable financing, regulation and maintenance mechanisms into all water-related project interventions, including small-scale water and sanitation infrastructure from emergency to development measures.

For the mid-term perspective, the UN system can

▶ push for more cohesive agenda-setting in terms of financing priorities and corresponding co-benefits.

▶ support global benchmarking of utilities and corresponding incentives on improvements in reaching the poorest and most vulnerable groups, in protecting the planet, and in recognizing the contributions by rights holders (e.g. indigenous peoples) in the safeguarding of water resources.

2.

DATA FOR ACCELERATION

Data-based decision-making: Decision-makers (from household to policy level) need access and to be enabled to employ quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data for analysis, planning and implementation of effective cross-sectoral action in order to leave no one behind.

Through its major impact on the hydrological cycle, climate change has become a game changer for the water sector. It is no longer possible to rely on historical hydrological and weather data as a basis for policymaking, planning and investments. New methods for planning and risk assessment require different data sources and modelling exercises. Comprehensive risk assessments reflecting the impact of climate change on the hydrological cycle as well as impact modelling highly depend on systematic hydrological and water-related data as well as on data from climate models and projections. New processes, capacities and technologies for analysing and using this data as well as data from other sectors need to be established and mainstreamed in order to translate findings into policy, planning and investment.

Water-related data and information are critical to understand the social, economic and environmental demands and to target measures. Gender-disaggregated data, for example, is important to fully understand the different experiences of women and men accessing water, and to then formulate programs and policies tackling related inequalities. High-quality data has the power to achieve change in people's behavior, to spur innovation and to encourage cooperation. Modern technologies and new data sources (e.g. through satellites and blockchain technologies) combined with disaggregated household surveys and census data allow more data access and analysis than ever before. Such augmented access provides many opportunities to eliminate growing inequalities, to increase efficiency and service quality, and to ensure accountability. It plays a crucial role for determining which groups are at greatest risk of being left behind and why.

At the global level, the Integrated Monitoring Initiative on SDG 6 brings together the different UN entities responsible to collect country data. This joint effort enables synergies across UN organizations as well as a harmonization of methodologies and requests for data. It leads to a more efficient outreach, a reduced reporting burden, and offers opportunities for targeted action. At the national level, the initiative promotes intersectoral collaboration and consolidation of existing capacities and data across organizations. The progressive harmonization of indicator definitions and improved comparability among national data sources is a huge success.

However, there is a human factor in digital transformation and data usage, and it is no longer a matter of tools but learning how to use them properly. The existing data gap results from too little technical capacity and too few human and financial resources, that inhibit the potential progress. To foster implementation and use, especially at the local level, data collection and management systems must be fit for purpose so that they meet the needs and capacities of the actors on the ground. Only then data can be used effectively for informed decision-making, as basis for policies, planning or investments. A close and trustworthy cooperation among the relevant stakeholders with clear accountabilities is essential to go beyond data collection and to share the assessed information in a comprehensive format with the relevant actors involved. When producing new knowledge, moni-

toring systems must be needs-oriented, while still aiming at progressive disaggregation. Researchers and practitioners increasingly call for the integration of non-traditional data sources. Here, citizen science presents an innovative and participatory approach to overcome the lack of water data and information by involving members of the general public, most often as part of a collaborative project approach. Professional scientists[14] facilitate to report data from people's daily water reality. Thus, citizen science offers an important complementary tool to address the lack of data and to overcome the reluctance regarding open-source data sets. To seize its added value, it needs to be accompanied by capacity development.

Data generation, validation, standardization and harmonization is equally crucial to estimate virtual water flows and to enable the visualization of associated potential water savings and the consequences of implicit or explicit mechanisms of water allocation. Water is shared and exchanged directly as well as indirectly around the world, through natural hydrologic systems but also through global trade. The scarce resource is a key ingredient of goods and services. However, production and trade patterns are not necessarily water efficient. The concepts of 'virtual water' or the 'water footprint' present a way of evaluating the amount of water needed throughout the whole value chain of a product. They aim at making the cost of water use transparent. With the required data available, they allow to identify water-intensive goods and have the potential to change production patterns, consumer behavior and avoid scarcity through international trade.

The sharing of data and accessibility of information between sectors and among governing entities, also in a transboundary context, is an essential step to increase transparency, to effectively inform decision-making processes and to formulate cross-sectoral policies. Accessibility of information both for sector actors, consumers and the general public, the vulnerable groups and their advocates, in particular, is an important precondition for participation, accountability and targeted interventions by decision- and policymakers. Data also plays a supportive role in achieving good water governance: Data transparency allows to demonstrate accountability, which is a key element to stimulate functioning institutional arrangements. Available data supports the protection of water resources and improves transparency on actions of all stakeholders involved. Data systems generally benefit from the cooperation with the private sector and research institutes. Considering their data as well as citizen data enriches the data set as long as it is not abused to bias government decisions. Therefore, mechanisms need to be in place ensuring accuracy of data (e.g. through open data or transparency portals, through external reviews and audits).

14   Oxford English Dictionary (2016): 'citizen science'

In view of the persisting challenges in the collection, analysis and use of data,

The immediate role of local and regional governments, service providers and water management organizations is to

▶ introduce fit-for-purpose water monitoring systems according to local needs and capacities, and make data on planning, budget and performance publicly available.

▶ include citizens as local actors for complementing data generation e.g. on water quality.

▶ improve the local framework conditions (e.g. budgets, capacity, infrastructure) and partnerships with (citizen) science and the private sector to better use digital solutions (e.g. including satellite technology, innovative sensors, global databases, advanced modelling approaches and forecasts), and to support transparency as well as evidence-based decisions.

For the mid-term perspective, local and regional governments and their service providers can

▶ consistently collect, organize, aggregate (to appropriate scale and detail), use and share data with appropriate departments (horizontally and vertically) or sectors and the public to support integrated decision-making (e.g. by introducing a monitoring task force).

▶ Collect water data disaggregated by sex, age, and other relevant dimensions (e.g. cultural and religious context, household size and location) to better understand how water is used, managed and distributed, in order to identify and understand patterns of gender and inclusion, and to adequately address these patterns in planning, projects and policy.

The immediate role of national governments is to

▶ invest in institutions that are able to collect qualitative, accessible, timely and reliable (gender-) disaggregated data as the basis for a decision support system for water management and WASH services in close cooperation with relevant institutions (e.g. statistic offices) to inform and develop effective policies that ensure no one is left behind.

▶ set-up fit for purpose sector performance monitoring system in order to provide accessible data and support to the stakeholders, especially for local institutions, operators and users within and outside the water sector.

▶ develop incentives to foster engagement and collaboration with research institutes, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to drive innovative and cost-efficient data collection (e.g. through citizen science) as well as analytical approaches and collaboration on new technical systems.

▶ communicate the link between global and local data and include water sector organizations in the development of monitoring systems and corresponding indicators to improve the understanding for global and cross-sectoral approaches and the willingness to support data collection.

For the mid-term perspective national governments can

▶ develop cross-sectoral, integrated monitoring systems linking different sectors at the national level towards the ambition of the 2030 Agenda and feeding data into transboundary and regional monitoring systems.

▶ strengthen horizontal coordination between departments on available data and indicators including due diligence procedures that consider the impact on water in course of policy development at level of other sectors.

▶ align data systems to meet needs of policymaking, planning and investments under rising uncertainties and unknowns resulting from the climate change.

The immediate role of multilateral actors is to

▶ actively support national governments in development and strengthening of country level disaggregated data collection and analysis, as well as respective management systems for monitoring and reporting that are adapted to local needs and resources and support the application of innovative technologies.

▶ ensure data collection, monitoring and evaluation measures as an integral part of financial and technical cooperation programs by by including earmarked funds for data and monitoring in all project and program budgets (e.g. to involve citizen science projects in data generation).

▶ prevent the development of a parallel system of nationally and globally collected data to avoid unnecessary burden on local and national entities in data collection, analysis and reporting.

1 Climate Disclosure Standards Board (forthcoming 2021): https://www.cdsb.net/what-we-do/nature-related-financial-disclosures/water-related-disclosures

For the mid-term perspective, multilateral actors can

▶ encourage and support governments, municipalities as well as the private sector to map their dependencies on water and their water usage to better understand their water-related needs and vulnerabilities as well as their potential for water reuse.

▶ work with the private sector towards a full data disclosure (in line with the CDSB Framework Guidance1), emphasizing uncertain and unknown impacts of climate change.

▶ provide standards for data and support data system integration.

The immediate role of the UN system is to

▶ support on the ground SDG 6+ monitoring through improved staffing and resource allocation to the UN-Water help desk and the Regional Coordinators allowing to advance integrated data collection and analysis, as well as discussion and assessment of its impact on cross-sectoral policy development.

▶ further strengthen the UN-Water data hub to allow for integrated cross-sectoral data collection, discussion and impact on policy development.

▶ feed back data to national entities which has been collected for global SDG 6 monitoring, and support Member States in applying digital tools for collection and analysis of these data as basis for national policymaking.

For the mid-term perspective, the UN system can

▶ combine its SDG6+ relevant data resources, integrate the respective databases of different UN entities (e.g. WMO, UNESCO, UNFCCC, UN-Water SDG 6 Monitoring Initiative) and make these data as well as the corresponding tools available to multiple stakeholders.

▶ define a global data sharing principle (advocated by WDR) for the 2023 Midterm Review to create trust in data and promote data sharing protocols in transboundary agreements.

▶ establish linkages between good governance programs and water sector performance in order to actively tackle governance and corruption issues.

3.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR ACCELERATION

An inclusive approach: Capacity development needs to holistically transfer knowledge beyond training to foster cross-sectoral decision-making, planning and implementation, intensifying horizontal and vertical cooperation on all levels.
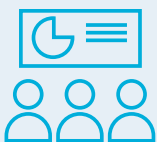
The ambitions for accelerated implementation to achieve the water-related Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda and other agendas, ranging from climate to biodiversity, are often high. Repeatedly, these ambitions are not reflected in the level of capacity for planning and implementation nor in the corresponding efforts to boost these capacities.

The content and approach towards capacity development[15] needs to consider the nature of the cross-sectoral ambition of the 2030 Agenda and its links to other global agendas. In consequence, the capacities of national and local institutions need to be strengthened for enabling a cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder cooperation, coherent policymaking, the establishment and enforcement of legal frameworks and regulations, strategic development, investment planning and implementation.

The need to consider interlinkages with and co-benefits of other sectors (e.g. energy, agriculture) in policymaking, planning and investments is not restricted to better quantitative and qualitative data. It comprises knowledge to understand and capacity to address increasingly complex interdependencies, from local to global level and cross-sectoral. While policies are often in place, implementation is lagging and often hampered by sectoral boundaries and institutional mandates. Supervisory bodies need to be strengthened and cooperation intensified (e.g. between water, environment, health, agriculture) in order to be capable to effectively promote, enforce and monitor regulations on WASH services as well as on the protection and use of water resources. Progress is hindered by weak capacities at individual, institutional and sector level, and hampered by lacking incentive of the national and international systems fostering the usage of co-benefits between sectors and countries. Self-initiated efforts of the countries are the backbone for any progress supported by external parties, such as international and multilateral actors.

The approach to capacity development must reflect and adapt to the rising complexities. The opportunities offered by modern technology must be seized. For a long time, capacity development has focused on individuals and organizations within one sector; largely through trainings and organizational development advisory, sometimes in short timeframes and linked to specific project cycles. Such capacity development measures have seldom been sustainable or conceptualized as a contribution to uplift the sector or society as a whole. In result, the sector has got to face the reputation of being old and ageing, slow-moving, male dominated, not innovative and therewith unattractive. In the public sector, in particular, financial resources for hiring and retaining staff are still lacking, im-

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15 Within the scope of this paper "capacity development" refers to a holistic understanding of system wide capacity development including individuals, institutions, sectors, and countries. It also takes account of the increasing need for cross-sectoral capacity development and the specific needs of transboundary water management. The understanding goes beyond traditional training measures and considers on-the-job training, peer-to-peer learning, peer exchange and the opportunities offered by modern technologies and progressing digitalization.
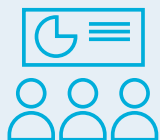
age problems and stigma continue to exist (e.g. regarding sanitation- and reuse-related jobs). Attracting and keeping qualified staff in rural areas is even more difficult[16].

A better link of capacity development measures to sector and/or national targets and respective capacity needs would be ideal and decrease the dependency of countries on external and often unsustainable knowledge import. Cross-sectoral learning is needed to tackle emerging and future challenges: The water community needs to be capable to develop master as well as business plans and design bankable investment projects that are understood and implementable by the finance sector. Vice versa, the finance sector must learn about the potentials of the water sector and start "talking water". A clear communication of climate-related needs (e.g. in terms of data background and arguments, why water can and must contribute to the adaptation and mitigation) by the water sector can facilitate such collaborative learning. A further example is the close cooperation with the environment sector, whose success largely depends on good water quantity and quality, that allows improving the joint development and implementation of ecosystem-based projects. Water resources, drinking water and sanitation are key elements of urban planning for livable cities, and call for strengthened capacities for an integrated proper long-term planning. Management and reuse of fecal sludge and used water in agriculture, sustainable usage of solar pumping for drinking water and irrigation, or crop decisions in water scarce regions demonstrate that the Nexus approach on water, energy and food security cannot be implemented from the water side alone. The knowledge and capacities to consider and address these interlinkages must be developed across sectors and at all levels. Conflict-sensitive moderation and mediation skills help preventing, managing or resolving water-related disputes, and should form integral part of capacity development programs.

At the individual level, traditional training methods need to be complemented by action- and practice-oriented learning, highlighting the importance of on-the-job training measures. Emphasis must be given on gender-sensitive peer-to-peer learning, e.g. as part of operator partnerships, as well as on peer exchange between sectors that can result in Communities of Practices fostering collaborative learning. Capacity development measures must ensure the inclusion of young people, women, and indigenous people as key actors at all levels. If the Covid-19 pandemic has had a positive impact, it showed the potentials of digitalization and modern technology for capacity development. Through e.g. webinars, online tutorials and virtual learning events, more and more people have access to knowledge and skills development. Experience and good practices can more easily be shared, replicated and scaled-up.

At the level of local governments, comprehensive and feasible capacity development plans need to be put in place. They shall reflect cross-sectoral approaches and take into consideration future challenges and emerging needs, whenever possible. Capacity development needs to be budgeted and prioritized in funding decisions. Partnerships and networks, e.g. of cities, municipalities and water utilities), can support collaborative capacity development and foster cross-sectoral collaboration.

At a sector level, capacity development needs to become an integral part of any investment plan. Capacity development is required at the technical, managerial, legal and political level to plan, design, implement and, thus, absorb investment. The same applies for effective and appropriate operation of

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16   Compare World Water Development Report 2016
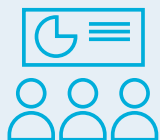
fecal sludge and used water management systems and the enforcement of respective policies, considering cross-sectoral synergies and trade-offs. Strong systems of technical, vocational, secondary and tertiary education are needed in all water-related disciplines, to make sure that the water sector can recruit, develop and retain the required staff. A clear link between sector needs and educational and training curricula needs must be established on a regular basis. Also, horizontal cooperation within the sector and with other sectors towards the achievement of the entire SDG agenda (e.g. linking WASH to food security, gender equality, poverty, health) is needed and offers synergies and efficiency gains.

In view of the persisting challenges in developing capacities,

The immediate role of local and regional governments, service providers water management organizations is to

▸ use new approaches to improve managerial and technical capacities through gender-sensitive peer-to peer learning, on-the job training and partnerships (e.g. between cities, operators and basin organizations on local, regional, national and international levels) and new digital learning measures to provide capacities to where they are needed.

▸ strengthen and institutionalize capacities at the level of local governments, service providers, user associations as well as local and regional water authorities in the areas of service delivery, water management, protecting and restoring water resources and water-related ecosystems, merging indigenous and traditional knowledge with modern technologies.

▸ increase awareness on water issues among the general public and use civil society organisations as partners to improve capacities (e.g. for monitoring in isolated or rural areas) and advocacy.

For the mid-term perspective, local and regional governments and their service providers can

▸ extend use of partnership models to the cross-sectoral level (e.g. between water, energy and agriculture) to improve capacities for integrated policy-making and its enforcement through peer exchange and Communities of Practices.

The immediate role of national governments is to

- strengthen the capacities of national and local institutions for cross-sectoral cooperation in policy-making, the establishment and enforcement of legal frameworks and regulations, strategic development, investment planning and implementation with a particular focus on meeting the needs of vulnerable groups, including those living in informal settlements.

- engage with the relevant educational institutions (schools, universities, vocational training centres), academia and research, knowledge bearers and sector actors (e.g. within a water sector capacity summit) to define the capacity needs of the water sector, and to translate them into curricula, action- and practice-oriented training programs and financial capacity development measures.

- strengthen institutional capacity to improve the management of freshwater ecosystems and groundwater, considering system linkages from source to sea and to other sectors to reduce the risks of over-abstraction and pollution (e.g. through agriculture, energy).

For the mid-term perspective national governments can

- transform the labour market according to water sector requirements, ensure the availability of professionals through establishment, expansion and equipping of appropriate educational institutions, emphasizing on-the-job training to ensure attractiveness of the water sector for (potential) staff.

The immediate role of multilateral actors is to

- strengthen and promote knowledge transfer to foster the transition towards gender-sensitive integrated water management, including groundwater and green water, with a special emphasis on alternative water sources e.g. through harvesting, recycling, reusing and recovering water and other resources from used water and fecal sludge.

- intensify knowledge transfer on sustainable and affordable WASH approaches and technologies to low-income urban and rural communities.

- promote the establishment of and/or accession to intergovernmental agreements for transboundary water management while ensuring the development of required capacities and availability of funding sources for their implementation.

For the mid-term perspective, multilateral actors can

- support and promote an integrated approach which considers linkages between different SDGs and global agendas to overcome silo implementation, single-sector funding channels and assistance.

- support scaling-up of Water Operators' Partnerships, especially South-South as well as North-South, and explore the extension of the partnership model to water resource management and cross-sectoral approaches (e.g. with agriculture).

The immediate role of the UN system is to

▶ compile, analyze and recommend good practices to foster the sharing of knowledge and experiences and provide guidance for scaling-up of proven concepts and methods, including cross-sectoral approaches.

▶ enable the Regional Coordinator System to support capacity development in national water sectors, facilitate cross-sectoral approaches, corresponding regional exchanges and translate global terms, agendas and indicators into the context of the national sector actors.

▶ develop applicable standards for capacity development to support Member States in building integrated, evidence-based, human rights-based, inclusive and well-funded national strategies and plans to achieve sustainable development that ensures no one is left behind.

For the mid-term perspective, the UN system can

▶ increase the capacity of UN-Water to act as a global service desks to improve national and local capacities to collect, analyze and monitor progress data for the water-related targets of the 2030 Agenda on a large scale.

4.

INNOVATION FOR ACCELERATION

A transformative pathway: Decision-makers need to combine traditional knowledge with modern technology and innovative methods by involving multiple stakeholders to increase efficiency of water use and ensure sustainable freshwater supplies, especially in water-stressed and transboundary regions.

Water-related challenges are numerous and divers. They range from ensuring water and sanitation services to sustainable and climate resilient water resources management. 'To do more with less' applies for water use and financing, in terms of increasing efficiency. Global challenges, as reflected in the 2030 Agenda, demonstrate that a transformative change is needed for taking innovation to scale. The framing of innovation must go beyond research and development, foster national systems for innovation and involve civil society as well as water users.[17] Thus, water innovation must comprise integrated research, technology, governance, multi-stakeholder processes and learning along value changes to offer technical and financial solutions, new governance and business models to accelerate the implementation of SDG 6.

Sustainable and innovative finance schemes have not yet reached the scale to shift towards a more transformative pathway. This is closely related to an urgently needed innovative governance agenda, which ensures that budget, procurement and regulatory tools are used strategically, and policies and programs are designed, coordinated and implemented in a forward-looking manner. With the growing complexity of cross-sectoral and technical solutions and developments, innovation is also needed in education to keep pace with these new requirements. The interaction between people and water (socio-hydrology) is constantly changing, due to continuous water abstraction, the construction of dams and reservoirs, but also hydrological extremes or modified water regimes. Socio-hydrological interactions seek to close the gap in understanding between the research community, policymakers, the civil society and water users. They play an important role to take innovation to scale. An enabling environment at national level for innovation fostered by the international water community may create stimuli on governance and social cohesion. Hereby, the cultural value, and, thus, context of water must be considered.

This cultural context and knowhow has been under-estimated over years: Traditional and indigenous peoples' knowledge, accumulated, tested and applied over generations (e.g. related to water quality, allocation and use), must receive more recognition. It is a complementary capacity that offers meaningful contributions to improved water management at technical but also at governance level. Merging modern technology and approaches with traditional knowledge has several benefits (e.g. safeguarding indigenous peoples' knowledge, contextualization of technologies).

Focusing on water conservation and preserving the functions of ecosystems, traditional and indigenous peoples' knowledge can reduce pressures by limiting pollution, soil erosion and water demand through restoring the hydrological and ecological functioning of soils. As the environment is the source of all water, this interlinkage must be more prominently recognized and accounted for. Na-

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17 Compare https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327357703_Three_frames_for_innovation_policy_RD_systems_of_innovation_and_transformative_change

ture-based solutions are valuable water management instruments with a huge potential to improve the availability and quality of water as well as the water use efficiency and providing some answers to the climate change induced uncertainties. Water demand in agricultural production worldwide could reduce by about 20% if greener water management practices were used. In addition to such efficiency increases, nature-based solutions enable the recharge of aquifers or reallocation of saved water for domestic consumption, and, thus, show great potential in urban areas. Moreover, nature-based solutions rarely have negative transboundary impacts but rather numerous co-benefits for the entire basin and riparian countries (e.g. flood mitigation, the protection of biodiversity). They also contribute to respond to the impacts of climate change on water resources. This illustrates the importance of protecting and restoring water-related ecosystems with all their vital functions and demonstrates the need for greater recognition in politics and society. Mainstream grey infrastructure systems will continue to play an important role in ensuring WASH and water resources management related services. Experience shows that integrating green infrastructure and nature-based solutions brings numerous opportunities and benefits, boosting resilience, generating positive environmental impacts and even lowering costs.

As climate change impacts primarily manifest as changes to the hydrological cycle and ecosystems, and considering water does not follow national borders, building resilience through better water management is key, and transboundary cooperation more crucial every day. Diversifying the sources of water is one option to increase resilience to water scarcity. The sustainable provision of alternative water sources and storage methods, e.g. through used water treatment, rainwater harvesting, managed aquifer recharge and nature-based solutions, is critical and should increasingly be considered. Especially used water is still an undervalued resource, but can be an important source of water, nutrients or other recoverable by-products to be used, e.g. in agriculture. Used water also has the potential to be a source of renewable energy generated on-site, which together with improved energy efficiency and low carbon treatment technologies can be used to help operate treatment plants and water infrastructure in a carbon-neutral way. Desalination is another alternative to generate water from brackish or seawater to increase resilience against increasing variability of rainfall and diminishing (ground)water resources. Due to is still high energy needs and potential negative environmental impacts, desalination should only be contemplated if other approaches as part of sustainable water and demand management are insufficient. Principles of sustainability and safeguards must be given rigorous attention, especially regarding potential environmental and social impacts as well as climate assessments. The coupling with renewable energy sources and environmentally friendly disposal of concentrated salt brine are crucial. Rainwater harvesting is another alternative source of clean water which additionally allows aquifers to recharge and takes off pressure from groundwater resources.

In view of the persisting challenges in innovation,

The immediate role of local and regional governments, service providers, water management organizations is to

▶ value and apply locally appropriate traditional and indigenous knowledge of water allocation, quality, use and conservation and increase efficiency (e.g. in agriculture and irrigation) and the preservation of ecosystem functions within decision-making, planning processes and subsequent implementation.

▶ identify and implement waterless sanitation options and fit-for-purpose water reduce, reuse and recycle approaches to best take advantage of available water resources within a circular economy planning.

For the mid-term perspective, local and regional governments and their service providers can

▶ analyze water challenges also from a social and cultural perspective, establish participation channels to include local communities in overcoming these challenges and enhance their social adaptive capacity.

▶ create an environment which nurtures innovation (e.g. through specific challenges, supporting innovation funds or competitions) in cooperation with the national government.

The immediate role of national governments is to

▶ focus on ecosystem conservation and restoration by deploying nature-based solutions in combination with grey infrastructure as the main means of adapting to climate change and being the primary response to reverse current trends in ecosystem degradation and water scarcity.

For the mid-term perspective national governments can

▶ foster development and implementation of innovative solutions and ensure policy and governance frameworks that mainstream and support innovation in the sector.

▶ Develop and implement innovative corporate governance models for cross-sectoral policy coherence.

The immediate role of multilateral actors is to

- support investments on innovation as well as scaling-up and replicating innovative pilots, which e.g. integrate ecosystem functions and nature-based solutions into grey infrastructure.
- develop low-cost solutions to leave no one behind.
- actively support an environmentally sensitive diversification of water sources.

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1 E.g. the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, the Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses, the UNECE/WHO-Europe Protocol on Water and Health

For the mid-term perspective, multilateral actors can

- seize international agreements[1] providing a platform for intersectoral cooperation as a governance and accountability framework in view of collaborative research projects within jointly managed transboundary water basins.
- make the support for planning and implementation of innovation a central element at policy level and in programming.

The immediate role of the UN system is to

- develop a common approach towards integrating biodiversity and promoting nature-based solutions in combination with grey infrastructure, and jointly foster their implementation among all relevant UN organizations (e.g. following a "One Health" perspective) mainstreaming a more climate- and environment-responsive approach into strategic plans and subsequent programs.
- support indigenous peoples' knowledge systems ensuring that their rights are respected, protected, promoted and fulfilled in such common approaches and acknowledging existing treaties and guidance.
- ensure that operations and programs are inclusion-transformative and consistent climate-resilient development pathways (e.g. considering low emissions).

For the mid-term perspective, the UN system can

- expand funding for (cooperative) research on innovative approaches dealing with uncertainties and addressing increasing water scarcity (e.g. water-saving and water reuse technologies).
- Call for cross-sectoral and accelerated action towards 2030 in the second half of the water decade.

5.

GOVERNANCE FOR ACCELERATION

A cross-sectoral, cooperative, good water governance approach: Growing water demands in view of increased water uncertainty calls for improved vertical and horizontal governance and intensified cooperation among stakeholders, sectors and countries.
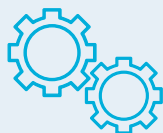
Water crises are often referred to as governance crises. Since 2012, the World Economic Forum's Global Risk Report has consistently ranked water crises among the top global risks with the greatest impact. As the quality of water degrades and the quantity available must meet increasing needs, perpetuated by climate change, competition among uses and users intensifies. Local communities and particularly rural women and girls are among the most affected, as they carry the huge burden of providing water for household uses and suffer most from inappropriate sanitation and hygiene. Despite their key role in the provision, management, and overall safeguarding of water, they are usually not included in water-related planning and decision-making processes thus, leading to a neglect of their specific needs. The same applies for people living with disabilities and other vulnerable groups that are left behind, most often.

Poor governance frameworks and weak institutions have undermined the attempts to include inclusion aspects into water management policies. In urban centers, informal settlements are growing rapidly. In these places, unclear matters of land tenure and public sector responsibilities make WASH service provision and water management difficult. At the same time, metropolitan areas are expanding, as a result of population growth and migration of the rural population to urban centers, at times so fast and uncontrolled that available water resources and the speed of infrastructure development are insufficient. Also, good governance is costly and takes time (especially when involving multiple stakeholders) and typically not enough resources are allocated to these processes.

In order to make progress in the water sector and ensure improvement in many sectors important to reach the 2030 Agenda, there must be strong coordination between governance in the water sector and governance factors in other sectors (e.g. civil service law and the public sector remuneration system, level of decentralization, social protection systems, citizen-oriented budget planning, anti-corruption measures). Water governance, from the local to the global level, is highly fragmented, with roles and responsibilities for closely linked water aspects assigned to different entities, from the water ministry, to agriculture, to environment, health and education, from UNEP to WHO, to UNESCO and so forth. This reflects the importance of water for a multitude of other Goals and targets. The water sector has to make good water governance, as outlined in the OECD Water Governance Framework and its core Principles, a priority and even use the fragmentation of the sector as an opportunity to become the convening platform, to bring different line ministries and stakeholders together on a cross-sectoral basis and promote shared responsibility for water resources.

Multi-sector and multi-stakeholder approaches, in which citizens are empowered to articulate their voices in water planning and decision-making processes, are essential to optimize the use of scarce resources, accounting for the maximization of synergies and minimization of trade-offs in order to manage conflicting and cross-sectoral interests. As the availability, but also productivity, of water, energy and land are very different between countries, regions or production systems, recognition of the interlinked sectors in coherent policies is a first step towards sustainable development. It is the
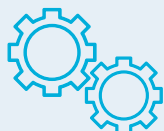
basis to further contribute towards the promotion of integrated investments and inclusive capacity development efforts.

This also includes improved coordination as well as optimization of planning processes, policies, investments and organizational structures at the administrative level of water management, nature conservation, agriculture, climate and energy to achieve intersectoral and integrated management of water bodies (e.g. through due diligence processes of policy documents on its impact on water, especially in water-stressed settings). For example, UNFCCC Focal Points are often located in environment entities and not in close connection to water, despite its importance for adaptation, which is reflected in plans and commitments such as Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans. They are not interlinked and not reflected in sector strategies, and likewise are weak on water-related aspects. The same applies for the interlinkages between WASH management, health and education. Integrated water resources management (IWRM)and the Nexus approach are intrinsically connected to peace and security, and therefore demand inclusive and corporate governance structures as well as an enabling institutional environment to solve multiple interrelated challenges at various levels and achieve the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation.

Multi-stakeholder dialogues have for a long time been a part of IWRM approaches. In recent years, this has been complemented through Stewardship approaches, which explicitly bring together public, private and civil society actors to collectively improve WASH management by identifying synergies and managing trade-offs. Several Nexus approaches are building on these, including stakeholders from other sectors (e.g. energy, agriculture, environment). Looking at the cross-sectoral ambition of the 2030 Agenda, this must be increased at the local, national, regional and global level, also across boundaries.

According to the 2030 Agenda, it is the UN agencies' responsibility to follow up at the global level. However, most Member States recognize a fragmentation and lack of coordination among UN agencies' work on water -related Goals and targets. Policy guidance, as well as the work on norms, standards and frameworks constitutes a gap in terms of UN WASH activities. There is also currently a gap in supporting governments to discuss WASH issues with multiple stakeholder groups. In fact, there is no space for Member States to review and discuss UN-Water's SDG 6 synthesis report and further input before it feeds into the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

To drive effective progress on the ground for the implementation of water-related Goals and targets, a mechanism is therefore needed within the UN system for Member States to be able to collectively assess progress, provide policy guidance, facilitate capacity development and experience exchange, and set priorities, namely in terms of resource allocation.

In addition, it is essential to build a "Whole of Society Approach", creating an environment in which citizens, especially women and vulnerable groups, can successfully participate in water management and governance and thus hold governments accountable for effective and inclusive WASH service delivery on the ground.

In view of the persisting challenges in water governance,

The immediate role of local and regional governments, water management organizations and service providers is to

▶ improve coordination and optimize planning processes, policies, investments and administrative structures among multiple sectors (e.g. water, energy, agri-food, environmental and waste) to manage water bodies in an integrated, gender-sensitive, participative and inclusive manner at the level of the water basin by particularly considering vulnerable groups in these policies, processes and coordinating bodies.

▶ promote integrated, cross-sectoral WASH solutions, especially for peri-urban and rural areas through multi-stakeholder dialogues that actively involve public, private and civil society actors.

▶ promote corporate governance of service providers to reduce their fragmentation and increase formalization and accountability.

For the mid-term perspective, local and regional governments, water management organizations and service providers can

▶ strengthen the institutional, governance structures and frameworks.

▶ support multi-level governance approaches to better target context-specific and cross-sectoral challenges and adequately address water inequity across sectors and users.[1]

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1   The Dublin Statement on Water and Sustainable Development, also known as the Dublin Principles (1992), emphasizes that fresh water is a finite and vulnerable resource and needs to be distributed in an equitable manner.

The immediate role of national governments is to

▶ establish effective legal and technical mechanisms for sustainable transboundary water management (as appropriate, through regional and international conventions such as the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes) as an instrument of conflict prevention and peace.[1]

▶ design sector reviews in a cross-sectoral manner to ignite dialogue beyond sector boundaries.

▶ support multi-scale approaches and foster city-basin dialogues to address urban singularities.

For the mid-term perspective national governments can

▶ strive for adaptive governance systems and coherent policies, taking into account transboundary waters and river basins, cross-sectoral and system interlinkages, the interests of rights holders, synergies and trade-offs.

▶ support an improved legal environment through closer cooperation between environment, marine and water resources institutions.

▶ support cross-sectoral legal frameworks on water, land, agriculture, energy, ecosystems governance aspects such as water tenure (to prioritize access and use rights of water resources) in urban and rural areas also considering communal or customary law.

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1   In particular, international legal instruments such as the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) aiming to ensure the sustainable use of transboundary water resources by facilitating cooperation should be taken into account.

The immediate role of multilateral actors is to

▸ support cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder dialogues at all relevant levels to increase the coordination of strategies, prevent maladaptation and support mutual accountability.

▸ support elaboration and dissemination of tools and instruments to measure progress on water governance.

For the mid-term perspective, multilateral actors can

▸ encourage all stakeholders, the private sector, academia and all members of civil society, including vulnerable groups to become involved in water management and raise awareness through dialogue in order to hold governments accountable.

The immediate role of the UN system is to

▸ strive to draw attention of UN partnerships to water solutions, strengthen cross-sectoral approaches in UN Regional and Country Assistance and ensure the coherence of UN efforts in the water sector (e.g. through early-stage coordination of their programming - development/updating of new programs or strategies) among all UN-Water members (not only with regard to the 2030 Agenda, but also its cross-references to other multilateral environmental agreements, as the Paris Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention etc.).

▸ appoint a special envoy on water to the UN, having additional potential to keep attention on the water sector high, strengthen the international water ambition and closely connect to the committed governments, government agencies, but also academia and research, private sector and civil society.

▸ interlink the UN-Water SDG 6+ Momentum Event with the other sectors under review within the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and invite other sector representatives accordingly to pave the way for intersectoral dialogue also at the global level.

For the mid-term perspective, the UN system can

▸ support the establishment of a mechanism to collectively assess and oversee the progress towards meeting the water-related Goals and targets, provide policy guidance and facilitate capacity development.

▸ further mainstream the SDGs into planning, work, as well as reporting, and support countries in accelerating their implementation, follow-up, and review, including addressing the gaps and challenges identified by Voluntary National Reviews.

▸ facilitate bringing together key partners to enhance leadership, integration and accountability for substantive delivery on the ground and ensure that vulnerable groups and rights holders are recognized as key partners.

Publication details