

**Thematic Debate of the General Assembly
“Water, Sanitation and Sustainable Energy
In the post 2015 development agenda”**

18-19 February 2014

Background

Water, sanitation and sustainable energy are at the core of sustainable development and the overarching goal of poverty eradication, and are closely linked to the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Water and energy are also intimately linked in sustainable consumption and production patterns, and this relationship aggravates resource scarcity and conservation.

Achieving universal access to safe drinking water, basic sanitation and modern energy services is one of the greatest multifaceted development challenges confronting the world today. The role of women and girls is also important, as in many countries they bear the burden of the provision of water and fuel for households and are susceptible to *inter alia* violence in the absence of adequate water and sanitation services. The post 2015 development agenda will have to respond to these challenges in a manner that allows both developed and developing countries to forge endogenous pathways that build resilience, contribute to the eradication of poverty and lead to sustainable development.

The Water and Sanitation Challenge

Achieving our sustainable development objectives of poverty eradication and overcoming inequalities, while at the same time boosting and sustaining economic growth and development is reliant upon healthy freshwater ecosystems, reliable water service provision and adequate sanitation services. Uncertain water availability is a challenge faced by many countries that can impact on economic growth, gender equality and sustainable development. The ‘water and sanitation challenge’, and its links to sustainable development, has multiple dimensions, one of which is access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation services. Improved access has a direct positive impact on people and communities leading to significant social, economic and environmental benefits. Ongoing discussions have revealed a broad support for a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) for water.

Addressing the water and sanitation challenge will require improvements in (i) the way we manage available fresh water resources in river basins; (ii) how efficiently and effectively we use and manage freshwater resources in agriculture, industry, and household use; (iii) how we dispose of it after use (wastewater management and related pollution); (iv) how we finance the investments required to improve water productivity; (v) how we balance the interdependencies between water and energy; (vi) how we reduce the risks of disasters such as flooding and drought; (vii) how we engage vulnerable populations in integrated management of the resource through the promotion of sustainable livelihoods (viii) how we take advantage of the potential for policy reform induced by increasing water scarcity.

The Sustainable Energy Challenge

Sustainable energy is a key enabler of sustainable development. No country has developed and will develop without access to reliable and affordable energy. Energy directly impacts on people, communities and countries in terms of economic growth, health, security, food and education. It also affects ecosystems and is linked to climate change. Disproportionate dependence on imported fossil fuels exposes many developing countries to volatile and rising oil prices, limits economic development, degrades local natural resources, and fails to establish a precedent for global action to mitigate the long-term consequences of climate change. Sustainable energy is thus a key enabler of sustainable development for all countries and all people. Ongoing discussions have revealed a broad support for a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) addressing energy.

Meeting the growing demand for sustainable energy will require *inter alia* (i) stable national policy frameworks which *inter alia* foster investment, promotes sustainable consumption and production patterns and enables consumers to make wise choices and decisions; (ii) the promotion of energy efficiency and the removal of barriers to efficient production which addresses *affordability* – because less energy is needed, *security* – because it reduces dependence on imports and *sustainability* – because it reduces emissions; (iii) the promotion of a diverse mix of fuels and technologies, which supports the transition to a lower-carbon economy; (iv) providing an appropriate enabling environment for the healthy growth of renewables in the national energy mixes and (v) appropriate attention to be given to technology transfer to support national and global sustainable energy goals.

The interdependence between water and energy is also important to consider. Water is currently the third-largest industry in the global economy, after oil and electricity. Water is used to produce energy (hydro electric generation, drilling, mining and processing of fossil fuels, as a coolant in nuclear power plants, many green alternatives are water intensive to grow) and Energy is used to produce and distribute water (to extract, pump, treat, and deliver freshwater, and in desalination plants).

Objective

In building upon the deliberations undertaken in the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals and other relevant fora, the thematic debate will provide an opportunity for participants to address key issues, such as:

- 1) What are the main challenges we are facing in the water, sanitation and energy sectors hampering the achievement of the MDGs and how can these challenges be tackled in an integrated manner in a post 2015 development agenda with the overarching goal of poverty eradication, including through goals and targets?
- 2) What concrete means of implementation (e.g finance infrastructure, human capacity, institutional reforms etc.) must governments, their international partners and other stakeholders undertake to ensure implementation?

- 3) How can ecosystem approaches, science and technology know-how, conservation measures and sustainable use be successfully utilized to increase action at all levels on water, sanitation and sustainable energy?

Format and Outcome

The thematic debate will take place on the 18-19 February, 2014, in New York. In accordance with the letter of the President of the General Assembly to Member States dated on December 5th, 2013, it will consist of an opening segment in the morning and three consecutive, interactive, multi-stakeholder panel discussions and a brief closing segment. A President's summary will be issued at its conclusion and will subsequently be made available to the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals and the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing for their consideration, as applicable.

Participants

The thematic debate will include participation of Member States at the highest possible level, Observers, UN Agencies and representatives of civil society, private sector, and other relevant stakeholders. Permanent Missions are invited to express to the President of the General Assembly their interest in co-chairing an interactive panel discussion.

Additional details of this thematic debate including draft program will be communicated at a later stage.