

# Post-2015 consultation on environmental sustainability

Submission by WaterAid

## Why we must focus on core blockages and not the details of specific environmental issues

Rather than attempt to cover every single environmental issue in depth, the consultation could more usefully focus on the core factors underpinning the lack of progress to date. In particular, the second phase of the consultation should focus on several fundamental issues relating to environmental sustainability that have not been resolved.

### **The toxic political context**

The process and outcomes of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations, Rio+20 and even the relatively uncontroversial Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) have demonstrated that the political context for multilateral sustainability issues is still deeply toxic.

Multilateral agreements on environmental sustainability are perceived as a restriction on economic growth and freedom. This perception leads governments around the world to see global agreements on environmental sustainability as a cost and a negative factor for their international competitiveness. The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) and the subsequent Wealth Accounting and the Valuation of Ecosystem Services (WAVES) initiative go some way to valuing ecosystems, but more than 20 years after the Brundtland Report, the economic case for sustainability has still not been won at a political level.

### **Ending the divide between environment and development**

We talk of sustainable development as linking environment, economy and people, yet environmental sustainability is still very much divided from economic and social development in practice. Even this very thematic consultation has a split between environmental sustainability and the rest of development.

Combined with the toxicity of the multilateral sustainability debate, there is a risk of environment being pushed aside in the post-2015 framework. The framework needs to show environment and development as an indivisible whole and an opportunity for positive change.

## Water as an example of a holistic approach to environment and development

Using WaterAid's experience, this discussion note outlines a possible approach for water. This approach is equally applicable to other issues such as energy or food.

People around the world attach different values to water – social, cultural, environmental and economic. These different values shape the way that we talk about water and frame the policy issues.

### **As a development issue**

Water is the foundation of social and economic development and, along with food and shelter, is one of the most basic human needs. Yet 783 million people lack access to safe drinking water<sup>1</sup> and diarrhoeal disease is the second leading cause of under-5 mortality globally, causing more under-5 deaths than AIDS, malaria and measles combined<sup>2</sup>. People also use water to grow crops, water livestock and produce goods and services, underpinning livelihoods, economic and social development.

For those without water in the home, the burden of collecting water falls mainly on women and children, who spend up to eight hours a day collecting water<sup>3</sup>. This is time that could be used for attending school, earning a living or recreation.

### **As a security and stability issue**

Water is also a strategic issue with implications for national security. The prospect of 'water wars' is unlikely – violence over water does not seem strategically rational, hydrographically effective, or economically viable<sup>4</sup>. However, poor water management combined with wider factors such as poverty or social tensions can pose significant risks to state stability and integrity.

“During the next ten years, many countries important to the United States will experience water problems... that will risk instability and state failure, increase regional tensions, and distract them from working with the United States on important policy objectives... Water problems will hinder the ability of key countries to produce food and generate energy, posing a risk to global food markets and hobbling economic growth.”

US Intelligence Community Assessment on Global Water Security, 2012

### **As an economic issue**

Water is a key economic input to many industries, such as food and beverage, and the extractives industries. Poor management of water can directly affect business operations as well as pose reputational risks and threats to social licence to operate

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<sup>1</sup> WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (2012) *Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation*.

<sup>2</sup> WHO/UNICEF Child Health Epidemiology Reference Group (2012).

<sup>3</sup> Dessalegn, M et al (2012) *Voices from the Source: Struggles with local water security in Ethiopia*. ODI/WaterAid.

<sup>4</sup> Wolf, A.T. (2006) *Conflict and Co-operation over Transboundary Water*. UNDR 2006 Background Papers. Available at [http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2006/papers/Wolf\\_Aaron.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2006/papers/Wolf_Aaron.pdf)

at a company level<sup>5</sup>.

At a macro-economic scale, rainfall variability can have a direct impact on GDP if the economy depends on sectors that are exposed to climatic vulnerability and lack the storage to buffer variability<sup>6</sup>.

Water scarcity can hinder energy production and therefore growth. The Chinese Academy of Science estimates that the 16 coal-fired power stations planned in the 12th Five Year Plan will require 10bn cubic metres annually, driving annual water consumption in four provinces to or beyond total industrial water supply capacity (reaching 94 to 141% of supply)<sup>7</sup>.

Finally, water-related disasters can severely compromise growth. The 2010 floods in Pakistan caused an estimated US\$9.5bn<sup>8</sup> worth of damages and were forecast to depress GDP growth from 4% prior to the floods to -2% to -5% after.

### **As an ecological issue**

Freshwater ecosystems provide and maintain the supply of water for many of the above uses – the water cycle is responsible for transportation and purification of water. Water provides important cultural services such as spiritual, recreational and aesthetic benefits. Water also underpins other ecosystem services, playing an essential role in other vital ecosystems.<sup>9</sup> The Nakivubo Swamp near Kampala was estimated to have an annual value of US\$1m - 1.75m for purifying the city's waste waters and retaining nutrients.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, there is no framing of 'water' that recognises these multiple views and values. Despite a plethora of initiatives and activity, there has been limited progress – and what progress has been made is in silos. Water initiatives are often not connected and it is hard to see if they have truly delivered systemic change. It's clear that there is both energy and expertise on water, but there's an obvious lack of recognition of multiple viewpoints.

To move closer to a more coherent approach that takes these different values into account, there are three 'functions' that the post-2015 framework needs to deliver to make progress on water (that are also applicable to other resource issues):

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<sup>5</sup> Pegram, G., Orr, S. and Williams, C (2009) *Investigating Shared Risk in Water: Corporate Engagement with the Public Policy Process*. WWF.

<sup>6</sup> D. Grey and C.W. Sadoff (2007) Sink or swim? Water security for growth and development, *Water Policy* 9, no. 6: 545–571.

<sup>7</sup> Greenpeace China (2012) *Thirsty Coal: A water crisis exacerbated by China's new mega coal power bases*. Greenpeace China/Chinese National Academy of Sciences.

<sup>8</sup> Guha-Sapir D, Vos F, Below R, with Ponserre S. (2011) *Annual Disaster Statistical Review 2010: The Numbers and Trends*. Brussels: CRED. p16.

<sup>9</sup> TEEB (2010) *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity: Mainstreaming the Economics of Nature: A synthesis of the approach, conclusions and recommendations of TEEB*.

<sup>10</sup> Emerton, L., Iyango, L., Luwum, P. and Malinga, A. (1999) *The present economic value of Nakivubo urban wetland, Uganda*, IUCN, Eastern Africa Regional Office, Nairobi and National Wetlands Programme, Wetlands Inspectorate Division, Ministry of Water, Land and Environment, Kampala.

- **Reduce inequity** – everyone should have access to sufficient water for drinking, sanitation and hygiene, with poor and disadvantaged groups a first priority.<sup>11</sup>
- **Fairly share benefits** – water needs to be used more efficiently to maximise the overall benefits obtained from its use, within resource thresholds. These benefits need to be fairly shared across users.
- **Minimise risks and build resilience** – the post-2015 framework needs to protect economy and society from water-related shocks (eg droughts, floods), including protecting ecosystem services and environmental buffers.

## Proposed set of questions

### Changing the politics

- **How can we improve the dynamic in multilateral sustainability discussions?**  
In order to agree a post-2015 framework that includes environmental sustainability, the underlying multilateral dynamics need to be addressed head on. This is a core challenge that has to be tackled if any progress is to be made.
- **Can other approaches complement multilateral processes?**  
There are good examples of where responsible businesses have recognised the business case for environmental sustainability. Can we use practical business examples to win the economic case?

### Making progress on water

- What needs to change in the multilateral system to deliver these three proposed functions?
- What needs to change at the national level?
- What is the role of goals in driving change?
- What could a global water goal look like?



WaterAid transforms lives by improving access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation in the world's poorest communities.

<sup>11</sup> See JMP website ([www.wssinfo.org](http://www.wssinfo.org)) for latest thinking on the goals targets and indicators to achieve this.