



Accelerating implementation of the 2030 Agenda through water, sanitation and climate action

Co-organized by the Permanent Missions of Canada, Finland, Hungary, Japan, Kenya, Netherlands, Portugal, Singapore, Tajikistan and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs with the support of UN-Water

29 May 2020

Concept Note

Background

The current pandemic and its devastating impact on human security in the world showed the interlinked nature of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Weak water and sanitation systems aggravate the COVID-19 crisis and the COVID19 crisis in turn impose extraordinary pressures on already stretched water and sanitation systems. Currently, 2.2 billion people lack access to safe drinking water, 4.2 billion lack access to safe sanitation, and 3 billion lack access to basic hygiene depriving people of the most basic and effective prevention measure against the virus: frequent handwashing. This implies that people living in countries with limited or non-existent water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services are more vulnerable to the virus than others.

Reliable access to water requires sustainable and integrated water resources management, which in turn provides the necessary base for water to fully play its role as an enabling factor for sustainable socio-economic development and stability. Therefore, water is a fundamental element which helps the world and regions to restore its capacities for mastering the current crisis and its consequences and to be more resilient when facing a future crisis. In addition, WASH services are an integral part of the global efforts to achieve universal health coverage (UHC), as committed by leaders at the General Assembly high-level meeting on UHC on 23 September 2019.

The impacts of climate change exacerbate the situation, with its effects being felt everywhere and having real consequences on people's lives. For example, 90% of global disasters are water-related, 40% of the world's people are affected by water scarcity, and increased incidences of flooding threaten to destroy water points and sanitation facilities and contaminate water sources. Climate change is aggravating natural variability and increasing water related disaster risks. Therefore, we should remember that such disasters are likely to occur even under the COVID-19 crisis. Water related challenges will likely worsen as population growth, rapid urbanization and industrialization, as well as agriculture and food security increase demand for water and intensify the negative effects of climate change on water quality and quantity. Worldwide, an estimated 4.8–5.7 billion people will be living in areas that are at-risk of being water-scarce at least one month per year by 2050.

Climate variability and change have been identified to be responsible for the increase in the frequency and intensity of surface runoff, soil water erosion, drought, pollution, melting of glaciers and for the decrease in surface water/runoff and groundwater, with negative impacts on agricultural lands, grasslands and terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Interlinkages between water and climate also provide a clear opportunity to advancing the water and climate agenda in an integrated manner and to come up with innovative solutions. Mitigating these challenges in the context of water can be broadly classified as nature based or technology driven strategies. While technology-driven climate change mitigation options usually require investment in reducing emissions from powering water infrastructure, nature-based solutions offer a vital means of moving beyond business as usual to address many of the world's water challenges, while simultaneously reducing the risks associated with water-related disasters and climate change. There are therefore significant co-benefits to managing climate and water in a more coordinated and sustainable manner. Solutions for addressing the challenges are available and are being implemented by an increasing number of countries and international river basin authorities, but progress has been slow. Additional attentions should also be paid to the risks for water-related disasters, even under the current pandemic.

While, water's centrality to climate adaptation has been increasingly recognized over the past decade, there remains a concerning gap on how National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC's) envision water governance for adaption, in particular the incorporation and regulation of groundwater, the cooperation regarding transboundary watercourses, as well as climate-resilient sanitation. Furthermore, it remains unclear as to if and how countries' NDC implementation plans address or consider water governance issues. Institutional reforms should therefore be crafted accordingly, bearing in mind that local-level leadership is crucial for successful adaptation, and that water governance should be also be taken into consideration as part of countries' mitigation efforts.

Recognizing the need to reinvigorate action, Heads of State and Government stressed in the Political Declaration¹ of the 2019 SDG Summit the urgent need for concerted, accelerated action by all stakeholders at all levels to achieve the 2030 Agenda, including SDG 6 on water and sanitation and SDG 13 on climate action. Subsequently, on 22 January 2020, the UN Secretary-General launched the Decade of Action calling on all sectors of society to mobilize action at three levels: global action to secure greater leadership, more resources and smarter solutions for the Sustainable Development Goals; local action embedding the needed transitions in policies, budgets, institutions and regulatory frameworks of governments, cities and local authorities; action by youth, civil society, the media, the private sector, unions, academia and other stakeholders, to generate an unstoppable movement pushing for the required transformations.

Objectives

This high-level event under the framework of the Water Action Decade, will allow Member States along with the United Nations System and all relevant stakeholders to discuss water and climate related actions in support of the implementation of the Decade of Action. Participants will present transformative solutions to address systemic gaps in the implementation of related SDGs and identify “accelerators” necessary to drive progress on the 2030 Agenda. Access to water, sanitation and hygiene is a key determinant of health, and a key pillar in preventing and combatting any disease transmission (like COVID-19). The adaptation to climate change needs additional care for the pandemic under increasing water related disaster risks. The SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework, currently being developed by UN-Water, can provide a relevant basis for the discussion on how to place water and sanitation at the heart of the Decade of Action. The outcomes of this event will be in direct response to the global call of the UN Secretary-General for accelerating sustainable solutions to the world’s biggest challenges and inspire action on water-related issues.

¹ A/RES/74/4

Programme

- **09:00-09:50 Opening: Water, sanitation and climate solutions to accelerate progress on the 2030 Agenda** – moderated by H.E. Mr. Mahmamin Mahmadaminov, Permanent Representative of Tajikistan to the United Nations

Speakers:

- H.E. Mr. Sirojiddin Muhridin, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan
 - H.E. Ms. Karina Gould, Minister of International Development, Canada
 - H.E. Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, The Netherlands
 - Video message: H.E. Ms. Krista Mikkonen, Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, Finland
 - Video message: H.E. Mr. João Pedro Matos Fernandes, Minister of Environment and Climate Action, Portugal
 - H.E. Mrs. Katalin Annamária Bogyay, Permanent Representative of Hungary
 - H.E. Mr. Ishikane Kimihiro, Permanent Representative of Japan
 - H.E. Mr. Lazarus O. Amayo, Permanent Representative of Kenya
 - H.E. Mr. Burhan Gafoor, Permanent Representative of Singapore
- **09:50-10:50 Interactive dialogue: Identifying accelerators needed to drive progress on the 2030 Agenda** – moderated by H.E. Mr. Henk Ovink, Special Envoy for International Water Affairs, The Netherlands.

Panelists:

- Mr. Gilbert F. Hounqbo, UN-Water Chair and President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development
- Mr. Petteri Taalas, Secretary-General, World Meteorological Organization
- Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director, UN-Habitat
- Ms. Shamila Nair-Bedouelle, Assistant Director-General for Natural Science at UNESCO
- Mr. Maarten van Aalst, Director, Red Cross and Red Crescent Climate Centre
- Mr. Péter Kovács, Vice-Chair of the Bureau of UNECE Water Convention
- Dr. Jerome Delli Priscoli, Chair of GWP Technical Committee, High-level Experts and Leaders Panel on Water and Disasters (HELP)

Interventions/questions from the floor

- **10:50-11:00 Closing remarks** – Mr. Liu Zhenmin, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs