

TOWARDS A Sustainable Water Future

“Sustainable Development Goals: A water perspective”

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RECOMMENDATIONS

from the Bonn Conference 2015 on Sustainable Development Goals: A water perspective

The impending 70th session of the UN General Assembly in September 2015 will mark the inception of a new 15-year agenda to guide national and international efforts on sustainable development. The emerging Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include a dedicated goal on water, which calls for sufficient availability and sustainable management of the resource for all. The goal is expected to address the unfolding global water crisis, as evidenced by such issues as increased water scarcity and conflict, widespread water pollution, rapid declines in freshwater biodiversity and the loss of essential ecosystem goods and services. Within this goal are fundamental targets for drinking water provision and sanitation but also for environmental sustainability.

Attainment of this goal requires better management and good governance of water resources including the striking of a balance among economic, social and ecological goals. In addition, a strategy is needed for measuring and monitoring targets and deriving indicators capable of assessing achievements. Scientific research plays a strong role in facilitating the implementation of the SDGs by providing analyses, assessments and policy engagement at all levels - from global to local.

These aspirations have motivated more than 200 experts to assemble in Bonn for an international conference on “Sustainable Development Goals: A water perspective”. Participants represent the global water science community, policy and decision-makers as well as non-governmental organizations, industry representatives and UN organizations. This conference has brought together available information; identified knowledge and action gaps; and shared lessons on viable instruments and approaches to implement SDGs from a water perspective.

This summary statement identifies the main barriers, challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the water-related SDGs. It makes a set of core recommendations to institutions and individuals engaged in science, governance, management and decision-making on water and related resources to promote water stewardship.

The full set of outcomes of the conference will be made available at:

sdg2015.gwsp.org

Institutional capacity and transparency

The lack of such capacity and transparency are the primary causes of the poor performance of water governance in many countries. It is likely more important than the state of economic development, although intimately connected to it.

Effective implementation of the SDGs requires improved governance in the water and related sectors. The SDG implementation process should support the building of institutional capacity where needed and adequately monitor governance aspects next to monitoring the resource.

Financing mechanisms

Since the use of water poses many common pool resource problems at different scales, there is a need to create innovative financing mechanisms in the water sector that can also incentivize the engagement of private resources in ways that protect the long-term environmental integrity of the resource.

The SDG implementation process should undertake a financial assessment of SDG targets to address the financial gaps and to identify appropriate and effective financing mechanisms for the implementation of the water SDG.

Technology diffusion

There are currently many innovative technical solutions in environmental conservation and economic development that are not in conflict but instead produce co-benefits (or synergies). The challenge is to stimulate the diffusion of such innovations by facilitating co-production of action-oriented knowledge and identifying change agents and their affiliated institutional settings.

Solutions-oriented research should be identified, fostered and broadly adopted to stimulate the development of innovative technologies and approaches towards the achievement of the water SDG and its component targets.

Engaging the private sector

The business and industry communities need to promote water stewardship more widely and embrace sustainability as a guiding principle.

New business models should involve a system of risk assessment, transparency and accountability to realize water stewardship and achieve competitiveness.

Assessing and measuring sustainability

We need to develop an assessment process that can measure sustainability - whether humans can remain in a safe operating space of the global water system while meeting essential water needs for human health and well-being.

The successful implementation of the water and related SDGs requires a robust science-based and internationally mandated process to regularly monitor, review and assess progress.

Technical readiness and human resources

Widely variable levels of technical and human resources result in challenges at the national level in setting up monitoring systems and building capacity to operationalize and monitor the proposed SDG indicators.

In situ and remote sensing technologies as well as citizen science-based monitoring should be employed to support the monitoring of water targets and identify emerging risks of underachievement. A differentiated approach for progressive uptake of agreed monitoring indicators will be needed.

Interlinkages between water-related targets

Sustainable use of water is an essential precursor to the attainment of other development goals, especially related to human health, food security, energy security and biodiversity, thus giving water a unique role in the entire SDG process. Potential inaction or maladaptive action to implement an essential water-related target may thus severely affect other targets.

The SDG implementation process should adopt a broad systemic risk framework to assess the multiple synergies and trade-offs emerging across different SDGs. Prioritizing water-related targets with regard to their implementation risk and benefits could be the smartest way to maximize the overall achievement of water-related goals while contributing to the success of other SDGs.



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