

# THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND THE WATER SECTOR

Rozemarijn ter Horst, Andrea van der Kerk\*

■ In September 2015, all 193 countries of the United Nations (UN) agreed on a new set of development goals that will follow up on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which end in 2015. Unlike the MDGs, these new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) form a framework for development in *all countries*, not just developing countries. The framework comprises 17 goals and 169 targets, covering a wide range of topics promoting sustainable development. There is one specific water goal, and several targets linked to water issues. Now the goals and targets have been adopted, the next steps will be about implementation and monitoring. Each country is expected to develop a strategy and roadmap to implement the SDGs and monitor progress. To help countries monitor progress, a global indicator framework is being developed by an Expert Group guided by the Statistical Commission of the UN. The Netherlands will be one of the pilot countries in which the water-related indicators will be tested.

■ In this article we provide insights in what the SDGs are and specifically highlight the water-related targets. Secondly, we will look at the expected implementation and monitoring of the goals in developing and developed countries. The Netherlands will be a pilot country to test a number of SDG water-related indicators, which is expected to provide more insights in how the implementation of the water-related SDGs will influence policy and practice in the Netherlands.

## SDG process

Since 2010, UN member states and a wide variety of stakeholders have been shaping a new international development agenda to follow up on the Millennium Development Goals that end in 2015. This post-2015 development process culminated in the decision to develop a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the Rio+20 Conference in 2012. Whereas the MDGs were formulated by a small group of experts, the SDGs have mainly been negotiated in the “Open Working Group” (OWG); a platform where negotiators of governments discussed with

international NGOs, international organizations and bilateral donors. Also a High Level Panel of Eminent Persons was established to advise the UN Secretary General on the new development framework. The suggestions of both the Panel and the Open Working Group formed the basis for the new development agenda.

In August 2015, the 193 UN member states reached consensus on the new development agenda “Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. This agenda has been adopted at the “UN summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda” on 25-27 September 2015 in New York.<sup>1</sup>

The Agenda comprises 17 Sustainable Development Goals with 169 associated targets. “These Goals are a blueprint for a better future”, the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon declared after the adoption of the goals, “Now we must use the goals to transform the world. We will do that through partnership and through commitment. We must leave no-one behind.”<sup>2</sup>

\* Rozemarijn ter Horst and Andrea van der Kerk, Secretaries Netherlands National IHP-HWRP Committee ([www.ihp-hwrp.nl](http://www.ihp-hwrp.nl) / [ihp.hwrp@unesco.nl](mailto:ihp.hwrp@unesco.nl))



## Water and SDGs

Water is much more integrated and visible in the SDGs than in the MDGs. There is even a specific goal focusing entirely on freshwater and sanitation issues; **SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all**, with six technical targets (6.1 to 6.6) and two targets related to the Means of Implementation (MoI)<sup>3</sup> of the goal (6.6a and 6.6b).<sup>3</sup> The first two technical targets (6.1 and 6.2) build on the MDG drinking-water and sanitation targets. The other four technical targets (6.3 to 6.6) address the broader water context that was not explicitly included in the MDG framework, such as waste water management and water quality, water efficiency, integrated water resources management, and the protection of water-related ecosystems. The two Means of Implementation (MoI) targets (6a and 6b) refer to international cooperation and capacity building support as well as the participation of local communities for implementation of SDG 6. These MoI targets thus highlight the need for an enabling environment for the implementation of the technical targets. SDG 17 is also specifically focused on creating an enabling environment for the implementation of all goals and includes targets on finance, capacity building and other governance related topics.

When we look at the other SDGs, fresh water seems to be linked to almost all goals such as the goals on food (SDG 2), health (SDG 3), climate change (SDG 13), forests (SDG 15), etc. Water is also mentioned specifically in a number of targets such as 3.3, 5a, 11.5, 12.4, 15.1 and 15.8. Please find an overview of the water-related targets in the text box below and a complete overview of the Goals via <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org>.

### OVERVIEW WATER-RELATED SDG TARGETS

**GOAL 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture**

**GOAL 6. 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 substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally

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 in improving water and sanitation management

### **GOAL 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable**

11.5 – By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations

#### **Other water-related targets:**

Target 3.3 – By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, **water-borne diseases** and other communicable diseases.

Target 5.a – Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.

Target 12.4 – By 2020, achieve the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle, in accordance with agreed international frameworks, and significantly reduce their release to air, **water** and soil in order to minimize their adverse impacts on human health and the environment

Target 15.1 – By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland **freshwater ecosystems** and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements

Target 15.8 – By 2020, introduce measures to prevent the introduction and significantly reduce the impact of invasive alien species on land and **water ecosystems** and control or eradicate the priority species

### **Implementation and monitoring**

Now the goals have been adopted, the next steps will be about implementation and monitoring. Everybody is invited to contribute to the implementation- from governments to the civil society and the private sector. However, huge investments are needed to implement the goals. Trillions of dollars a year, according to World Bank Group's Chief Financial Officer, Bertrand Badré, who indicates that for infrastructure alone already 1,5 trillion USDollars is needed yearly.<sup>4</sup> If investments will lag behind, the SDGs will just be "words on paper", as Ban Ki Moon warned in his speech at the UN summit in September. The large number of targets (169) is another challenge, as there is a risk that countries will just pick and invest in the ones they like (e.g. because they are cheaper, or less politically sensitive) and neglect other targets. This is even more likely as there are no specific accountability mechanisms in place (yet) to hold governments accountable for the implementation of the targets. Furthermore, many goals are interlinked and trade-offs should be addressed; if targets are not approached in an integrated way, interventions to meet one target could have unintended consequences on others.<sup>5</sup>

A High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development has been established to provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations on the implementation of all goals. This intergovernmental platform under auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is mandated to conduct regular State-led (voluntary) reviews and thematic reviews. The next meeting will take place in July 2016.<sup>6</sup> Discussions are ongoing about the creation of thematic (intergovernmental) platforms to review the implementation of specific goals such as the water goal.

Implementation and monitoring is expected to happen at the national level. Although no official accountability mechanisms are in place, it is believed that a global monitoring framework can provide the information needed to put pressure on low-performing countries and to hold them accountable. It is expected that the indicators will be guiding for the implementation, as countries will not be 'acknowledged' for actions that are not measured by the indicators. A set of global indicators is being developed by a UN expert group

of representatives of national statistical offices from 28 countries, the Inter Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDG), under the guidance of the UN Statistical Commission. This Commission will probably adopt the final list of indicators in March 2016, after which it will be presented to the designated political inter-governmental process (for instance the UN General Assembly) for formal adoption.

The Netherlands is a member of the IAEG-SDG and is being represented by Jan Pieter Smits (senior statistical researcher at the Dutch national statistics office, CBS). Open consultations with stakeholders about the indicators took place online. Some representatives from regional and international agencies, civil society and the private sector also attended the IAEG-SDGs session as observers. The aim of the expert group is to develop a simple yet robust indicator framework, addressing all SDGs and targets. The technical indicators should reflect the ambitions of the goals set by the politicians. This is a tough task, with more than 300 proposed indicators to review and accept, adjust, or discard. If a target is not measurable it will also be difficult to hold countries accountable for (non)progress and most probably the issue will fall off the political agendas.

On 26-28 October in Bangkok the UN expert group agreed on accepting 159 indicators, classified as “green”. There are also still a number of “grey” indicators that require more in-depth discussion or methodological development. In the water goal there are still some grey indicators, for instance those on water use efficiency and IWRM. Also the indicator for 11.5 on disaster risk reduction is still marked as “grey”.<sup>7</sup> The intention is to gather data on the indicators a yearly basis, which entails a big challenge for some countries. The shape of the reporting process (i.e. when and how should countries report on progress) is still being discussed.

### **What does this mean for the water sector?**

Each country is expected to develop its own roadmap for SDG implementation and is invited to complement the global monitoring framework with additional indicators at national, regional or program level. Governments are also responsible for monitoring and reporting on the progress of SDG implementation in their own country.

However, in some cases coordinated data collection and monitoring and evaluation is necessary like for work on transboundary waters. It is still unclear how this will work in practice, and which actors need to collaborate or provide data.

Several UN agencies are also setting up international monitoring initiatives to support countries in their monitoring efforts. UN-Water is the UN system focal point for the water goal and also contributes to the discussions on target 11.5 on water-related disasters.<sup>8</sup> UN-Water is currently trying to integrate UN-monitoring initiatives for SDG 6. Monitoring can build upon the mechanisms set in place for the MDGs, such as the already existing WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme on Water Supply and Sanitation (JMP) for targets 6.1 and 6.2, and the Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS) for 6a and 6b. For the “new” targets 6.3. to 6.6, an initiative called Global Expanded Water Monitoring Initiative (GEMI) is created as a partnership of UNEP, UN-Habitat, UNICEF, FAO, UNESCO, WMO, and WHO under the UN-Water umbrella.<sup>9</sup>

GEMI aims to support national governments in fulfilling their monitoring responsibilities for SDG6. GEMI will test the proposed indicators for SDG 6 in pilot countries to see if they are sound, feasible and fit for purpose. Both developing and developed countries are encouraged to engage as pilot country. The Netherlands will be one of the pilot countries in which the indicators will be tested. The Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment is the focal point for this exercise. Within GEMI several target teams are being set up, each coordinated by a participating UN agency. These groups are inclusive and open to (Dutch) research partners.

### **What does this international process mean for the Netherlands?**

The Dutch government has indicated that the process on the indicator development is now leading and that activities on SDG implementation will start once the monitoring framework is concluded. A first analysis will be made of which processes can best be used for implementation or reporting of the SDG framework, but a future policy debate will provide more clarity on Dutch SDG related activities. It is already clear

that it is expected of the private and public sector to join the implementation of the SDGs. Also, the Netherlands would like to make the best use of existing international platforms and initiatives to support the implementation.

In the water sector the Netherlands National IHP-HWRP Committee has taken the lead in planning a joint workshop with German and Belgian partners on “Exploring new data for SMART monitoring of water SDG targets”. The workshop took place in Maastricht on 30 November and 1 December and brought together scientists, policy-makers and practitioners from the three countries. They assessed the present state of monitoring in the three countries; explored what the three countries can offer in terms of new data sources and monitoring techniques for smart monitoring of the water related SDG targets; and identified gaps between what is currently being monitored and what needs to be monitored to fulfill the monitoring responsibilities of the water SDGs. The report will be published in January.<sup>10</sup>

The Dutch national statistics office (CBS) has already made a first assessment of which information is already being gathered in the Netherlands on the proposed water-related indicators. The assessment shows that the Netherlands already gathers most of the information needed to monitor the water-related SDG targets either via the CBS or via authorities such as Rijkswaterstaat and several knowledge institutes. It also shows that we already achieved, or almost achieved Goal 6.1 on access to safe and affordable drinking water for all and Goal 6.2 on equitable sanitation and hygiene for all. A challenge will be measuring more complex Water Goals such as 6.5 (*on IWRM Implementation and transboundary basin management*) and the Means of Implementation (6.a and 6.b). Some workshop participants also indicated that for goals 6.3 and 6.4 more information is needed than suggested in the CBS report. This also depends on the finalisation of the indicators. A more detailed description of what each indicator entails can be found in the UN-Water report on metadata.<sup>11</sup>

In the workshop it became clear that also developing countries will encounter challenges to report on the

indicators. In Germany for instance, most data are collected at the regional (i.e. “Länder”) level and it is difficult to bring the information together at the national level as is required for SDG reporting. In the workshop also new innovative monitoring techniques were presented that can contribute to reliable monitoring in many (developing) countries. Monitoring programmes such as JMP, GLAAS and GEMI should remain flexible and open to new, less traditional approaches for monitoring in various contexts.

In March 2016, it will become clear which indicators are selected to be part of the monitoring system, and what will be expected from countries in terms of reporting. It is too early to say what the implementation and monitoring of the Goals will exactly mean for government agencies, farmers, water boards, water utilities or households. The GEMI pilot country exercise is expected to give more insights in this regard. In the workshop several scientists, policy-makers and practitioners from the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium already expressed their motivation to continue to work together on this topic. The Dutch water sector has a lot to offer when it comes to innovative monitoring and data collection techniques that can be useful in both developed and developing countries. The SDGs provide an opportunity for the Netherlands to show that we are truly a leading water country. ■

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## NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING

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Afgelopen september hebben alle 193 landen van de Verenigde Naties (VN) overeenstemming bereikt over 17 ambitieuze doelen voor duurzame ontwikkeling wereldwijd: de “Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”. Deze doelen volgen de Millennium Development Goals (MDG’s) op die eind 2015 eindigen. De SDGs vormen, in tegenstelling tot de MDG’s, richtlijnen voor ontwikkeling in alle landen, niet alleen ontwikkelingslanden. De 17 doelen en 169 sub-doelen zijn gericht op het bevorderen van duurzame ontwikkeling van 2016 tot 2030. Terwijl de MDGs destijds zijn opgesteld door een klein groepje experts, zijn de SDGs ontwikkeld op basis van openbare consultaties. Ook is er voor het eerst één specifiek doel helemaal gericht op water. Op dit moment worden al strategieën uitgewerkt om de doelen te behalen. Dit gebeurt vooralsnog door donoren, ontwikkelingsbanken en NGO’s. Uiteindelijk zullen alle landen verantwoordelijkheid moeten nemen voor het behalen van de doelen. Om in de gaten te houden of de doelen behaald worden, wordt er aan een monitoring systeem gewerkt met voor elk doel een aantal indicatoren. Vertegenwoordigers van 28 nationale statistische bureaus, waaronder het Nederlandse CBS, buigen zich nu over de kwaliteit van de voorgestelde indicatoren. In de lente van volgend jaar zullen de indicatoren worden voorgelegd ter goedkeuring aan alle VN landen.

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In dit artikel zullen we inzicht geven in wat de SDGs zijn, en specifiek aandacht besteden aan de doelen gericht op water. Verder kijken we voorruit naar de implementatie en monitoring van de water-gerelateerde doelen. Nederland neemt een bijzondere plek in omdat het als pilot land zal fungeren voor het testen van een aantal water-gerelateerde indicatoren. De resultaten daarvan zullen meer inzicht geven in de impact van de water-gerelateerde SDGs op het Nederlandse beleid en de praktijk.

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- 1 More info about the Summit: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/summit/>
- 2 ‘UN adopts new Global Goals, charting sustainable development for people and planet by 2030’, UN News Centre 25 Sept 2015.
- 3 The means of implementation (MoI) refer to the different aspects necessary to support implementation of the targets such as financing, trade, technology, capacity building, policy and institutional coherence, data and monitoring, and multi-stakeholder partnerships ([www.unwater.org/sdgs/means-of-implementation/en/](http://www.unwater.org/sdgs/means-of-implementation/en/)).
- 4 ‘World Bank Group (2015) ‘Achieving trillions out of billions’ [www.fin4dev.org/2015/07/13/achieving-trillions-out-of-billions/](http://www.fin4dev.org/2015/07/13/achieving-trillions-out-of-billions/), consulted on 11-11-2015.
- 5 ICSU (2015) ‘Review of Targets for the Sustainable Development Goals: The Science Perspective’
- 6 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2016>
- 7 Results of the list of indicators reviewed at the second IAEG-SDG meeting, available at <http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/meetings/iaeg-sdgs-meeting-02/Outcomes/Agenda%20Item%204%20-%20Review%20of%20proposed%20indicators%20-%2020%20Nov%202015.pdf>
- 8 For target 11.5 the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) plays an important role and influences the discussions through the Hyogo Framework for Action (2005-2015) and Sendai Framework for Action (2015-2030) : [www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/sendai-framework](http://www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/sendai-framework)
- 9 <http://www.unwater.org/gemi/en/>
- 10 For more information on the workshop please contact [ihp.hwrp@unesco.nl](mailto:ihp.hwrp@unesco.nl)
- 11 UN-Water (2015), ‘Metadata on Suggested Indicators for Global Monitoring of SDG 6 on Water and Sanitation’ [www.unwater.org/publications/publications-detail/en/c/296330/](http://www.unwater.org/publications/publications-detail/en/c/296330/)