

FINAL AS DELIVERED
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We are meeting at the dawn of the Sustainable Development era. The 2030 agenda represents our opportunity to shape a healthier, better world.

And more — it represents our responsibility to do so. A responsibility for every one of us.

We cannot meet this responsibility if we fail to translate our commitment to safe water, effective sanitation and good hygiene — WASH — into a daily reality for millions of people around the world.

More than meeting a responsibility — we also must be spurred by high ambition. For the universal coverage called for by Sustainable Development Goal 6 means we must include the poorest and most disadvantaged in every society.

Since 1990, 2.6 billion people have gained access to improved drinking water — and 2.1 billion to improved sanitation facilities. Great results, although improved water is not necessarily safe water.

But despite our progress, we are still failing millions of people...millions of children.

Children like the girl who can no longer attend school because she must travel miles each day to fetch water.

Children like the boy living in a rural area — or the girl living in an urban slum — both among the millions of children having no option but to practice open defecation because their communities lack basic sanitation and water services.

Or children like the stunted boy — one of the 41 per cent of the world's children under five who suffer from this irreversible affliction.

One by one, child by child, our unfinished agenda paints a devastating picture. A picture of poor health and disease. A picture of economic loss, as poor sanitation and inadequate water supplies result in an estimated global GDP loss of \$260 billion annually. And ultimately, a picture of growing inequalities — a widening of the gap between the “haves” and “have nots.” Those who have safe water and decent sanitation — and those who do not.

In our pursuit of the MDGs, we learned some valuable lessons. That measuring progress through aggregate national statistics obscured the struggles of those populations being left behind...and that a narrow focus on water and sanitation infrastructure was insufficient.

So the SDGs have aimed higher: water and sanitation for all, including a new emphasis on water quality, availability, affordability and accessibility.

As the SDGs have raised the bar, so must we. We must change how we think about this issue in relation to other global challenges... how we address it by building stronger systems...and how we must change our behaviours, both within communities and among ourselves.

First, we must change how we think about water and sanitation as it relates to other global challenges. They are, in fact, deeply interconnected.

When we provide a child with access to water and sanitation, we prevent disease. We improve her nutrition and well-being. We reduce the chance she will be stunted. We increase the likelihood she will attend school, and “learn and earn” more in the future, and thus contribute to the well-being of her family and society as a whole.

Water and sanitation are also essential to the economic progress of nations. According to WHO, every one dollar invested in water and sanitation yields an average return of \$4.00.

And when we improve water and sanitation for a community, we strengthen its ability to cope with a future emergency, such as a conflict or natural disaster, and to recover more quickly.

Consider climate change — which, by even the most ambitious estimates, will inhibit development for decades to come. In responding to natural disasters — including climate-related disasters — the first humanitarian need is always access to water and sanitation...not only to help build their future resilience.

So our progress towards SDG 6 is not only an outcome in itself — but an opportunity to support other goals — from health, to education, to disaster risk reduction, to ending poverty.

Second, as we integrate our thinking about water and sanitation, we must integrate our actions through strengthened systems.

Ethiopia is showing us what can be done. During the MDG period, this country increased the number of people using improved water from six million in 1990 to 55 million people in 2015 — two to three times the population of most African countries. Ethiopia also achieved the world's highest reduction in levels of open defecation — from 92 per cent in 1990 to 28 per cent last year. [Applause.]

We must also go beyond funding and installing water and sanitation infrastructure, and establish new, innovative systems to manage and maintain these systems over time. Kenya's Kitui County is now using an SMS-based, real-time monitoring system for handpumps. The system has reduced the average downtime of broken pumps from 27 days to just two days.

And we must build strengthened systems that weave water, sanitation and hygiene into disaster-preparedness plans. Bangladesh is using a managed aquifer-recharge system to collect water from ponds and roofs, filter it, and create an emergency reserve of fresh drinking water in case of floods.

Third — unlocking the full benefits of safe water, sanitation and good hygiene means changing our behaviors...both within communities and among ourselves.

In communities, ending open defecation, improving handwashing and hygiene practices and promoting water safety are all essential.

India is taking important steps to tackle stunting caused by poor water and sanitation — including providing handwashing facilities in 300,000 schools.

Mali's Community-Led Total Sanitation campaign achieved dramatic results by improving access to private latrines and handwashing facilities, and by reducing open defecation. Among the 121 communities studied, open defecation rates fell by 70 per cent among adults, and by 50 per cent among children under five.

We can never forget that these numbers represent lives...they represent futures...and they represent the pride — the happiness — of parents watching their children grow healthier. I remember the parents I met in a cholera-prone village in Malawi, who boasted that there had not been a single case of diarrhea in their community since they ended open defecation.

But as we support communities' efforts to change their behaviours, we must also turn the mirror around and change our own.

Of course, we must continue supporting governments as they establish the building blocks for stronger water and sanitation systems in the years ahead.

But we must also broaden our movement. SWA must bring together ever more governments, civil society and other development partners. And we need to involve more closely the private sector in our cause, mobilizing new financing, skills and innovation.

The world's endorsement of the Sustainable Development Goals last September provided the moment — but it's up to us to provide the momentum that the water and sanitation movement deserves. To achieve the progress that every child deserves.

Progress measured in the face of a girl taking her rightful place in the classroom because her school has the separate facilities she wants and needs. Progress measured in more parents watching their children grow up free from disease and poor health. And ultimately, progress measured in a world in which each of the poorest and most disadvantaged has a fair chance in life.
