



The UN & You

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Water is Life! All life on earth depends on water. Water is a precondition for human existence and sustainability of the planet. It is one of the most precious resources we have. There is no substitute or replacement for water. The demand for water is increasing everyday with the impact of growing population, growing urbanization, unsustainable consumption and production practices, global climate change and environmental challenges are putting enormous pressure on fresh water supplies. Many regions in the world are experiencing increased water stress as rivers and ground water sources begin to reach the limits of their renewable capacity. Globally, water scarcity affects four out of every 10 people. Increasingly people are reliant on water rendered non-potable by climate crises and all types of waste from human activity, including from nuclear energy and extractive industries. Since water is linked to every aspect of life, it is a complex issue. Today, water is considered as a **peace and security issue**, a threat to the wellbeing of a country. It is said, that the next world war could be on water.

Water is critical to the survival of people and planet and to the implementation of the transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to end poverty in all its forms. The 17 SDGs and 169 targets provide an integrated approach to social, economic and environmental development, while keeping the focus on people and planet. The 2030 Agenda also seeks to realize the human rights of all and achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.

Sustainable Development Goal 6 not only addresses the issues relating to drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, but also the quality and

sustainability of water resources everywhere. SDG 6 – “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all,” with six targets was reviewed at the recently concluded High Level Political Forum 2018. The 2030 Agenda has committed to make access to water and sanitation a human right. **Agriculture is the primary consumer, accounting for 69 per cent of annual water withdrawals globally. Industry accounts for 19 per cent and households account for just 12 per cent.** And all these water uses contribute to the pollution of freshwater resources.

How far have the world succeeded in achieving SDG 6, especially, targets 6.1 and 6.2?

Target 6.1: Achieving universal access to safe and affordable drinking water by 2030 is a huge challenge for all countries:

- Only 71 per cent of the global population (5.2 billion) use a safely managed drinking water service; that is, located on premises, available when needed and free from contamination.
- 263 million people spent over 30 minutes per round trip to collect water from an improved source.
- 1.8 billion people use a source of drinking water contaminated with feces, putting them at risk of contracting cholera, dysentery, typhoid and polio.
- 2.1 billion people lack water accessible on premises, available when needed and free from contamination.

The commitment to **“leave no one behind”** will mean countries have to increase their efforts to reach out to the disadvantaged groups to eliminate inequalities in drinking water services.

There are still 844 million people who lack even a basic water services. An important aspect they need to consider is affordability; payment for services should not be a barrier to access services.

Target 6.2: Achieve access to sanitation and hygiene and end open defecation – providing adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene by 2030 is a major challenge in many parts of the world. Having access to improved drinking water can only be fully realized when there is improved access to sanitation and good hygiene practices. It plays a fundamental role in ensuring public health. It calls for political commitment from governments and creating systems and institutions to deliver these services which will lead to behavioral changes in people.

- Only 2.9 billion people (39 per cent) use a safely managed sanitation service; 4.5 billion people lack safely managed sanitation services.
- 2.3 billion people lack basic services. Still the practice of open defecation continues – 892 million, 90 per cent of whom live in rural areas from the following regions - Central Asia, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. (For women and girls from these places, finding a place to go to toilet outside have to wait until the cover of darkness, which can leave them vulnerable to abuse and sexual assault.)

Water impacts the lives women in a significant manner and plays a central role in their empowerment. Women are the predominant caretakers of domestic water – they are the water managers. They, along with their girl children bear the burden of collecting water from distant sources. They are often forced to collect water from unsafe sources and are exposed to pollutants. Illnesses related to lack of clean water and sanitation, are the fifth leading of death for women, globally. Taboos, stigmas and inadequate sanitation facilities in

schools, markets and workplaces, prevent girls and women from going to schools, economic participation and income generation.

Women need much greater engagement in decision making about **WASH** - (Water, sanitation and hygiene) infrastructure and services. They need to be asked about location, design and management of water points and toilet facilities.

The water sector across the world is struggling to improve water resources management and increase the coverage and quality of water and sanitation services. Bigger issues are beyond installing more taps and toilets, building reservoirs, treating and reusing/recycling waste water. The need is for good water governance, solving the problems of cross border water sharing, and elimination of inequalities in providing water and sanitation services to the wealthy and those living in poverty.

Integrated water resources management is a key to good governance. Good governance also would ensure equal access to sufficient safe and affordable water, adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene. For it can make the difference between prosperity and poverty, well-being and ill-health. Another major factor to be considered is finance. The implementation of SDG 6 requires more funding for the effective use of existing resources and for providing services to those who are left behind. According to the World Bank estimates, **the annual cost of financing targets 6.1 and 6.2 is \$114 billion.** International cooperation and investments are urgently needed to implement the transformative vision to end poverty. It is estimated that **every \$1 invested in WASH yields a \$5 return.** The world is not on target to achieve SDG 6 by 2030. (This UN and You is based on UN Synthesis Report on SDG 6)

