

A Statement by UN-Water for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development 2012 (Rio+20 Summit)

About this statement: This statement reflects a collective opinion of the UN-Water Members and comprises recommendations to the participants of the UNCSD 2012 as well as a list of potential actions in support of green economic approaches.

Summary

Key Messages from UN-Water:

- A. Success of green economy depends on sustainable, integrated and resource-efficient management of water resources and on safe and sustainable provisioning of water supply and adequate sanitation services. This approach must be underpinned by timely measurement of economic performance in terms of indicators of social and environmental sustainability.
- B. Effective management of water variability, ecosystem changes and the resulting impacts on livelihoods in a changing climate scenario is central to a climate-resilient and robust green economy.
- C. In line with the UN General Assembly Resolution 64/292 on the human right to water and sanitation, the highest priority must be given to the 'bottom billion' people while addressing inequities in access to water, which are closely linked to energy security as well as food security.
- D. Universal coverage of water supply and sanitation services must be a central development goal in the post-2015 period. UN-Water urges national governments to set realistic intermediate targets and goals.



Key Actions by UN-Water:

- E. UN-Water can offer solid public policy recommendations and powerful solutions for monitoring progress against key development targets. Our ongoing work is further focused on identifying ways for scaling up green economy approaches and challenges under different development and geographic contexts.
- F. In support of green economy, UN-Water will continue its capacity development initiatives – including enhancing knowledge generation, facilitating transfer of appropriate technologies and reinforcing cooperation among national governments.
- G. UN-Water is an effective medium for consolidating and advocating water related green economy messages and providing communication channels for their dissemination.

Key Messages from UN-Water

- 1. Success of green economy depends on sustainable management of water resources and on safe and sustainable provisioning of water supply and adequate sanitation services.** Population growth, expanding cities and accelerating economic activity increase the demand for energy and food, and create additional pressures on our limited water and land resources as well as the supporting ecosystems. The lack of integration of water in the development agenda and minimal investments in water are putting a serious brake on social and economic development in emerging economies¹ while adversely impacting the most vulnerable groups and our environment. This places water and therefore also energy and food security at risk, increases public health costs, constrains economic development, slows down poverty eradication, and could also lead to social and geopolitical tensions while causing irreversible environmental damage.
- 2. The integrated approach to water resources management, as defined in Agenda 21, remains relevant and must be central in strategies towards a green economy.** In a recent global survey carried out by UN-Water as a contribution to the Rio+20 Summit, 80% of countries reported that they have embarked on reforms to improve the enabling environment for water resources management based on application of integrated approaches. This has already led to better water resources management practices and demonstrated important social and economic benefits. To better inform pertinent policy and decision-making by governments and external support agencies, a regular global reporting mechanism should be established for water resources management that would assess progress and share information.
- 3. The highest priority must be given to the 'bottom billion' people while addressing inequities in access to water, which are closely linked to energy security as well as food security.** These people live in slums and impoverished rural areas without access to safe drinking water supply, adequate sanitation services, or adequate food and energy services. Addressing their water challenges and helping them out of extreme poverty must receive the highest priority and trigger action at all levels for a successful green economy. This is important from a humanitarian standpoint and for promotion of economic growth and social stability.
- 4. Effective management of water variability, ecosystem changes and the resulting impacts on livelihoods in a changing climate scenario are central to a climate-resilient green economy.** The water cycle is primarily accelerated by climate change, thereby increasing the number of extreme weather events and resulting in more floods and droughts. Adaptation measures that include effective and robust water management can boost green economy approaches and minimize impacts on livelihoods.
- 5. Universal coverage of water supply and sanitation services must be a central development goal in the post-2015 period.** UN-Water urges national governments to set realistic intermediate targets and goals. The framework for achieving the ultimate goal will need to accommodate both development targets and human rights targets at all levels, in line with the notion of access to water and sanitation services as a human right as stated in the UN General Assembly Resolution 64/292. Continued assessment and analysis of the enabling environment (policy frameworks, institutional arrangements, human resource base and financial flows) will allow the identification of critical bottlenecks.

¹ <http://www.wsp.org/wsp/content/economic-impacts-sanitation>
http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/economic/en/

- 6. There must also be a commitment to build the foundation for a water resource efficient green economy.** Over 70% of freshwater resources are utilized for agricultural production. Therefore, we must help farmers increase water efficiency in agriculture – more nutrition and crop per drop. Similarly, all stakeholders are urged to reduce water losses and waste from field to fork, thus increasing the total food supply-chain efficiency. National governments should also commit to increase water efficiency in energy production – more Kilowatts per drop.
- 7. There is a need for increased water resilience and sustainability of cities, keeping in view the global challenges and urbanization trends.** For the first time in human history, more people live in cities than in rural areas – a trend that will continue unabated throughout this century. Much unplanned urban growth has taken place in peri-urban areas and in slums, where the absence of adequate water supply and sanitation services threatens the quality of life of its inhabitants.
- 8. Water challenges are a global concern and international action and cooperation at all level are required to accommodate them within the green economy.** As recognised by the UN General Assembly Resolution 65/154 on the International Year of Water Cooperation 2013, there is an urgent need to develop appropriate water management frameworks and knowledge sharing networks for sound cooperation.
- 9. Green economies can only be achieved if they are supported by green societies.** Achieving sustainable development calls for enabling policies that take into account not only economic but also water-related scientific, social, educational and environmental considerations. This will foster “green societies” that promote a culture of sustainability together with a shift in behaviour and lifestyles, which would lead to sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Key Actions by UN-Water

- 10. UN-Water can offer solid public policy recommendations and powerful solutions for monitoring progress against key development targets.** Existing methodologies and tools can be used for measuring progress against a new model of human and economic development that captures and promotes improvements in human well-being across the world. As the world leaders at the Rio+20 Summit undertake commitments and identify related baseline indicators, UN-Water can play an instrumental role in monitoring these indicators. Existing UN-Water monitoring mechanisms such as the WWAP² and the GLAAS³, UN-Water affiliated mechanisms, such as the WHO/UNICEF JMP⁴, are effective tools that can be further strengthened and improved to provide relevant outputs.
- 11. UN-Water will continue to play a major role in identifying practical solutions that demonstrate success of green-economy policy choices, and facilitate their scaling up.** UN-Water has produced a toolbox that contains synthesized lessons learnt from implementation of green economy approaches and success stories identified in the public and private sectors. Ongoing work is further focused on identifying scaling up opportunities and challenges under different developmental and geographical contexts.

² World Water Assessment Programme

³ Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water

⁴ Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation

12. In support of green economy UN-Water will continue its focus on capacity development, including enhancing knowledge generation, facilitating transfer of appropriate technologies and reinforcing cooperation among national governments. UN-Water can effectively contribute to meeting the water-related capacity needs of developing countries and of countries in transition. Capacity development together with innovation and investments in green development offers numerous opportunities including the creation of green jobs, which is one of the fundamental elements of a green economy.

13. UN-Water is an effective medium for consolidating and advocating water-related green economy messages and providing communication channels for their dissemination. Through its success in utilizing the World Water Day platform to communicate with the general public and policy-makers, UN-Water has demonstrated that it can consolidate a body of information, identify strong messages across the United Nations system and deliver them with high impact to relevant audiences. The convening power of the United Nations would allow for successful advocacy of green economy approaches, disseminating success stories and presenting underlying policy messages.

About UN-Water:

UN-Water is an inter-agency mechanism that was formally established in 2003. It currently has 28 United Nations agencies and organizations as Members and 25 other international organizations as Partners. UN-Water provides an efficient, coherent and proactive mechanism for coordinating the work of UN System agencies and programmes in relation to water resources, water supply and sanitation related issues. UN-Water complements and adds value to existing UN programmes and projects by facilitating synergies and joint efforts among the implementing agencies. In doing so, UN-Water seeks to: (a) improve the coherence in UN System actions at all levels, and in particular at the country level; (b) contribute to the global policy debate on water-related issues through active participation in global policy fora and events and the production of assessments and policy reports; (c) contribute to increased knowledge on water-related issues through relevant monitoring and reporting systems and by serving as an entry point for water-related indicators, data and information; (d) identify emerging issues related to global water challenges and provide a platform for UN System strategic discussions on how to prepare for and cope with them more effectively; and (e) increase the capacity among stakeholders by providing relevant information and policy advice available through the extensive experience among UN-Water Members and Partners.

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