

Urgent shift in water management crucial if SDGs are to be met

The High Level Panel on Water (HLPW) says a fundamental change in the way the world manages water is necessary if the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly goal six, are to be achieved.



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“Whoever you are, whatever you do, wherever you live, we urge you get involved and contribute to meeting this great challenge: safe water and sanitation for all, and our water resources managed sustainably. Make every drop count, it’s time for action,” members of the panel said in an open letter released in New York on Wednesday, 14 March.

“Making Every Drop Count: An Agenda for Water Action” presents many recommendations as part of an outcome report from the panel, which was convened in January 2016 by the United Nations secretary-general António Guterres.

“World leaders now recognise that we face a global water crisis and that we need to reassess how we value and manage water. The panel’s recommendations can help to safeguard water resources and make access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation a reality for all,” Guterres said.

The panel’s report found that the water crisis has many dimensions.

According to the report, 40% of the world’s people are affected by water scarcity, with as many as 700-million people at

risk of being displaced by intense water scarcity by 2030.

The report also reveals that more than 2-billion people are compelled to drink unsafe water and more than 4.5-billion people do not have safely managed sanitation services.

“Women and girls suffer disproportionately when water and sanitation are lacking, affecting health and often restricting work and education opportunities. 80% of wastewater is discharged untreated into the environment and water-related disasters account for 90% of the 1,000 most devastating natural disasters since 1990,” the report said.

World Bank Group president Jim Yong Kim said that the ecosystems on which life itself is based, including our food security, energy sustainability, public health, jobs and cities - are all at risk because of how water is managed today.

“The work of this panel took place at the level of heads of state and government because the world can no longer afford to take water for granted,” Kim said.

As part of the recommendations to address these challenges, the panel is advocating for evidence-based policies and innovative approaches at the global, national and local level to make water management and water and sanitation services attractive for investment and more disaster resilient.

Water infrastructure investment

The panel called for policies that will allow for at least a doubling of water infrastructure investment in the next five years.

The panel's report sets forth a new approach to catalyse change and build partnerships and cooperation, outlining why an integrated and inclusive approach that draws in sectors like agriculture and other stakeholders, such as city mayors, is needed.

The report also made the case that ways of working between, for example, governments, communities, the private sector and researchers are essential.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said: “We have a single opportunity to change the narrative on water by acting timeously in pursuit of a more promising future, in a better world which should never face the scenario of the last single drop of water in our lifetime and for generations to come.”

The HLPW consists of 11 heads of state and a special advisor. The core focus of the panel is the commitment to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, SDG six, as well as to contribute to the achievement of the other SDGs that rely on the development and management of water resources.

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