Water and sanitation in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: A linked agenda

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Let me begin by listing some key starting points from the Water Population Dynamics Background Paper[1]:

1. "Two-thirds of the world's population will face water stress by 2025 and will continue to exacerbate resource related unrest".
2. "Existing and projected water crises in the future pose threats not only to human wellbeing and environmental sustainability for the planet, but increasingly are perceived by governments as threats to national security"
3. "Almost 90% of the most disastrous events across the globe between 1900 and 2006 were caused by hydrometeorological phenomena, principally floods, droughts and windstorms".
4. "Approximately 30% of global urban land in 2000 was located in what are called high-frequency flood zones and, rather alarmingly, almost half of the global urban expansion by 2030 will have taken place *within* these vulnerable areas"

Background to water and sanitation in the 2030 Agenda:

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda), agreed at a high-level UN Summit on 25 September 2015, commits the 193 UN Member State signatories to achieve 17 ambitious Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, one of which (SDG 6) is specifically dedicated to achieving water and sanitation access for all.[2]

Within the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) framework, agreed in 2000 with a 2015 deadline, water and sanitation issues were primarily focused within one target of MDG 7 on "Ensuring Environmental Sustainability" which aimed to halve, by 2015, those without access to "safe" drinking water and "basic" sanitation. Water and sanitation scarcity and access, however, directly impacted all eight of the MDGs, which covered issues such as poverty and hunger, education, gender equality, child mortality and maternal health and infectious diseases.[3]

Compared to the MDGs, the SDGs are both more ambitious in scope (applying to all people in all countries for equitable access to "safe and affordable" drinking water and "adequate" sanitation and

[1] Available at https://www.populationenvironmentresearch.org/pern_files/papers/PERN_water_cyberseminar_background_paper.pdf
[2] See "Transforming our World:the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" outcome document: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld
[3] See "Water Scarcity in the MDGs," www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/scarcity.shtml

hygiene) as well as more explicit in their interlinkages between Goals and targets in the agenda.[4] SDG 6 also goes far beyond the access agenda to take into account underlying factors affecting the sustainability of quantity and quality of the world's freshwater. In addition to finishing the "unfinished business" of the MDGs in terms of access to drinking water and sanitation, therefore, SDG 6 is clearly identified as being one of the underpinning links for achieving markers on gender equality, health, and a key driver of economic development.

SDG 6 goes even farther, however, to link to other topics in the 2030 Agenda, noting that sustained water resource management is the key to preventing and managing water-related disasters (SDG target 11.5), supporting agriculture (SDG 2) and securing energy needs as the world's population continues to rise (SDG 7). It acknowledges that access to adequate improved water supplies in informal settlements in many developing countries is particularly challenging, and this has important health and gender dimensions. Historically and currently, women and girls are disproportionately affected, and so water management issues are intrinsically linked to issues of gender equality (SDG 5) and education (SDG 4). Finally, most of the effects of climate change (SDG 13) are felt in the area of water and resilience infrastructure (SDG 9) will urgently be needed. These and many other linkages are spelled out in detail in the materials related to the topic of the 2015 World Water Day Campaign, "Water and Sustainable Development"[5].

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SDG 6 and Water Scarcity:

It is estimated that two-thirds of the world's population will live in areas of high water stress by 2025. SDG 6 (target 6.4) calls for substantially increasing water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity. Other Goals linked to water scarcity in the 2030 Agenda include resilient infrastructure (9.1, 9.4), sustainable cities (11A, 11B, and 11.5), sustainable consumption (12.2), inclusive societies (16.1, 16B) and global partnerships (17.6, 17.7, 17.8).

As water-related ecosystems underpin most of the Earth's natural processes, their protection and restoration receive an explicit mention in SDG target 6.6, with clear and explicit linkages to the ecosystems Goal (SDG 15).

SDG 6 and Water Quality:

The quality of our sources of freshwater are of increasing concern in many areas of the world. SDG 6 (target 6.3) aims to improve water quality and target some of the root causes of poor water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and

[4] See UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) Working paper, "The Sustainable Development Goals as a Network of Targets:" www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2015/wp141_2015.pdf
[5] See "Water and Sanitation – the Pathway to a Sustainable Future": http://www.unwater.org/worldwaterday/tools/all/en/

materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally. This directly links to SDGs for health (3.3 and 3.9), resilient infrastructure (9.4), sustaianble cities (11.6), sustainable consumption (12.4), sustainable oceans (14.1) and sustainable ecosystems (15.1).

SDG 6 and water in the context of a changing climate and water supplies in urban areas:

The PERN cyberseminar background paper notes that the vast majority (almost 90%) of the world's most disastrous events are water-related. Target 6.6 of SDG 6 contextualises water-related ecosystems such as mountains and wetlands and their ability to absorb the effects of climate change and scenarios of water stress. With increasing climate variability and shifting population demographics, the consequences of these events will become more severe and far-reaching.

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These climatic shifts could encourage population migrations, as water is the key determining factor for two other pillars of (sustainable) development: agriculture and energy. This water-energy-food nexus, as it is known, clearly demonstrates the interlinkages and tradeoffs between the sectors. Moreover, it is often the same segments of the population which do not have access to two or all three of these essential building blocks of development. Population growth and changing patterns from rural to urban areas are expected to exacerbate the situation: it is predicted that by 2035, energy consumption will increase by 35%, in turn increasing water consumption by 85%.[6]

MDG monitoring demonstrated that those in rural areas were often hardest to supply with water and sanitation access, yet even for those in urban areas the quality of quality and reliability of supply can be lacking. These issues are explicitly targeted in the formulation of the language in targets 6.1 and 6.2, underscoring that many urban or rural residents classed as having 'access' are either unable to utilise affordable facilities and obtain sufficient volumes of potable water, or simply have no access to these services at all. Understandably that means that access is also highly inequitable. At the same time, the 2030 Agenda takes into account the water-related challenges cities are increasingly facing, such as flooding and increased pressures on water supply and sanitation infrastructure.

Finally, the crucial issue of water governance is granted specific mention in the 2030 Agenda. SDG target 6.5 calls for "implementing integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate", which links to many other SDGs.

[6] See the World Bank Group, water-energy nexus and "Thirsty Energy" initiative: http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/sustainabledevelopment/brief/water-energy-nexus