

Post-2015 and SDGs



Nourishing people, Nurturing the planet

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Highlights

- Water is a key determinant in all aspects of social, economic and environmental development and should therefore be a central focus of any post-2015 framework for poverty eradication, food security, resilience to natural and human-induced disasters, and global sustainable development.
- Water cuts across all sectors and boundaries and is affected by a number of externalities such as economic development, changing lifestyles and consumption patterns, an increasing and mobile global population, climate change, and technological and social changes. Leaders need to make water an integral part of their decision-making processes.
- Safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, the sustainable management and development of water resources and the protection of aquatic biological resources, wastewater management and water quality are all indispensable elements for building a water-secure world.
- Water-related capacity development, both at the individual and institutional levels, is essential for realizing and implementing the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Water

Overview

It is increasingly evident that the current use, development and management of the planet's water resources and the services they provide are unsustainable. Water use has been growing at more than twice the rate of population increase in the last century, and an increasing number of regions are chronically short of water.

- Between 1990 and 2010, more than 2 billion people gained access to basic drinking water, but 780 million people still remain without it and many more remain without safe and sustainable sanitation;
- Over 1.7 billion people live today in river basins where water use exceeds recharge, leading to the desiccation of rivers and depletion of groundwater;
- As countries develop and populations grow and urbanize, their demand for water is projected to increase by 55 percent by 2050;
- Two-thirds of the world's population could be living in water-stressed countries by 2025 if current consumption patterns continue.

At the same time, climate change and the degradation of ecosystems due to human activity are expected to further exacerbate extreme events such as floods and droughts. These trends will add further stress on an already difficult situation, increasing the risk of conflicts over water.

To sustainably achieve poverty eradication, food security, and resilience to natural and human-induced disasters, water productivity needs to be

enhanced, appropriate infrastructure developed, an integrated approach to water resources management implemented, water governance systems improved at all levels and the ability of ecosystems to support sustainable water management, including the aquatic biological resources that are dependent on water, protected and restored. Examples of the positive impact of water on economic growth and poverty reduction include irrigation, fisheries, aquaculture, and hydropower as well as flood management. Water abstraction for irrigation and food production constitutes one of the greatest pressures on freshwater resources. Agricultural water withdrawal accounts for 44 percent of total water withdrawal in OECD countries, 74 percent in the BRICs and over 90 percent in the least developed countries. With global population growth driving food demand up by 60 percent by 2050, more water will be needed for irrigation, in particular in regions already suffering from water scarcity.

Key challenges

While the MDG drinking water target has already been achieved, the current MDG framework did not adequately address the broader water agenda, including inter-sectoral competition, wastewater management, living aquatic resources and issues of water quality. Recent results from a survey of 130 countries show that there has been widespread adoption of integrated approaches to water management worldwide, but that these approaches find difficulties in their application on the ground.

Progress towards improved water governance and efficient water use has been uneven across countries and regions, constrained by limited implementation capacity and stakeholder participation as well as by suboptimal institutional arrangements. This has resulted in significant challenges where irrigation, rainwater harvesting and investment in freshwater ecosystem services are concerned, with direct impacts on food production and food security. In some regions of the world, the productive potential of water resources remains untapped due to lack of focused investment, as in Sub-Saharan Africa. Water-related disasters can cause losses of up to 14 percent of GDP due to a lack of storage and regulating capability.

What needs to be done?

Improved knowledge, research, innovation and implementation towards more productive and sustainable use of water, especially for food and energy, will be required to meet the world's future fuel and food needs. Data and information, updated on a regular basis, about the current status, trends and prospects of water resources and their use are prerequisites for informed decision-making. Through a better combination of technical solutions, improved cross-sectoral approaches and political commitment to sustainably meet competing needs of multiple users, wise water management offers enhanced livelihoods - job creation, a safer environment, and better overall health and well-being.

At the same time, there is a pressing need to improve global freshwater quality by addressing water pollution and making better use of wastewater. It has been estimated that about 80 percent of wastewater from human settlements and industrial sources worldwide is discharged directly untreated into water bodies, with detrimental effects on human health and the environment. Improving the quality of the world's water resources requires pollution reduction by treating and recycling contaminated water and protecting the ability of ecosystems to regulate water quality.

There is an increasing need for transparent and effective governance mechanisms to allocate water among competing demands. A truly water-secure world can only be achieved through cross-sectoral water cooperation at local, national, regional and global level and through an inclusive process engaging with all concerned stakeholders.