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# Water for Development and Development for Water: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Vision

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## Abstract

The inclusion of the Water Goal in the United Nations 2015 Development Agenda recognizes that water is at the heart of all aspects of sustainable development rather than being secondary to other sectors, where it risked becoming neglected and therefore no-one's responsibility. It puts water management firmly in the hands of the water and water-using sectors. This paper suggests that for all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be successful, a major shift in conceptual thinking about water management is needed. It must be recognized that there is no single approach for sequencing portfolios of investment to improve water security and that a high degree of flexibility will be needed to embrace the unique economic, social and environmental circumstances that will determine a nation's pathway towards water security and prosperity. Above all, governments must accept and embrace interconnectedness and take an integrated approach to water management. But the big question now facing many countries is how to best put an integrated approach into practice.

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## Introduction

The new United Nations (UN) development agenda fully recognizes the importance of managing water for sustainable development, and the need for the water and water-using sectors to collaborate and move beyond traditional sectoral 'silos' if the world's limited water resources are to be used wisely. This recognition is a major

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breakthrough. The future looks rosy but only if governments and the corporate sector recognize and take a number of crucial steps.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda is an unprecedented effort that embodies universal aspirations for a better, more just, equitable, peaceful, and sustainable future. The SDGs agenda provides a framework that fosters collaboration across countries, mobilizes all stakeholders and inspires action. It invites us to accept and embrace comprehensiveness and interconnectedness.

## 1. The ‘Water Goal’

Growing global concerns over water resources, highlighted in 2015 by the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2015), are closely reflected in the SDGs, not only in terms of SDG 6 (see Table 1), which specifically addresses water resources (the ‘Water Goal’), but also in recognizing that water affects the entire development agenda. Water connects us all. Water is embedded in almost all the other SDGs, particularly those dealing with food, energy and the environment. Water is the gossamer that links the web of the 17 SDGs and their 169 targets. No longer can water be addressed as a separate element in isolation from the other goals. But this interconnectedness has important implications. It means that the Water Goal will only be achieved if the other goals are attained, and in turn, that other SDGs will only be achieved if the Water Goal is attained.

Table 1. The Water Goal

SDG6	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
6.1	By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all
6.2	By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all, and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations
6.3	By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater, and at least doubling recycling and safe reuse globally
6.4	By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of fresh water to address water scarcity, and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity
6.5	By 2030 implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary co-operation as appropriate
6.6	By 2020 protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes
6.6a	By 2030, expand international co-operation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water and sanitation-related activities and programmes, including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies
6.6b	Support and strengthen the participation of local communities for improving water and sanitation management

From the beginning of the SDGs development process, we at the Global Water Partnership (GWP) felt that the way water was fragmented across a set of SDGs, failed to recognize both the scale and the complexity of the huge, multi-dimensional water challenge. Water was perceived as a ‘slave’ to other sectors rather than as a limiting factor. This mind-set promoted the thinking that water was everyone’s responsibility, which of course it is, but by embedding water in a fragmented way across SDGs, water resources were in danger of becoming no-one’s responsibility and therefore neglected, apart from water supply and sanitation, as in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

GWP has always emphasized the need to take account of the synergies between long-term water resources management and meeting the needs of water and sanitation services, food production and energy generation, and supporting ecosystems. We have pointed to the problems that a ‘silo’ approach creates and we have highlighted the importance of developing a dedicated Water Goal, which would champion the need for an integrated water

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