**Target 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**

**Key messages:**

1. **Link Target 6.2 to human rights.** Target 6.2 aims to ensure universal access to sanitation as does the UN General Assembly Declaration on the Human Right to Water and Sanitation (HRWS) which is now seen as legally binding in customary law.

2. **Target 6.2 concerns a public/merit good.** Achieving Target 6.2 requires ensuring that access does not come at the cost of unmanaged sewage streams and recognizing that sanitation services are a public and merit good demanding State intervention.

3. **Implementation instruments should target drivers.** The instruments used should focus on the bio-physical, cultural, demographic, economic, and technological drivers of poor sanitation and hygiene.

4. **Implementation technologies should be inclusive.** The technologies should be equitable, ensure social inclusion and protect the environment.

5. **Indicators should use HRWS norms.** The implementation of Target 6.2 and its indicators can benefit from integrating the human right to sanitation norms of acceptability, accessibility, safety, and affordability.

**Introduction**

Despite the Millennium Development Goals target for sanitation 2.5 billion people lack access. Based on detailed research, this policy brief suggests how Target 6.2 can be interpreted for universal access to sanitation. It argues first that Target 6.2 builds on developments within the legal field on the Human Right to Water and Sanitation (HRWS) which has arguably become legally binding as customary law.

**Recognize the broader meaning and true economic character of sanitation as a public and merit good**

The safe management of all waste streams generated by anthropogenic activities is critical to maintain water and environmental quality. Hence, MDG 7, international human rights law, and now SDG 6 link water and sanitation. Additionally, Target 6.2 when read together with the other SDG 6 targets, for instance Target 6.3, offers a broader definition of sanitation that covers important components of a sustainable sanitation system necessary for water quality. Furthermore, since sanitation systems are arguably both a public good (like sewerage systems) and a merit good (like toilet systems), it is important that States take responsibility for providing vulnerable people with access. The costs could possibly be cross-subsidized from other more profitable sectors in society and will in the long-term generate multiple benefits for society.
SDG instruments should reflect the drivers of poor sanitation and hygiene at different governance levels

The drivers of poor sanitation and hygiene will limit the effectiveness of SDG instruments in guaranteeing access sanitation and hygiene. These drivers include bio-physical factors like floods which damage the existing infrastructure; cultural factors like the taboo surrounding discussions of sanitation and marginalization of certain groups within the population in such discussions; demographic factors like population growth and migration beyond the capacity of existing infrastructure; economic factors like the high cost of services which make them unaffordable for the poorest; and technological factors like complex infrastructure. Therefore, these drivers ought to be clearly mapped at different levels of governance and addressed by the SDG instruments to ensure universal access.

Technologies for sanitation and hygiene must ensure social, relational, and ecological inclusion

The design and operation of sanitation and hygiene technologies should ensure inclusive development through social, relational and ecological inclusion. Social inclusion requires that the design, operation and maintenance processes are participatory. Relational inclusion requires that the technologies reduce the inequities in the distribution of sanitation and hygiene services, considering the special needs of vulnerable groups. Ecological inclusion requires that the technologies ensure the reduction of pathogens to a degree that is safe for the environment.

Indicators for Target 6.2 should be contextualized to reflect both the drivers of poor sanitation and the international HRWS norms

Despite the relatively broad meaning of sanitation under SDG 6, when compared to HRWS, the current framing of Target 6.2 does not expressly reflect norms like acceptability, accessibility, safety, and affordability. This is critical because the MDG implementation review showed that the poor performance on sanitation was often because the available services were either unacceptable to the population due to cultural or personal biases or unusable because of the inaccessible or unsafe location and design of the infrastructure. In other cases, the connection and maintenance costs were too expensive for the poorest, making the available services unaffordable, and therefore inaccessible. Indicators are necessary to ensure accountability and track the maximum use of available resources for improved access to sanitation services, as required under the HRWS framework instance. The indicators for Target 6.2 are essentially outcome indicators which measure the proportion of people with access to safely managed sanitation services and the proportion of people with access to hygiene. While this makes it easier to track progress in the achievement of the sanitation and hygiene target, it seems to be an extension of the technology ladder used under the MDGs which stems from the early perception of sanitation as an engineering problem. However, as shown in the enumeration of the drivers above, technology is only one aspect of the problem. Therefore, the indicators ought to be contextualized at the local level to (a) reflect the bio-physical, cultural, demographic, and economic causes of poor sanitation, and (b) use the HRWS norms and participation as a starting point at the minimum to ensure that the vulnerable are not saddled with inadequate, expensive, or inappropriate technology which further compound their poor sanitation and hygiene challenge in the long run.

Acknowledgements

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Further reading


