



ODUMUNC 39

Global Sustainable Development Goal Summit

Establishing Water Security and the Right to Water

By: Robert Townsend and Kym Ganczak



Issue Brief for the
Global Summit on SDG Improvement and Implementation

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by: *Kym Ganczak and Robby Townsend*
Old Dominion University Model United Nations Society

Introduction:

The importance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot be stressed enough. The SDGs were created by the Member States of the United Nations to establish clear goals for development aid and assistance, to meet insure that basic human needs are met for all humanity

One key factor to ensuring that citizens from every country in the world survive and thrive is water security. Water is one of the most basic and necessary human needs. Most in developed countries take water completely for granted. But for *billions* worldwide, safe drinking water is not easy to come by. For this reason, the SDGs establish an unambiguous commitment for the year 2030: ‘Goal 6: Ensure access to water and sanitation for all.’



Enormous progress has been made toward this goal, especially under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the guidelines created for the years 2000-2015. But huge needs remain:

- 2.6 billion people have gained access to improved drinking water sources since 1990, but 663 million people are still without

- At least 1.8 billion people globally use a source of drinking water that is fecally contaminated
- Between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of the global population using an improved drinking water source has increased from 76 per cent to 91 per cent
- But water scarcity affects more than 40 per cent of the global population and is projected to rise. Over 1.7 billion people are currently living in river basins where water use exceeds recharge
- 2.4 billion people lack access to basic sanitation services, such as toilets or latrines
- More than 80 per cent of wastewater resulting from human activities is discharged into rivers or sea without any pollution removal
- Each day, nearly 1,000 children die due to preventable water and sanitation-related diarrhoeal diseases.¹

According to UN-Water (2013), “Water security is defined as the capacity of a population to safeguard sustainable access to adequate quantities of acceptable quality water for sustaining livelihoods, human well-being, and socio-economic development, for ensuring protection against water-borne pollution and water-related disasters, and for preserving ecosystems in a climate of peace and political stability.”

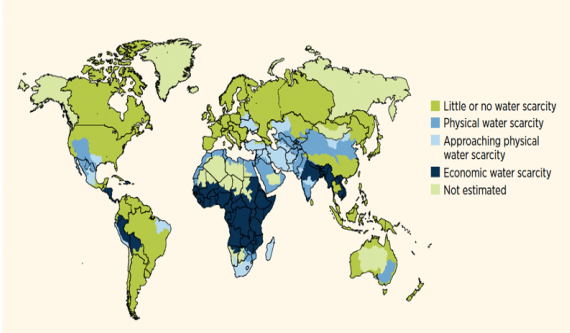
¹ ‘Goal 6: Ensure access to water and sanitation for all.’ 2015 - *Time for Global Action for People and Planet Homepage*.
<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/water-and-sanitation/>



Among the factors affecting water security include “from biophysical... infrastructural, institutional, political, social and financial” factors that are intricately linked to water sources. With a 40% water shortage predicted to occur by 2030, the world must act swiftly to ensure all peoples achieve and retain access to clean water. However, States have had difficulty agreeing on a universal definition of “water security,” which makes a consensus on solving the issue more contentious.

Water affects citizens of the world in countless ways. The obvious is the need to drink. But scarcity and the control of water can lead to conflicts between nations, and increase conflicts where fighting is already occurring (like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for example).

Global physical and economic water scarcity



I. History

When the United Nations was formed, the central focus was to ensure safety for the world’s citizens, and the focus for decades was reducing and containing wars, genocides, colonization, and other large conflicts. As the United Nations has progressed, focuses have expanded to not only large-scale issues, but also ones that affect specific vulnerable population, like those in poverty and those discriminated against for a variety of reasons.

In 1990, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) had one of the earlier meetings

specifically dedicated to the issue of water security, focusing on West Asia. In these meetings, they discussed many concerns which are still of top priority today: pollution, environmental threats, and potential conflicts between countries for the limited water resources. But while this region was forward thinking in discussing these issues, they have so far failed to save the region from water stress, as every country in the region is currently under high or extremely high water stress.

Current Situation:

There are three central issues that must be considered during your committee’s discussion on this topic: Safe drinking water, water security, and environmental sustainability. All three are intimately connected, but also have differing intricacies that could cause disagreements between different delegations.

Safe Drinking Water

The United Nations estimates that 2.6 billion people lack access to basic sanitation worldwide and 884 million people lack access to safe drinking water. To ensure that each person can meet his or her basic needs, each person needs between 50 and 100 liters of water daily. The water source should be within 1000 meters of the person’s home, water should not cost more than 3% of the household’s income, and collection time should not exceed 30 minutes (UNW-DPAC). The water crisis disproportionately affects the poor, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

There are two main types of water scarcity: economic water scarcity, and physical water scarcity. Physical water scarcity is what it sounds like; a state or region lacks water resources. But economic water scarcity is another important factor, which is essentially when an area could have safe drinking water

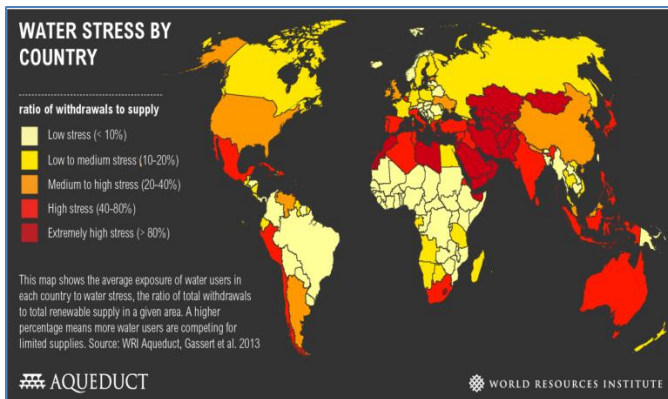


available, but poverty, poor infrastructure, or other economic issues are leading to a lack of water access. This is a less-prominent issue, but one that should be a focus during your debates.

Water Security

Water security is an issue that affects people on an individual and state-level. According to the UNDP, 41 countries experienced water stress, while 10 nearly depleted their renewable freshwater supply. The more stressed countries get regarding water, the more likely conflicts will arise for water sources. Of course, this disproportionately affects nations in drier climates, with less infrastructure.

Furthermore, fossil fuels are not a clean form of energy, and their increased use will cause more polluted freshwater if the practice isn't curbed. Waste also pollutes freshwater sources, an especially large issue in highly populated states. If pollution and sustainable sources of energy are not taken into consideration, all of the attempts to bring universal water security can't succeed.



Role of the UN:

The responsibility of this Conference is to create solutions to these very real and very immediate issues regarding water security. The United Nations is uniquely capable of bringing together Member States from all over the world to come to compromises that benefit everyone, and this issue is one that every single country has a stake in, albeit to differing degrees. And with the final document produced by the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015 adopted by all 193 Member States, the UN has authority to work towards this important goal.

Environmental Sustainability

As the International Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) continues to warn, climate change is a serious threat to local communities worldwide, especially those who are in poverty. Worsening weather conditions and more droughts could lead to even more water scarcity worldwide. Droughts have already been getting worse and more extremely, which has led to water issues in parts of even highly industrialized countries such as the United States and Australia.

This goal of universal access to clean water and sanitation is an obligation for the international community, to be completed by 2030. This means that the Conference must be committed to both short-term and long-term solutions to this issue that will only continue to grow.



Specific goals were detailed in January 2015 at the UN-Water Annual International Zaragoza Conference. Water and Sustainable Development. These include the following formal goals:

- 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 waste water, and increasing recycling and safe reuse by x% globally (percentage to be agreed).
- 6.4 by 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater 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 cooperation as appropriate.
- 6.6 by 2020 protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes.
- 6.A by 2030, expand international cooperation 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.B support and strengthen the participation of local communities for

improving water and sanitation management.²

These are the goal to be achieved. Along with thinking both short and long-term, delegations now must focus on making them happen. Implementation of these water issues on a local, regional, and worldwide scale is everyone responsibility. This Conference will determine how that happens. Ensuring individuals in poverty have access to drinking water, ensuring conflicts in regions with high water stress are prevented, that global climate change is addressed in a way that reduces pollution and the dangerous effects of droughts and other weather events which can harm water security and safe drinking water initiatives.



Below is a list of some various United Nations affiliates who play essential parts in water security and the Sustainable Development Goals and can give some insight into how you can help move the world towards completing SDG no. 6 on universal access to water:

- UN-Water: Created in 2003, UN-Water is an inter-agency coordination

² 'Water and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)', *2015 UN-Water Annual International Zaragoza Conference. Water and Sustainable Development: From Vision to Action. 15-17 January 2015.*
http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/waterandsustainabledevelopment2015/open_working_group_sdg.shtml



mechanism within the United Nations that handles all freshwater issues, including access to water. It's stated purpose is to "complement and add value to existing programmes and projects by facilitating synergies and joint efforts, so as to maximize system-wide coordinated action and coherence as well as effectiveness of the support provided to Member States in their efforts towards achieving the time-bound goals, targets and actions related to its scope of work as agreed by the international community, particularly those contained in the Millennium Development Goals and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (World Summit on Sustainable Development)."

- Joint Monitoring Program (JMP): The JMP, a joint effort between the WHO and UNICEF, is the UN mechanism that monitors progress towards Millennium Development Goal 7.C which aims to halve the proportion of the world's population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015. The program began in 1990 and reports every two years on progress.
- Task Force on Water Security: Created to address the difficult task of developing a working definition of water security, addressing transnational concerns, and focusing on individual's access to clean water. It's objectives include identifying policy responses by the UN and other actors to address global security challenges, describing a broad set of issues that are related to overcoming the water crisis, and creating a dialogue to encourage understanding and the need for action.
- UN Development Program (UNDP): UNDP works with multiple facets of the

international community, including governments, the private sector, and NGOs to attempt to reach the MDG. It supports a wide range of initiatives including coordinating country assistance by UN partners, special attention to fragile states, local delivery of water supply, and incorporation of water and sanitation into national development planning.

Key UN Resolutions and Documents:

The United Nations Millennium Declaration Resolution A/RES/55/2 describes the Millennium Development Goals, the predecessors of the Sustainable Development Goals. Even though the MDGs were quite thorough, there is no explicit mention of the right to sanitary water.

One of the earliest official UN discussions on water rights was in 2002, when the General Assembly discussed Palestinian accusations of Israel cutting off vital natural resources like water (A/57/536). In 2010, Resolution 64/292 was passed, which explicitly recognizes access to water and sanitation as a human right, including the fact that access to clean water is necessary to realize all other basic human rights.

Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/RES/18/1 (September 2011) calls upon states to take the initiative in ensuring financing exists to sustainably deliver water and sanitation services to their citizenry.

Report of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development A/CONF.216/16 (June 2012) discusses the results of the Rio+20 Conference from June of 2012.

In 2015, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, a body that has been seriously discussing water issues longer



than the rest of the United Nations, released a report titled Water Supply and Sanitation in the Arab Region: Looking beyond 2015. You might be able to find some helpful suggestions here as to how to move forward with your debate. Finally, The Official Sustainable Development Goals can be found at the link above. This is the reason why your delegation is meeting.

Proposals for further action:

UN Studies: At the least, the member states of the United Nations should be able to agree to further study the issue of clean water availability. A study authorized by the SDG conference would buy time for many hesitant governments, allowing them to diplomatically defer action, especially on the highly sensitive issue of spending and committing new financing.

Funding problems: For virtually all other proposals, the most pressing issue is where the money will come from. Proposals to dig safe wells, improve urban water use and sewage treatment, for greater investment in desalination or more efficient farming techniques, are meaningless without funding. The greatest job facing the SDG conference is finding the money to meet the goals for 2030.

Donor governments are hesitant to offer additional financial support. Traditional key supporters such as Japan and the United States are unable or unwilling to offer more money. New donors such as China and India resist obligations. The European Union is shifting funds to deal with the migration crisis of 2015-16, and cannot find additional funds for development activity like the water issue.

Prioritization: Thus the most likely source of funding will be shifting resources previously spend on other development activity, such as food or health, industrial development or agriculture. Clear water, in other words, means

shifting priorities. Many member states will resist this step.

Country Positions:

Africa:

Many African states are in need under the SDGs. Large stretches of the middle of the continent, from Somalia to Senegal and Sudan to Zambia, are experiencing water scarcity, limiting economic development and sometimes human survival. Some of those countries, along with the rest of the states from the south and north, are experiencing some degree of water shortage. African nations are united in their need for more resources to improve their infrastructure and increase their citizens' access to drinking water. However, like with any other region, not all nations will necessarily agree with the specifics of a plan, especially when political factors are taken into consideration.

Asia:

China and India, along with some other smaller nations, are experiencing either physical water scarcity, economic water scarcity, or approaching this dangerous territory. But they no longer are international aid recipients. Rather, their concern is to promote global welfare while minimizing the cost they must pay for it. The water scarcity issues found in India and China can be largely attributed to pollution and overpopulation of urban centers. As two of the largest polluters in the world, they have a responsibility to their citizens and the rest of the world to find more sustainable ways of growing. However, China and India will not cede their ability to continue industrializing in order to appease other countries. They may be willing to help other nations, but may also push back if they are accused of having fault.

Central and South America:

States in Central and South America vary greatly in water stress. In Mexico and along the Western edge of South America, there is



approaching or present physical water scarcity. For most other countries in Latin America, water is not a high priority issue. In Central American countries, there is less water scarcity, while most regions of South America (including Brazil) has little or no water scarcity. Environmentally sustainable development is of top priority to the states in this region; poverty is high, so industrialization is seen as necessary to many state leaders, but there are also serious environmental concerns to consider. Some Latin American countries see investment in water issues as irrelevant to their needs. They approve international action, but are cautious about excessive investment in this one issue, which is not their top concern. Finding a way to merge their priorities and avoid paralysis will be important for these countries.

European Union:

According to the European Union, SDG no. 6 is not about Europe but the recipients of European development assistance. The 28 member states of the EU already work together to help regions of the world affected by water scarcity.

Middle East:

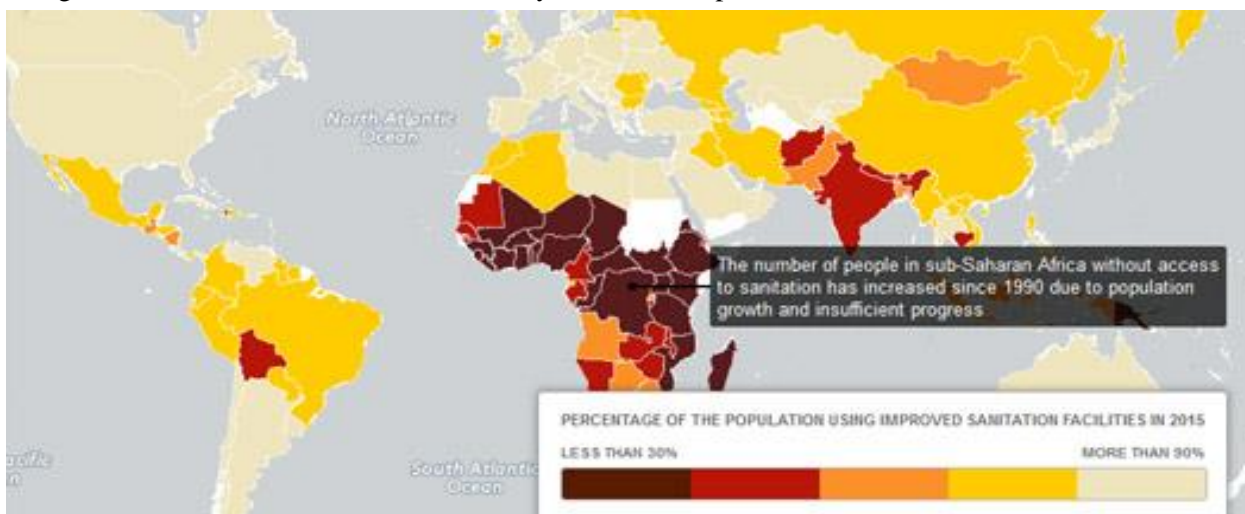
Like Africa, every state in the Greater Middle East is experiencing or nearly experiencing serious physical water scarcity. This region was at the forefront of water security

in the early 1990s, and continues to be leaders because of the immense relevancy of the topic to the region. Desertification is one of the largest issues causing water scarcity, and this is one that the countries of the Arab League might not be able to solve alone.

Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen are only a few of those with extreme water stress in the region. With such a volatile political climate in this region, cooperation is necessary but can be difficult. Several countries in the Persian Gulf have invested heavily in desalination techniques, but this is not a solution for poorer countries in the region.

Pacific Islands:

Australia, like the US, has its own internal issues with water scarcity, but is also willingly a large participant in foreign aid initiatives. New Zealand has expressed support for international development goals like the SDGs. The Pacific island states are experiencing water shortages as sea level rise causes damage to their freshwater infrastructure. Tuvalu declared a state of emergency in 2011 over water scarcity, and others may have to follow suit. Clearly the best way for these nations to get freshwater is desalination plants, which are currently very expensive. Pacific island nations may want to fight for foreign aid to help fund these plants, and call for serious cuts in other





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nation's pollution that is leading to rising sea levels.

United States and Canada:

Water security was not a top priority for Canada's post-2015 Development Agenda, but the election of a new government in October 2015 is expected to lead to dramatic changes in Canadian development and aid policies. For the United States, water shortages are an issue in some Western regions, especially in Arizona and California. While economically serious, these

shortages are not life threatening, and do not qualify for help under the SDGs. The United States strongly supports the SDGs, but is very hesitant to increase funding due to its on-going constitutional crisis and the refusal of important segments of public opinion and government to approve any new spending. Speakers representing the US have stated support for the idea that safe drinking water should be considered a human right.



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