

Issue brief

SDG 6

UN
environment
United Nations
Environment Programme

6 CLEAN WATER
AND SANITATION



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ENSURING AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL

Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6) – Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all – confirms the importance of water and sanitation in the global political agenda. Building on the relevant Millennium Development Goal, SDG 6 addresses the sustainability of access to water and sanitation by focusing on the **quality, availability** and **management** of freshwater resources.

The individual targets of SDG 6 cover the entire water cycle and its interconnections:

- 6.1: provision of drinking water
- 6.2: sanitation and hygiene services
- 6.3: treatment and reuse of wastewater and ambient water quality
- 6.4: water-use efficiency and scarcity
- 6.5: integrated water resources management
- 6.6: protecting and restoring water-related ecosystems
- 6.a: international cooperation and capacity-building
- 6.b: local participation in water and sanitation management

Facts and figures

Today, around 1.9 billion people live in potentially severely water-scarce areas. By 2050, this figure could increase to around 3 billion people.

Globally, over 80 per cent of the wastewater generated by society flows back into the environment without being treated or reused.

An estimated 64–71 per cent of natural wetlands have been lost since 1900 as a result of human activity.

Environmental dimension of SDG 6

SDG 6 recognizes that countries' social development and economic prosperity depend on the sustainable management of freshwater resources and ecosystems. SDG 6 acknowledges that ecosystems and their inhabitants, including humans, are water users and that their activities on land can compromise the quality and availability of fresh water.

The water-related ecosystems addressed in SDG 6 include wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes, which sustain a high level of biodiversity. These ecosystems are also vital for providing multiple benefits and services, such as hydropower, irrigation, humidity and precipitation, habitats for aquatic life and water purification. Well-managed water-related ecosystems contribute to addressing the competing demands for water, mitigating climate change risks and helping to build community peace and trust. They are therefore essential for achieving sustainable development, peace and security as well as human health and well-being.

UN Environment and SDG 6

As the global environmental authority, the United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment) connects the issue of freshwater to other aspects of sustainable development, such as oceans, land and agriculture. This work entails building national capacity to monitor freshwater ecosystem health, including water quality, facilitating integrated water resources management processes and the implementation thereof, and providing guidelines and inputs for country-level action to protect and restore freshwater ecosystems at the national level. Through this work, UN Environment provides support to countries in protecting and restoring their freshwater ecosystems with a view to sustaining their ecosystem services for generations to come.

As with other SDGs, the environmental indicators in SDG 6 are new, meaning that this is the first time that many UN Member States have had to collect, submit and analyse the kind of data required to measure progress under this Goal. As custodians of three indicators under SDG 6,



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