

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In 2000, the largest assembly of heads of states in history convened at the United Nations in New York to adopt the Millennium Declaration, committing their countries to a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty in its many dimensions. The result was the setting up of eight development goals, with 2015 as a deadline, known as the [Millennium Development Goals \(MDGs\)](#).

Although significant progress has been done in achieving the MDGs in these past 15 years, many targets have been missed. To accelerate the progress and advance the development beyond 2015, the UN General Assembly on September 25th 2015 has adopted a post-2015 Development Agenda, setting new Goals and targets for the next 15 years.

The new agenda establishes seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with 2030 as a deadline, that seek to build on the MDGs and complete what they did not achieve. In this new development agenda, water and sanitation have been considered to play a crucial role in all dimensions of sustainable development, since they are linked to several key global problems and influence all human activities. That is why water and sanitation have been given their own dedicated goal (SDG 6). This stand-alone goal on water and sanitation is fundamental to have a holistic approach in tackling global water problems.

From MDGs to SDGs



Source: UNDP (United Nations Development Programme)

In the overall, the SDGs are more globally collaborative than the MDGs. For instance, the engagement of the private sector was enhanced through different initiatives such as UN Global Compact and Impact 2030. Also, the SDGs have been designed to better integrate human rights principles and standards, and therefore be generally more inclusive than the MDGs.

Up next, we are going to review the sixth SDG dedicated to water and sanitation, explaining the different targets set and the way to achieve them, and briefly explore the challenges in its implementation.

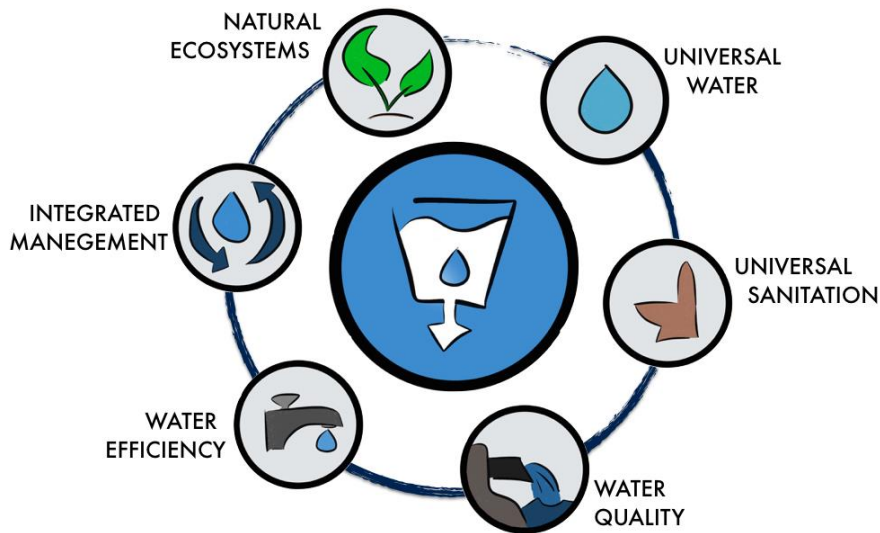
A. What are the new targets for water and sanitation?

The 6th Sustainable Development Goal of ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all includes six technical targets, and two additional targets as means of implementation.

Target 6.1. - Achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all.

The MDG target for safe drinking water has already been met: over 90% of the world's population has now access to improved sources of drinking water. However, in many developing regions (Central Asia, Northern Africa, Oceania and sub-Saharan Africa), the safe drinking water coverage remains low, and 663 million people still lacking access to [improved drinking water sources](#). This target aims to achieve an universal access to safe drinking water by continuing the efforts done.

SGD 6: WATER AND SANITATION



Source: UN-DSD (United Nations Division for Sustainable Development)

Target 6.2. - Achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all.

Unlike in drinking water, the MDG target for sanitation has been missed: only 68% of the global population uses an improved sanitation facility. Today almost 2.4 billion people still lack access to adequate sanitation, and [open defecation](#) remains a common practice in many regions. This target aims to achieve an universal access to sanitation by increasing the efforts done in the implementation of improved sanitation facilities.

Target 6.3. - Improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials.

Water pollution is a global concern, since water quality deterioration results in both environmental and socio-economic problems. Improving [water quality](#) and wastewater management is therefore necessary to address health, food-security, poverty and environmental challenges. This target aims to reduce freshwater pollution by increasing wastewater collection and treatment.

Target 6.4. - Increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity.

Excessive [water withdrawal](#) causes water stress for both humans and ecosystems, which result in high environmental costs. Therefore, in order to reduce water withdrawals and thus ensure water resources sustainability, it is necessary to adopt water saving techniques in all sectors: agriculture (e.g. drip irrigation), domestic (e.g. low-flush toilets) and industrial (e.g. wastewater reuse techniques). This target aims to ensure a sustainable use of water resources in these sectors by improving the efficiency.

Target 6.5. - Implement integrated water resources management at all levels.

The [Integrated Water Resources Management](#) (IWRM) is a cross-sectorial approach where the development and management of water, land and related resources is coordinated. With the IWRM, economic and social welfare can be maximized without damaging the environment. However, the implementation of this system is complex, as it requires creating an enabling environment (through legal framework and strategic planning) and then creating an institutional structure to support IWRM. This target aims to integrate the IWRM concept in water policies.

Target 6.6. - Protect and restore water-related ecosystems.

Natural ecosystems like wetlands, forests, rivers and lakes are extremely valuable, since they provide important [ecosystem services](#) regarding water quality and quantity. But degraded ecosystems lose their resilience and result in a decrease in water quality and availability. This targets aims to ensure the environment's capacity to provide water-related services by ending the disruption of ecosystems due to human activities (e.g. urbanization, inappropriate agricultural practices and pollution).

Additionally, the SDG 6 includes two targets related to the means of implementation:

Target 6.a. - Expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related activities and programs.

Target 6.b. - Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management.

These two additional are needed in order to build a solid base to support the implementation of SDG 6 and achieve its ambitious targets for water and sanitation. This base needs to include not only economic means (i.e. adequate and targeted investments) but also other crucial enabling factors (e.g. policies and capacity-building), as they can be the engine and driver to achieving the SDGs.

B. What are the challenges ahead?

For the first time in history, countries have shifted from a partial view to a global vision encompassing all challenges of water and sanitation (not only universal drinking water and sanitation coverage, but also ecosystems protection and integrated resources management). The new Goal set is very ambitious, and requires the adoption of new water policies, the regular monitoring of progress made and the search of better technical and managerial tools.

However, despite the challenges ahead, water professionals worldwide are prepared to implement the SDGs and make the water sector more sustainable and resilient.