

# SDG Targets on Fresh Water & Sanitation

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# 1. Universal access to safe water, improved sanitation and hygiene for all by 2030

There seems to be consensus that this target can and should build on the MDGs for water & sanitation.

We must go beyond universal access to include all aspects of the human right to water & sanitation, including equality, non-discrimination, equity and affordability.

This target should be broken out into 3 separate components on water, sanitation and hygiene.

A rights-based approach is essential for all SDGs, not just water.

## 2. Water use must not exceed recharge capacity in all watersheds

This is the definition of sustainability. It is simple, yet it will be incredibly difficult to achieve because unavoidable, complex, political trade-offs will be required.

Water for people and for achieving WASH goals must be put in the context of a holistic, systems framework. While there is much talk of a people-centered approach, failure to recognize planetary limits and prioritize the sustainability of planetary systems will surely undermine any achievements of the MDGs.

The 3 pillars of sustainable development are all essential but they are not equal. Social must be at the core, supported by the environment, while the economy is simply a tool for serving people.

### 3. Participatory, democratic water management at the watershed level

We need a dramatic overhaul of water management that allows residents of the watershed—including trans-boundary watersheds—to determine prioritization of use.

Democratic watershed management that puts people and sustainability in the center could counter over-extraction and water grabs in: commodity crop production, water bottling, mining, and energy production, as in the cases of hydropower and fracking for natural gas.

## 4. Increase productive use of water resources under managed conditions to X% of harvest potential by 2030

Targets 4, 5, and 6 all fall under the category of efficiency.

Agricultural efficiency doesn't mean prioritizing industrial mono-crops for export in the form of virtual water. It means growing climate-appropriate crops for local consumption first.

## 5. Use X% less water in energy production by 2030

We should use water more efficiently in energy but it is more important to simply use less water to produce energy.

Likewise, productive water use in energy does not mean environmentally-destructive large dams that displace communities and send the energy to distant locations.

## 6. Reduce non-revenue water loss by X% by 2030

This must be done through regulatory, front-end prevention and funding infrastructure, not through market-based trading solutions that further concentrate pollution in poor communities.



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# Financing

The majority of financing for water has come from governments and will continue to do so. We must strengthen public finance mechanisms and taxation to fund both water and wastewater infrastructure, as well as watershed sustainability.

Regulation must be strengthened to prevent industrial pollution but also to regulate industrial water users.

# Pricing

It is often said that we must “get the price right” so that people use water sustainably and efficiently, but this is a Trojan horse when only about 10% of fresh water is for domestic use.

In comparison, 70% of fresh water is used for agriculture and approximately 20% is used by industry. This clearly shows that we must focus our efficiency efforts at agriculture and industry first.

What’s more, statistics show that household use is relatively inelastic because people generally need a fixed amount of water for household drinking and sanitation. In contrast, agriculture & industry are incredibly price responsive.

While water service certainly comes with a cost, the water itself, flowing through the pipes is free. This is an important distinction.

# Conclusion

Many of these seven targets are dependent upon reliable measures of watershed quantity and quality so proper measurement is essential. And water footprints can be a useful tool in determining common but differentiated responsibilities among states.

Meeting these targets will be a great task, but the SDG process provides the world a great opportunity to dream big—indeed, we can't afford to do otherwise.

# THANK YOU!

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