

Action Against Hunger comments to the UN SDG6 Synthesis Report

Action Against Hunger welcomes the SDG6 Synthesis Report and thanks the opportunity to share our reflections:

Some positive highlights

- Effort to deliver a joint UN Report, compiling data from all available sources
- Focus on progressive realization of the human rights to water and sanitation, indicating that in those countries where a large proportion of the population still lacks even basic services, the initial focus must remain on ensuring that everyone has access to improved drinking water and sanitation services.
- Recognition that further work is needed to establish a commonly agreed method for assessing affordability, as payment for services should not be a barrier to accessing services.
- Focus on eliminating inequalities and increasing rates of progress for those furthest behind, if WASH targets are to be met by 2030, including less used criteria for vulnerability like hotspots where outbreak of diseases such as cholera recur.
- Strong emphasis on interdependency of SDGs and linkages between WASH, food security, nutrition and health.

Issues that could be further developed

- **Interdependency of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): from recognition to ACTION**

One of the main messages of the Report is the need to understand that Achieving SDG 6 is essential for making progress on all other SDGs and vice versa. Despite the strong rhetoric on the linkages across SDGs and the need for a multi-sectoral approach to the 2030 Agenda, challenges remain in understanding how governments and partners can work effectively across sectors to drive a comprehensive approach to the achievement of social, environment and economic goals. This is why beyond recognizing the important role of water for the realization of the 2030 Agenda, there is a need to ACT on this interdependency and engage the water sector in having a greater impact on other SDGs.

For example, improving WASH has multiple and diverse health benefits, from reducing the risk of diarrheal disease such as cholera, improve nutritional status or improve the delivery of quality health care in institutions, especially with regard to maternal and newborn health. However, the critical links between these areas are not always taken into account when targeting and prioritizing WASH investments. Encouraging WASH finance and infrastructural actors to take a leading role in engaging with the health and nutrition sectors to integrate information and action in their policies and plans towards SDG 6 and for prioritizing investments in high risk settings such as health care facilities, areas with high prevalence of undernutrition and cholera hotspots could be a concrete example of how working towards SDG6 can have a greater impact on SDG 2 and 3.

The example of global partnerships that are driving cross-sectoral action could be a useful reference. For example Scaling Up Nutrition and SWA have signed a joint agreement to work on WASH-Nutrition collaboration, including improved dialogue and coordination between sectors within countries.

- **“Leave No One Behind” should not forget people in emergency and conflict settings**

The Report stresses the need to eliminate inequalities and the fact that effective policies, strategies and subsidies must be developed to ensure no one is left behind, which implies going beyond households and increased attention on disadvantaged groups. The report also recommends improving international cooperation and better use of funding. However, insufficient attention is given to the fact that "leaving no one behind" also means not forgetting vulnerable populations that present specific challenges, like **refugees, displaced populations, and people in humanitarian crisis and conflicts**.

SDGs ambition towards universal access will not be possible without specific strategies to target these vulnerable populations, including improving the response, coordination and financing of WASH in emergency contexts. The links between emergency mechanisms and development mechanisms need to be strengthened, particularly in the post-crisis phase, in order to provide a structural and sustainable response to people's WASH needs. In times of stability, crisis prevention and risk reduction measures must be put in place.

There is also need to better integrate data from humanitarian contexts into SDG monitoring. Finally, specific support is needed for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals for fragile and conflict-affected States.

- **Strengthened water governance at the international level**

Alongside the need to improve water governance at the national level, there is a need to **strengthen intergovernmental coordination** on all water matters at the UN level, including the participation of all stakeholders, to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals for water and sanitation. Environment ministers adopted unanimously in December a resolution¹ that says, in its paragraph 15: *Stresses the need to continue the dialogue at UN level to discuss improving the integration and coordination of the work of the United Nations on the water-related goals and targets.*

- **Global baseline status of water related targets and indicators in other SDGs**

It would be interesting to complement this report with information regarding other water related targets across the 2030 Agenda:

viability of food production systems and drought / flood (2.4), water-borne diseases (3.3), pollution-related diseases and water contamination (3.6), safe schools (4.a), adequate and safe housing and basic services (11.1), water-related disasters (11.5), rational use of resources and risk management (11.b), adaptation to climate change, (12.4), freshwater ecosystems (15.1), land degradation and desertification / drought / floods (15.3).

¹ UN Environment Assembly of the UNEP, *Resolution on addressing water pollution to protect and restore water-related ecosystems*, UNEP/EA.3/L.27, December 2017

- **Gender disaggregated data on capacity development and human resources**

The report mentions the lack of capacity, human resource shortages and the fact that several countries are producing national capacity development strategies for the water sector. It would be particularly interesting to have gender disaggregated data on this issue.