

Water as a Catalyst for Collective Action in the Next Decisive Decade:

An Open letter to the UN Summits and the United Nations General Assembly from multi-stakeholder representatives of the water/climate/development community

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The UN Secretary General's Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019 implores that we as a global community undertake **a much deeper, faster, and more ambitious response to unleash the transformation needed between now and 2030**. There is clear and sufficient **evidence** that we are falling disparagingly short of meeting many of the essential goals required to safeguard the natural environment and human welfare beyond 2030. The Political Declaration of the SDG Summit, in response to this SDG Report, will demonstrate the commitment of governments to launch an ambitious and accelerated response to achieve SDG goals by 2030. The declaration speaks unequivocally about the threat of **climate change and environmental degradation and calls out as an immediate and urgent priority the task of mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, as well as the promotion of resilience**.

“On water, SDG 6, there has been alarmingly inadequate progress, as stated in UN-Water’s SDG6 Synthesis Report (2018). 785 million people do not have access even to a basic drinking water service and 3 billion people lack basic hand washing facilities at home. Furthermore, 700 million people practice open defecation. Some 2 billion people live in countries experiencing high water stress. By 2030, 700 million people could be displaced because of intense water scarcity.” Water is not merely a passive indicator, nor is it a discrete sector or resource. Water is a catalyst for action, for our collective pursuit of an **integrated and transformative global agenda**. **Water can drive progress across all 17 SDGs**. Moreover, water is essential to fulfilling the aims of other urgent global development Agendas such as the Paris Climate Agreement, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, as well as the New Urban Agenda.

In our 2018 open letter “Building a Resilient Future Through Water”, we echoed the United Nations’ recognition that water connects all of the Sustainable Development Goals and thus plays a central role in advancing human and environmental welfare. **Freshwater is essential to inclusive, equitable and sustainable development and is embedded in all the sustainable goals** – not only SDG 6. Water resources, and the wide range of services they provide, underpin poverty reduction, economic growth and environmental resilience. From food and energy security through decent work, cities and industry, to human and environmental health, water improves social wellbeing and inclusive growth, sustaining the lives and livelihoods of billions.

Connecting the dots¹



Inspired by the UN Secretary General's call for ambitious, accelerated, and transformative action in the next decade, here we reinforce and expand on our 2018 open letter with the message that wise and resilient water management offers a pathway for integrated and transformative action that leverages synergies across the global agendas. The 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report, authored by an independent group of scientists, endorses this position. The scientific community recognizes that water management, pursued through a systemic and holistic approach, can engender transformative results beneficial across all sustainable development goals, yielding positive synergies and co-benefits. They appreciate the opportunities offered by water's deep connectedness with other systems including sustainable economies, food, energy, urban development and with benefits to health, equity, environment, and the well-being of all life on Earth.

Important initiatives have been launched by Heads of States, the UN, its member states, cities and leaders of private sector and civil society with the aim of bridging divides and identifying means to accelerate and enhance implementation of the global Agendas in a more efficient and sustainable manner. We are encouraged by the UNGA's establishment of the "International Decade (2018-2028) for Action – Water for Sustainable Development," to advance the global water agenda through policy development, partnerships and action plans. We laud the recognition at the UN High-level Political Forum and the UNGA on the importance of regular high-level review of SDG6 and of raising commitments to achieve this goal. We welcome the aims of the UNGA to increase political momentum for all SDGs, the Paris Climate Agreement and Sendai Agreement and to build synergies for coherent and efficient implementation of these complementary and critical agendas. We are encouraged by the momentum created by the UN Climate Summit and by ambitious efforts launched by leaders of public, private and civil society institutions united in the Global Commission on Adaptation, which has prioritized accelerated climate change adaptation action on water. We are looking forward to contributing to the success of COP25 in Chile, the 'Blue COP', that seeks concomitant adaptation and mitigation solutions with all stakeholders.

We urge all stakeholders to collectively work to increase ambition, investment and action in pursuit of the SDG and NDC targets. In this spirit, we, the undersigned, would like to:

- **Pledge commitment to 2030 Agenda and its specific water commitments, recognizing the key role of public, private, and civil society actors working in concert, as we are doing through this multi-stakeholder alliance and platform for action;**
- **Urge accelerated action on key SDG water targets, which this alliance is prepared to lead and to deliver in partnership with member countries and relevant agencies and platforms such as UN-Water, Water Action Decade, the NDC Partnership, UNESCO's IHP, the Megacities Alliance for Water and Climate (MAWAC), etc;**
- **Pledge increased ambition and urgency in action by this alliance, commensurate with the immediacy of our climate change challenge and the need to build the resilience of natural and human systems in order to thrive;**
- **Pledge commitment to partnership and investment to accelerate progress through the Water Action Track of the Global Commission on Adaptation and other immediate opportunities;**
- **and Request that the UN, Member States, and partners welcome, enable and accelerate investment and action commensurate with these shared aims, particularly noting the need for international financial institutions to prioritize and deploy funding to upscale successful programs and to leverage partner contributions.**

Underpinning these commitments for action on water is our collective recognition that addressing human rights, gender equality, poverty alleviation, transparent and effective institutions, good governance, the rule of law, and innovation are the foundation for progress and fundamental to any prospect of success in realizing the Global Agenda. This is the bedrock that will make it possible for sustainable water resources and wise water management to help build thriving and resilient societies.

Signatories:

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