

Statement delivered by
Mr Matthías G. Pálsson
Permanent Representative of Iceland
on the occasion of the 43rd Session of the FAO Conference (1-7 July 2023)
4 July 2023

Mr chair,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first of all to congratulate Director - General Qu Dongyu on a very solid re-election as Director-General of FAO, Iceland looks forward to working with him for his second term in office.

We are far off track when it comes to the achievement of SDG6.

Climate change is driving water scarcity and floods. Droughts are leading to less, and more contaminated, water. Floods damage infrastructure and can lead to water contamination.

Yet, water is fundamental to our existence. It is a human right, essential for all aspects of life and inextricably linked to sustainable development. Access to safe drinking water provides enormous economic and health benefits and delivers essential gender equality outcomes.

Being among the richest countries in terms of water resources, Iceland sees it as its obligation to contribute to improving people's access to clean water in areas where water scarcity is prevalent. For decades we have therefore worked with district authorities to improve access to clean water and sanitation facilities in our bilateral partner countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Malawi, Uganda and Sierra Leone.

This work aligns with our emphasis on gender equality, as the lack of access to safe drinking water disproportionately impacts women and girls who often have the primary responsibility for fetching water, often a long way from home. SDG6 is therefore at its core a gender goal. We need to ensure women's active participation in all aspects of society. When it comes to water management, their participation in all decision-making needs to be ensured, their voices heard and taken into consideration. Women need to be involved throughout the process from policy and national budget decisions, to designing and constructing community water infrastructure.

While Iceland is indeed rich in water resources, it is important to ensure their protection and sustainability for the foreseeable future. Last year, Iceland adopted its first national water strategy for the years 2022-2027. We must not take for granted what we have - and ensure we preserve it for future generations.

We need universal political and financial commitments to SDG6. Everyone has a role to play, governments, individuals, civil society, the private sector - and FAO as well as the United Nations as a whole. The increasing focus on the importance of water, both here at FAO, at the recent UN Water Conference and its Water Action Agenda, at the World Bank and elsewhere in the international system, will hopefully drive this forward.

This is, indeed, a watershed moment. Iceland is committed to play its part in this new tide of water action. By sustainably managing its water resources, by investing in improved water access for vulnerable populations and by increasing its climate financing.

Thank you.