



SDG 6: Progress, gaps and recommendations for the UK

Compiled by:

Compiled by WaterAid and the UK WASH Network



Achieving universal access to these essential services underpins the success of the entire sustainable development agenda. **Goal 6** expands the Millennium Development Goals beyond just access to include sustainable services, through greater investment in governance, and recognises that investment and planning must put the needs of the most marginalised first to ensure no one is left behind. Recognising these important changes and the increased ambition of the 2030 agenda, some countries and donors are stepping up the political focus given to WASH.

Too many countries are centuries away from achieving universal access at current rates of progress. According to the United Nations secretary general Antonio Guterres: "If we remain off track to deliver on SDG 6 then we jeopardise the entire 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development... We must tackle weak funding, planning, capacity and governance of water and sanitation services as a top priority."¹

The World Bank estimates that providing safely managed services for water and sanitation targets will require an additional \$114bn per year in the Global South.² WASH challenges are growing daily, including demographic pressures, escalating water demand, rapid urbanisation, water insecurity, fragility and instability, and climate change (see **Goal 11** and **Goal 13**). As the global water and sanitation crisis is rooted in power, poverty and inequality, not just in physical availability, transformative change will only take place if there is a political step-change on WASH globally.

The UK's role and responsibility in delivering **Goal 6** lies beyond just DFID, and includes, for example, other government departments and the private sector. It also

includes global supply chains of UK based companies and other UK government financial investments overseas. However, DFID has and will continue to have a central role.

DFID's support has had very positive results, including ensuring 80 million people have gained access to WASH since 2011. However, the UK and other development partners fall short of what is needed in the poorest countries if universal access is to be achieved. Recent years have seen a scaling back of DFID WASH programming, including in countries such as Malawi and Tanzania, and recent figures from the OECD suggest that UK aid commitments to WASH are falling by as much as 67% from 2016 to 2017.³

Furthermore, the lack of fully integrated approaches within DFID remain a barrier to progress on WASH and other areas, including ending malnutrition (**Goal 2**) and ending preventable newborn and child deaths (**Goal 3**). WASH is inextricably linked to health, and integrating investment in health, particularly child health, and WASH interventions can have benefits far greater than the sum of their parts, leading to major health gains and improved cost effectiveness.⁴

Whilst the DFID WASH team has proposed a new WASH approach paper, which is welcome, the main issue is of scale and ambition. The UK should prioritise sustainable WASH by investing in it significantly more than 2% of bilateral aid, and strengthening and integrating WASH systematically into other key areas.

1. www.unwater.org/publication_categories/sdg-6-synthesis-report-2018-on-water-and-sanitation/

2. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/847191468000296045/pdf/103172-PUB-Box394556B-PUBLIC-EPI-K8632-ADD-SERIES.pdf>

3. <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=crs1>

4. https://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/monitoring/coverage/wash-post-2015-brochure/en/

Target 6.1:

By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all.

Since 2011, DFID has enabled over 80 million poor people, mostly in rural areas, to gain access to both water supply and sanitation.⁵ A proposed WASH approach paper is projected to address recent challenges (such as an increasing number of protracted humanitarian situations) and state some new priorities, including: urban WASH; strengthening national systems and leadership; the impact of climate change on WASH; and an appreciation that lasting change at any scale requires government action and investment and context-specificity.

DFID must also balance addressing emergency needs in an increasing number of humanitarian contexts with a retained focus on sustainability, both of which are equally central to all of DFID's WASH interventions and goals. With many DFID priority countries suffering from both repeated or cyclical crises, while also remaining poor in addressing underlying poor service delivery and public health, there is an even greater need for building resilience across all DFID departments in a more strategic way. This will help achieve greater impact and value for money by managing and planning for long-term water resource management and preventing public health outbreaks. The proposed WASH approach paper has the potential to deliver transformational results. However, it will require significantly increased investment and political ownership across DFID and the government, instead of just the DFID WASH Team.

Despite DFID's commitment to Target 6.1 and its efforts so far, of the 2.1 billion people, who do not have safely managed water, 844 million do not have even a basic drinking water service.⁶ Again, the issue is one of scale. Currently UK government investment in WASH is too low. The UK could support the roll out of pro-poor policies by service providers, including through more affordable tariffs and targeted subsidies. All these should deliver against the commitments and Targets of Goal 6, to help ensure that no one is too poor to access safe water or sanitation. The UK should also invest in the management of water resources, which underpins long-term water security and helps ensure sustainability of WASH interventions.

5. <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/html-report/wash>

6. www.unwater.org/new-publication-whounicef-joint-monitoring-programme-2017-report/

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

Globally, progress on sanitation is particularly stagnant. 4.5 billion people do not have safely managed sanitation and 2.3 billion still do not have basic sanitation services. This includes 892 million people, mostly in rural areas, who defecate in the open. Driven by population growth, open defecation is increasing in sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania.⁷ 2.3 billion people are without access to adequate sanitation, making achieving the new SDG benchmark of safely managed sanitation even more challenging.⁸

The WASH Team's proposed WASH approach paper aims to articulate women and girls as central to DFID's future work in this sector. In response to the ICAI's 2016 recommendations on proper results measurement for WASH policies, DFID developed a new methodology for collecting WASH results that will support an increased focus on reaching women and people with disabilities, and potentially other marginalised groups.⁹ Furthermore, DFID's bilateral WASH partners are required to demonstrate how they strengthen gender equality, including through targeting women and girls and those with disabilities.

The lack of fully integrated approaches within DFID remain a barrier to progress on gender and other areas. WASH factors affect women and girls throughout their life course and can continue to hold them back if not adequately addressed, in particular: the burden of water collection; the impact of lack of safe and secure sanitation facilities; and lack of awareness, acceptance and ways to safely manage menstruation with dignity (see also Goal 4). However, WASH was largely excluded from DFID's Strategic Vision on Gender Equality, demonstrating a lack of policy coherence on WASH and gender across DFID. Women and girls must have a fairer division of responsibilities, economic opportunities and greater involvement in decision-making powers, and underlying social and cultural norms surrounding gender roles around all aspects of WASH must be addressed (see also Goals 3, 4 and 5). The role of women's participation is increasingly important as a measure of equity, and DFID should address this further by integrating WASH and gender from both starting points (see also Goal 5).¹⁰ Finally, DFID should devote more attention to hand washing and other hygiene interventions, as well as menstrual hygiene

7. <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/12-07-2017-2-1-billion-people-lack-safe-drinking-water-at-home-more-than-twice-as-many-lack-safe-sanitation>

8. <http://www.unwater.org/new-publication-whounicef-joint-monitoring-programme-2017-report>

9. <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/report/wash>

10. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2018/goal-06>

management, as part of an integrated approach to women’s and girls’ SRHR (see also Goals 3, 4 and 5).

Recent research in South Asia points to the exclusion and lack of proper WASH support for trans people, especially those in vulnerable situations.¹¹ This points to a need for much better provision for sexual and gender minorities (or LGBT people) and other minorities in WASH to ensure no one is left behind.

Target 6.5:

By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate.

To date, the UK government’s investment in sustainable development has been rather siloed. This has reduced learning and effectiveness around increasingly fundamental global issues, such as the sustainability of drinking water (ie from a rise in salinity) and a marked decrease in water quality through repeat contamination due to a lack of effective wastewater management (linked to **Goals 11** and **13**). UK ODA should identify research, learning and programming on WASH in a more holistic manner, through a circular economy lens that addresses both efficiency of investment and value for money in the longer term.

A strengthening of standards, guidelines and transparency is necessary so that investments and supply chains don’t deplete water resources and negatively impact workers’ human rights to water and sanitation, and instead support responsible, sustainable, equitable use and consumption of water (linked to **Goals 8** and **12**). Here there are significant opportunities for DFID within the Alliance for Water Stewardship and the Global Water Stewardship Secretariat to drive and recognise responsible water use.

Target 6.a:

By 2030, expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water and sanitation-related activities and programmes, including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies.

The magnitude of the global WASH crisis requires a comparable response. We encourage the UK to lead in the effort to address this, by investing at a much higher level than the current 2% of UK’s bilateral aid budget in WASH, in

line with its spending on other key sectors, for example, 15% on health and 9% on education in 2017.¹² Lasting services for the poorest and most marginalised will only be achieved through efforts that focus on strengthening all aspects of the environment (or system) into which WASH services and behaviours are introduced. DFID should invest in WASH governance in the Global South, and encourage multilateral organisations such as the multilateral development banks (MDBs) to increase their investment levels in WASH.¹³

Achieving **Goal 6** globally requires the commitment of the private sector. Private sector engagement can play a constructive role in ensuring WASH access. However, the UK should exercise caution in its approach to promoting private sector delivery of essential services. The UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights raised concern that privatisation of sectors, including water, can be premised on assumptions different to those that underpin respect for human rights.¹⁴ As private companies are accountable to their shareholders, the users of services that they provide and the people whom their actions affect, this can lead to tensions in terms of which interests should be pursued.

For example, in the past the UK, including DFID, FCO and the CDC Group, has advocated for PPPs in ways that have on occasion increased costs for government and low-income households and reduced efficiency and quality.¹⁵ Such contracts can sometimes contractually oblige governments to prioritise deregulation and repayment over other spending priorities, leading to cuts that usually impact the most marginalised.

Delivery of **Goal 6** requires a renewed effort by DFID to ensure financing from, and services provided by the private sector are affordable, well-regulated and underpin respect for the human right to water, among others. DFID also has a potential role in supporting nations to generate and manage their own finances for WASH through wider governance reform work.

The UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights has called for strengthened accountability in the WASH sector, through identifying clear roles, responsibilities and performance standards, providing information to affected populations and maintaining transparent decision-making processes. This requires a concerted international effort, including continued engagement with, and influence through, the Sanitation and Water for All Partnership of which the UK is a founding member. Representation in this partnership should extend to the most senior level within DFID, to ensure UK engagement at the global level has the most traction.

11. <https://www.developmentbookshelf.com/doi/10.3362/1756-3488.18-00004>

12. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/660062/SID-2017b.pdf

13. <http://undocs.org/A/73/396>

14. <http://sdg.iisd.org/news/special-rapporteur-presents-report-on-human-rights-to-water-and-sanitation>

15. http://www.world-psi.org/sites/default/files/rapport_eng_56pages_a4_lr.pdf

Target 6.5:

Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management.

The DFID WASH team's proposed approach paper commits to focus on ensuring the poorest and most vulnerable are given an increasing share of resources and are involved in decision making processes. This is welcome, as greater accountability in delivery of WASH is needed at local and national level. Those who invest, deliver and receive services should be clear of their roles and responsibilities and supported to fulfil them; and citizens should be informed of their rights under water law, their legal recourse and the responsible authorities.

Equally, government accountability or private sector service provision must recognise the importance of communities, with emphasis on women's and other marginalised groups' engagement, consultation, redress mechanisms and communication, to increase safe access and improve management of water and sanitation services. DFID should encourage governments to be more transparent in their planning and engagement with communities in relation to service delivery, and mandate this through government investment, capacity-building and programming.

To achieve Goal 6, the UK government should:

- Invest significantly more than 2% bilateral aid in sustainable WASH.
- Ensure a whole-of-DFID approach to WASH that focuses on strengthening WASH systems and protecting the human right to water. Ring-fence funding for cross sector integration, including between WASH and health, education, and nutrition investments. Include WASH targets and indicators in all health, education, nutrition, disability and climate interventions, plans and policies.
- Introduce mandatory reporting on women's engagement and economic empowerment to help achieve equity in both WASH programming and policy development.
- Include good governance and accountability measures in both direct programming and government support for WASH, to support stronger civic space and voice and engagement between communities and authorities.
- Continue supporting fragile and conflict-affected contexts and countries that suffer with significantly high water stress, prioritising approaches that build the sustainability and resilience of water systems as well as addressing urgent needs.
- Ensure financing from and services provided by the private sector in WASH delivery are accountable, affordable, well-regulated and underpin respect for the human right to water. Work on governance reform so nations can manage their own public services and generate and manage their own finances for WASH.

This chapter is part of Bond's report, **The UK's global contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals.**

Access the rest of the report at bond.org.uk/UK-global-contribution-SDGs

Bond is the UK network for organisations working in international development. [Bond.org.uk](https://bond.org.uk)