



Water and Sanitation for All: Securing our Future, Preserving our Planet

UNSGAB's call for a Post-2015 Global Goal on Water

January 2013

Executive Summary

Good management of water and sanitation is critical to poverty reduction and a precondition for inclusive and sustainable development. Billions of people do still not have access to adequate sanitation and water that is safe for human consumption. Growing water scarcity and pollution are projected to further exacerbate the drinking water and sanitation crisis, seriously hamper economic growth and irreversibly degrade the environment.

The Board believes that the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) drinking water and sanitation target has been instrumental in galvanizing the global community to increase necessary investments, induce policy changes and establish innovative partnerships to deliver these basic services to those in need. The Board argues however that much remains to be done to realize the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. It also highlights that the water challenge is deeply complex. Solutions must reach beyond increasing access to water supply and sanitation. The Board recommends that the emerging post-2015 agenda includes a **dedicated and comprehensive Global Goal on Water** that reflects water's comprehensive contribution to development needs. Such a Post-2015 global goal on water should encompass quantified, qualified and time-bound targets that respond to the three following objectives:

- 1) *Achieve universal access to sustainable sanitation and to drinking water that is really safe,*
- 2) *Increase wastewater management and pollution prevention;*
- 3) *Improve integrated water resources management and water-use efficiency.*

In order to build synergies and address trade-offs between water and other sectors, UNSGAB recommends including water efficiency targets in other post-2015 goals (e.g. by reflecting water efficiency considerations in a potential goal on food security).

Concerned about the increasing frequency and severity of water-related disasters, UNSGAB also calls for including water-related disasters into the post-2015 agenda.



United Nations Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation

Introduction

Since its inception in 2004, the UN Secretary General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation has focused its advocacy efforts on stimulating action to meet the MDG targets for water and sanitation. As the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) period will draw to a close in 2015, the global community is discussing the future development framework including sustainable development goals.

Good management of water and sanitation is critical to poverty reduction and a precondition for inclusive and sustainable development. Billions of people do not have access to adequate sanitation and water that is safe for human consumption. Growing water scarcity and pollution are projected to further exacerbate the drinking water and sanitation crisis, seriously hamper economic growth and irreversibly degrade the environment.

The Board believes that the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) drinking water and sanitation target has been instrumental in galvanizing the global community to increase necessary investments, induce policy changes and establish innovative partnerships to deliver these basic services to those in need. The Board argues however that much remains to be done to realize the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. It also highlights that the water challenge is deeply complex. Solutions must reach beyond increasing access to water supply and sanitation. As was succinctly put by a participant at the last Board Meeting in Kenya: "you can put a lot of efforts in building water supply systems, but if there is no water available, you realize that your efforts have been in vain".

UNSGAB's call for a global goal on water

The UN Secretary General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation argues that:

1. The emerging post-2015 agenda must include a dedicated and comprehensive global Goal on Water that reflects the contribution of water to development needs.
2. A global goal on water must encompass quantified, qualified and time-bound targets that respond to the three following objectives:
 - a) Achieve universal access to sustainable sanitation and to drinking water that is really safe;
 - b) Increase wastewater management and pollution prevention;
 - c) Improve integrated water resources management and water-use efficiency.
3. Indicators and effective monitoring mechanisms need to be built and adequately financed to measure progress towards these three objectives.



United Nations Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation

A. The case for achieving universal access to sustainable sanitation and to drinking water that is really safe

The world's drinking water crisis is worse than it looks. In March 2012, the United Nations declared that the MDG target on drinking water had been reached five years ahead of schedule.¹ In 2010, 783 million people remained without access to an "improved water source", the criteria used to assess progress towards the MDG target.² The problem is that current MDG monitoring does not measure whether water accessed through such an improved source is also potable or fit for human consumption. Often water that is from an "improved source source" is not potable. Official statistics thus substantially overestimate the number of people with access to safe drinking water. In reality, the number of people who have "sustainable access to safe drinking water" as specified in MDG target 7c, is far greater with estimates ranging between 2 and 4 billion people.³

The lack of safe drinking water is closely linked to poor sanitation. Faecal contamination of drinking water is one of the main reasons why 2000 children under the age of five die from diarrhoea every day.⁴ Sanitation is considered one of the two most off-track MDG targets with an estimated 2.5 billion people lacking access to basic levels of sanitation, while the number of the world's urban population without access to wastewater collection and treatment services is unknown due to the absence of data.

The lack of measurably safe drinking water and sanitation is a stumbling block that is hindering development. Water and sanitation bring important benefits – for example, health benefits: two billion worm infections, affecting one third of the world's population, could be prevented through improved sanitation.⁵ The control of cholera is a major problem in many countries. Between 2004 and 2008, the World Health Organization received notifications of more than 830,000 cases, representing a 24 per cent increase in cases reported for this most recent five-year period. Safe water and sanitation is an excellent investment, yielding an average return of US\$4.00 for every dollar invested.⁶

In 2010, the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council recognized clean drinking water and safe sanitation to be a human right essential to the full enjoyment of life and all other human rights. Setting a goal for universal access is the next logical step for the global community to take with an emphasis on reaching the poorest and most vulnerable.

B. The case for increasing wastewater management and pollution prevention

Almost every kind of water use changes its state, thereby altering the quality of the water that is returned to the water cycle. Rough estimates suggest that 80 to 90 percent of wastewater in developing countries is discharged directly into rivers, lakes and seas, causing water-borne diseases, while severely damaging the environment. This widespread pollution also hinders economic development and threatens the availability of water resources.⁷ UNSGAB believes that sanitation



United Nations Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation

does not stop at the toilet and thus for citizens and countries to enjoy the health benefits, economic growth and human dignity that comes with safe sanitation and clean water a holistic approach, incorporating wastewater collection, treatment and reuse is necessary. In the Rio+20 outcome document, “The Future We Want”⁸ UN member states have stressed “the need to adopt measures to significantly reduce water pollution and increase water quality, significantly improve wastewater treatment and water efficiency”. Collection of used water, separation of polluted water from less polluted waters, prevention and management of wastewater pollution including treatment of used water are increasingly important to protect populations and ecosystems as well as to facilitate economic development.

In the face of the growing demands on finite water resources, it is also necessary to consider wastewater as an additional resource. Wastewater systems must be appropriate in scale, while cleaning water for the next appropriate use. There is no wastewater, only water that is wasted. Water re-use is an essential component of a sustainable future. Another essential component is reducing the amount of waste that is injected into water. Pollution prevention is the first appropriate policy response.

A global target will build impetus for improving wastewater management.

C. The case for improved integrated water resources management and water-use efficiency

Global trends such as growing energy, water and food demand, population growth and climate change risk to further exacerbate the drinking water and sanitation crisis through widespread pollution and depletion of water resources. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has projected that the number of people living in seriously water-stressed river basins will double between 2000 and 2050, reaching 3.9 billion people.⁹ The relation between water and disaster is a growing challenge, particularly given climate variability.

Sustainable economic growth, poverty eradication and ecosystem preservation cannot be achieved, if we continue to undermine the sustainability of our water resources base which compromises the sectors which depend upon it. Indeed, to cope with climate variability, improved water resources management is the first line of defense. While international energy habits are the focus of mitigation, water management and water-use efficiency must be how the world approaches adaptation. It is essential that the global community and national governments recognize and act on this fact now since it is clear that climate variability is amplified in the water cycle. The policy frameworks, physical infrastructure and global goals put in place now must be adapted to future needs.

To build synergies and address trade-offs between water and other sectors, UNSGAB advocates including water resource management and efficiency targets in other post-2015 goals (for example by reflecting water productivity considerations in a potential goal on food security).



United Nations Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation

About UNSGAB

The UN Secretary General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB) is an independent body established in 2004 to give advice to the UN Secretary-General as well as to galvanize action on water and sanitation issues. Chaired by His Royal Highness the Prince of Orange, the Board is composed of a wide range of dignitaries, technical experts, and individuals with proven experience in providing inspiration, moving the machinery of government, as well as working with the media, the private sector and civil society. Please visit www.unsgab.org

¹ WHO/UNICEF (2012): *Millennium Development Goal drinking water target met - Sanitation target still lagging far behind*, Joint News Release WHO/UNICEF, 6 March 2012.

² WHO/UNICEF (2012): *Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation: 2012 Update*, United States.

³ See for example Onda K., LoBuglio J., Bartram J. Global Access to Safe Water (2012): Accounting for Water Quality and the Resulting Impact on MDG Progress. In: *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2012; 9(3): 880-894, Bain R. W. et al. (2012): *Improved but not necessarily safe: water access and the Millennium Development Goals*, Global Water Forum Discussion Papers, 1225 and Payen, G. (2011): Worldwide needs for safe drinking water are underestimated: billions of people are impacted. In: *le Droit à l'eau potable et à l'assainissement, Sa mise en œuvre en Europe*, Académie de l'Eau, Smets et al., 2011, p. 45-63.

⁴ Liu et al. (2012): Global, regional, and national causes of child mortality: an updated systematic analysis for 2010 with time trends since 2000. In: *The Lancet*, Volume 379, Issue 9832, Pages 2151 - 2161, 9 June 2012.

⁵ Pruss-Ustun, Annette et al. (2008): *Safer Water, Better Health: Costs, benefits and sustainability of interventions to protect and promote health*, World Health Organization, Geneva, p.8.

⁶ Hutton, G. (2012): *Global costs and benefits of drinking-water supply and sanitation interventions to reach the MDG target and universal coverage*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization. WHO/HSE/WSH/12.01.

⁷ Corcoran, E. et al. (eds.) (2010): *Sick water? The central role of wastewater management in sustainable development. A rapid response assessment*, United Nations Environment Programme and UN-HABITAT, Arendal: UNEP GRID-Arendal.

⁸ Resolution Adopted by the UN General Assembly (2012) *The Future We Want* A/RES/66/288, page 24/

⁹ OECD (2012): *The OECD Environmental Outlook to 2050: The Consequences of Inaction*, OECD: Paris.